

AARP Tax-Aide Program Offered in Local Communities

Free tax counseling and tax preparation assistance for people

of middle and low incomes, with special attention given to those

Veterans May Qualify for Travel Pay

Veterans who use the Veterans Administration (VA) health care system and qualify for travel pay will receive 28.5¢ per mile as of Friday, February 1, instead of 11¢.

To qualify, veterans must meet the following criteria: have a service-connected rating of 30% or more; be traveling for treatment of a service-connected condition; receive a VA pension; be traveling for a scheduled compensation or pension examination; income does

not exceed the maximum annual VA pension rate; medical condition requires an ambulance or specially equipped van; veterans are unable to defray the cost; travel is pre-authorized.

Veterans are not qualified for reimbursement if they ride the Disabled American Veterans van, as this is free transportation. For more information, contact the Chippewa County Veterans at (906) 635-6370.

St. Ignace Schools Plan Conferences

Parent and teacher conferences at St. Ignace Area Schools will be Tuesday, March 4, and Thursday, March 6, during the evenings.

Students in kindergarten through fifth grades will receive a scheduled appointment time for their student-led conferences.

Student-led conferences for sixth and seventh grade students

will be Tuesday and Thursday, from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. in the middle school cafeteria. Students in grades eight to 12 should report to the high school gymnasium for parent and teacher conferences between 5:30 p.m. and 8 p.m. each day.

There will be no school Friday, March 7, when the school will host professional development.

Neighborhood Watch Meeting March 4

The next Clark Township Neighborhood Watch meeting will be Tuesday, March 4, from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. at Clark Township Hall in Cedarville. The public is welcome to attend, and volunteers are needed.

Local American Legion Posts Honored

Six American Legion posts, including West Mackinac, Manistique, Mackinac Island, St. Ignace, Carney-Nadeau, and Munising, were honored at the 11th District meeting at American Legion Post 131 as part of the Mid-winter Conference of the Upper Peninsula Association of American Legion Posts in Munising January 26. The posts are at 100% of their membership goal.

Job Fair Will Be April 25 at St. Ignace

There will be a Job Fair/Career Day at Little Bear East Arena in St. Ignace April 25, from 9 a.m. to noon, sponsored by the St. Ignace Chamber of Commerce and Michigan Works! It will focus on employment and career opportunities in the area.

MICF Grant Applications Accepted

The Mackinac Island Community Foundation is accepting spring grant applications. The deadline to file a request is April 15. Grant recipients are announced in May.

The foundation awards grants twice a year, in the spring and winter. The amount of money awarded is determined by income from endowments. Grants are awarded to nonprofit organizations.

Last spring, the foundation awarded almost \$10,000, which was given to Mackinac Island State Historic Parks, Trinity Episcopal Church, the Mayor's Advisory Committee, the Eastern Upper Peninsula Intermediate School District, Mackinac Island Public School, and the Mackinac Island Medical Center.

Grant applications are available from the Mackinac Island Community Foundation office on Hoban Street.

Kyle Hauswirth Completes MTU Degree

Kyle Hauswirth of Kincheloe was graduated cum laude with a Bachelor's of Science degree in mechanical engineering during commencement ceremonies December 15, 2007, at Michigan Technological University in Houghton.

age 60 and older is being offered in St. Ignace, Mackinaw City, Cedarville, Kinross, and Sault Ste. Marie. The community service AARP Tax-Aide program will run through April 15, the deadline for filing 2007 tax returns.

Seniors who do not normally file a tax return must file one this year to be eligible for the Stimulus payment starting in May.

Other tax credits are also available to residents who don't normally file returns, said a Tax-Aide coordinator, Cal Strom.

"The Michigan Homestead Credit and the Michigan Home Heating Credit forms can be completed, even if no state income tax is owed. Additionally, millions of dollars in credits go unclaimed when qualified residents fail to claim the Federal Earned Income Tax Credit. AARP Tax-Aide volunteers," he said, "encourage residents to make their appointment at a local Tax-Aide location to have their individual circumstances addressed."

Tax-Aide sites are available at the following places:

- St. Ignace Public Library in St. Ignace, every Thursday from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. For appointments call (906) 643-7307.
- Mackinaw Senior Center in Mackinaw City, for appointments call (231) 436-5149.
- Les Cheneaux Community Library in Cedarville, appoint-

ments may be made for Fridays and Saturdays by calling (906) 647-7362.

• Kinross Charter Township in Kinross, every Thursday from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. For appointments call (906) 495-5513.

• Bayliss Public Library in Sault Ste. Marie, every Wednesday from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and every Thursday from 12:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. For appointments call (906) 253-1684.

Residents should bring their Social Security cards for all persons to be included on the return, W-2 from each employer, 1099s, Social Security information, all forms showing federal income tax paid, dependent care information, and checks and receipts for itemizing, information showing original cost of stocks and bonds sold, and last year's return, if filed.

All AARP Tax-Aide volunteers are IRS-certified and many tax centers have e-filing capability. Where available, e-filing is free, as are the services of the AARP Tax-Aide volunteers.

