

After Hearing Presentation, St. Ignace City Council Supports Hospital's May 6 Ballot Proposal

Highlights: No Services Will Be Cut; New Board Will Not Have Designated Seats

By Karen Gould

With about 200 employees and an annual \$8.1 million payroll, the vital importance and impact of Mackinac Straits Hospital to the community is clear, said City Attorney Prentiss "Moie" Brown to about 20 people attending Monday night's St. Ignace City Council meeting, April 7. The cooperation with 25,000 members of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, he said, also makes it conceivable that the new hospital will grow.

Following Mr. Brown's comments, and those by hospital officials, Council added its support to transfer hospital assets and debts to a new governing board if approved by voters May 6.

If approved, operations will be transferred from Mackinac Straits Hospital Authority to a private, non-for-profit corporation, Mackinac Straits Health Systems, which is eligible for some \$37 million in direct and guaranteed federal loans.

Representing the hospital and each taking a turn addressing city leaders were CEO Rod Nelson, board Chair Ron Mitchell, board members Walter North and Richard Smith, and the Reverend Wayne Foote, who is the director of the Moses Dialysis Unit.

Mr. Nelson provided council with an overview of the six-year journey that has brought the new hospital plans to where they are today. Details of the new hospital building, financing, board make-up, and services have been published during that time in *The St. Ignace News*, and Mr. Nelson referred attendees to a 2005 article that covered the formation of the new not-for-profit corporation.

Hospital attorneys, said Mr. Nelson, are working with