AARP Tax-Aide volunteers are trained in cooperation with the Internal Revenue Service and offer help with personal income tax returns.

Additional information is available toll free at (888) 227-7669 or on the Web at www.aarp.org/taxaide.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Post Office Hours Shouldn't Be Cut

To the Editor:

The postal service is at it again. Upper postal management has decided, in order to save money, they are going to close northern Michigan post offices from half an hour to 1.5 hours per day. Saturday office hours will also be eliminated in some offices. Therefore, once again, the people of northern Michigan become second-class citizens in the eyes of upper postal management. A little over a year ago, these same forces announced they were going to close the main processing plant in Gaylord. Well, we, the people of northern Michigan, contacted our state representatives, and we were instrumental in stopping the closing of that office. Now we have another opportunity to prevent upper postal management from taking more of our window service from our communities. We can once again contact our local state representatives and voice our opinions, frustrations, and demands. We want our post office windows left open for service. The post office is mandated by the Constitution of the United States to offer fair and equal service to all Americans, not just some. Upper postal management does not have the authority, nor the right, to give lesser service to rural communities.

Here is a list of some of the offices affected by the proposed changes: St. Ignace, Traverse City, Traverse City-Barlow, Alpena, Cadillac, Charlevoix, Grayling, Petoskey, Atlanta, Bellaire, Boyne City, East Jordan, Evart, Frankfort, Hillman, Indian River, Interlochen, Kalkaska, Kingsley, Lake City, Lewiston, Mancelona, Manton, Onaway, Reed City, Rogers City, Suttons Bay, and Williamsburg.

Please contact your state representative, Bart Stupak, at the following Web site: www.house.gov/stupak or fax (202) 225-4744.

Thanks for your help

Chris Levi
Local Postal Union President
St. Ignace

Too Much Criticism of City

To the Editor:

Joe Durm needs his own column in *The St. Ignace News*. Call it "watchdog." [Building Inspector] Paul Sved is competent, trustworthy, educated, and we (the collective pilgrims of this hard tack town, doing its best in an economic slump statewide) are lucky to have him. He's a bargain.

Paula McNamara
St. Ignace

St. Ignace News Policies

Letters:

All responsible letters will be considered for publication and may be edited. They must be signed and a telephone number must be included for verification. Personal thank-you notes, personal attacks against other people, form letters, and letters promoting political candidates are not accepted, although letters for or against ballot proposals are welcome.

Obituaries:

The St. Ignace News maintains a policy of not charging for obituaries and we do often add information or rewrite them for clarity and reader interest. Obituaries that the family wants published exactly as submitted can be placed in the newspaper for \$75. Photographs are welcome at no charge.

Weddings:

Weddings with photographs are published without charge within 45 days of the ceremony. After 45 days, a photograph can be included for \$35.00.

Internet:

The complete edition of The St. Ignace News is available online at stignacenews.com.

Contact:

The St. Ignace News
359 Reagon Street
PO Box 277
Saint Ignace, MI 49781
(906) 643-9150 (phone)
(906) 643-9122 (fax)
e-mail: news@stignacenews.com

Michigan Politics

By
George Weeks



More Calls for Judicial Election Reform

"...judicial elections are becoming political prizefights where partisans and special interests seek to install judges who will answer to them instead of the law and the Constitution."

—Retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice
Sandra Day O'Connor

Michigan, Exhibit A in the compelling case made by O'Connor, this year will have what is likely to be the most expensive judicial race in its history.

This is also the year when, thanks in part to varying degrees of effort by three northern Michigan women, a head of steam is building to do something about an election problem that the Michigan Campaign Finance Network (MCFN) convincingly warns is becoming "more insidious."

Unfortunately, the effort for judicial independence comes too late to do anything about the 2008 election and could well be deflated down the line by the enormous influence the special interests have in the Legislature.

"Special interests" too often get a bad rap – but they deserve it when they play a stealth role in elections. In its welcome call for campaign finance reform, MCFN said of the \$23 million spent since 2000 for Supreme Court campaigns, \$10 million was on candidate-focused issue ads not reported in any campaign finance report.

In 2000, two Republican justices originally named to the court by Governor John Engler were overwhelming victors. One of them, now-Chief Justice Clifford Taylor, is the only incumbent up this year.

It's a good bet that Taylor and his yet-to-be-determined Democratic challenger each will have more money behind them than previous combatants.

This is high stakes combat for the GOP, with Michigan Chamber of Commerce and other business interests on one side, and the Michigan Trial Lawyers, consumer groups, and others on the left. That includes increasingly vocal environmentalists, who are appalled by the Taylor-led court and generate much media ink but not much campaign money.

A study by the National Institute on Money in State Politics said that in 86% of all cases heard by Michigan's high court, at least one campaign contributor was involved. A study in Louisiana found that on average, justices ruled in favor of their contributors 65% of the time, and two of the justices did so 80% of the time.

Money is not the only issue. A beef I have is the ballot itself. Court candidates, although nominated at partisan conventions, are on the "nonpartisan" ballot. And sitting justices get "incumbent" designation, an enormous advantage denied presidents, governors, senators, and other incumbents facing Michigan voters.

Among the five Republican justices on the seven-member Michigan Supreme Court, former

Chief Justice Betty Weaver of Glen Arbor has been a lonely voice for reform and transparency.

Battlin' Betty is "former" because her GOP colleagues don't much like her reformist and other ideas. She's too pushy for the Engler Four.

Weaver says "campaign finance reform through public financing of Supreme Court justice elections is needed to eliminate fundraising for justices' campaigns and to provide for prompt public identification and publication of the sources of individual and interest group money expended."

In a missive to Governor Jennifer Granholm and all legislators, she called for, among other things, Senate confirmation of gubernatorial Supreme Court appointments (as it is with presidential nominees) "with justices serving no more than one eight-year term, thus enabling the elimination of power blocs forming on the Supreme Court."

Weaver supports efforts of the Michigan Independent Supreme Court Campaign led by Anne Magoun of Traverse City, which presented Lansing lawmakers with nearly 1,200 signatures calling for such reforms as "full and timely disclosure of all campaign expenditures."

Weaver and Magoun are among those counting on Senator Michelle McManus (R-Lake Leelanau), who chairs the Senate Campaign and Election Oversight Committee and has been holding hearings around the state, to push for reform.

McManus will push. But how hard, and how soon? She told me her next step is to consult with colleagues such as Majority Floor Leader Alan Cropsey (R-DeWitt), a key senator on judiciary matters.

Even if McManus, Cropsey, and Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop (R-Rochester) have the gumption to go for real court campaign finance reform, it will not be soon enough to get corrections in place before what, if Democrats come up with a credible candidate, could this year be Michigan's biggest high-visibility battle for the high court.

But it's good that the dialogue is underway, thanks largely to Weaver.

Conservation Scorecard

Twenty-nine of the state delegations in the U.S. House have stronger records than Michigan's, according to a voting summary released last week by the League of Conservation Voters (LCV). On 20 votes in 2007 selected by LCV, Michigan was "right" 45% of the time.

The northern Michigan scores: Representative Bart Stupak (D-Menominee), 70; Representative Pete Hoekstra, 5; Representative Dave Camp, 0. Senators Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow each scored 67, although they have higher lifetime scores.

George Weeks retired in 2006 after 22 years as political columnist for *The Detroit News*. His weekly *Michigan Politics* column is syndicated by Superior Features.

CHURCH NOTES

• The **Engadine United Methodist Church** hosts a free community meal every fourth Wednesday of the month, from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. at the church, the Reverend Sandra Clark announced. The next dinner will be Wednesday, February 27. Everyone is welcome to attend.

• The **Evangelical Free Church and Baptist Glen Memorial Church** of St. Ignace are planning a March Madness Youth Rally Saturday, March 15, from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m., at the St. Ignace Middle School, reported Merv Wyse. The free rally is for students in grades seven through 12. There will be games and activities, along with a guest speaker, Ken Rudolph, and the bands Out Shined and The Andy Stefanic Band.

• Three Lakes Lay Academy announces a workshop for interested Christian adults to be held Saturday, March 8, 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at **Zion Lutheran Church** in St. Ignace.

This free workshop is for Christian adults who want to further understanding of their faith and the Bible. Workshops will be offered on the topics of the Bible, Old Testament, New Testament, spirituality, theology, world religions, and church history. Worship, testimonials from Three Lakes Lay Academy graduates, and lunch will be included.

For further information and luncheon reservations, contact the Reverend Tari Stage-Harvey at 643-7840.

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and Les Cheneaux Islands Weekly Wave

359 Reagon Street, PO Box 277, Saint Ignace, MI 49781

Telephone (906) 643-9150 • Facsimile (906) 643-9122

Hessel Office: 138 Pickford Avenue (906) 484-2268

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Publisher/Editor

Wesley H. Maurer, Jr.

Associate Publisher

Mary R. Maurer

Publisher 1975-1995

Wesley H. Maurer, Sr. (1897-1995)

Editor

Ellen Paquin, news@saintignacenews.com

Staff Writers

Amy Polk, amy@saintignacenews.com

Ryan Schlehner, ryan@saintignacenews.com

Karen Gould, karen@saintignacenews.com

Paul Gingras, paul@saintignacenews.com

Advertising Department

Tammy Matson, David Movalson

ads@saintignacenews.com

Print Shop Manager

Sherry Cece

Circulation Manager

Wendy Colegrove



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The quotation under the flag of *The St. Ignace News* on Page 1 is from the 10 triads written by Dr. Fred Newton Scott, creator and teacher of the first continuous course in journalism in the United States at the University of Michigan in 1890. The 10 triads are chiseled on the parapet of the Detroit News Building at 615 Lafayette Boulevard, Detroit. They were headed "Ideals of the Press" or "The Newspaper in a Free Society," and serve as a reminder of what a free press means to us.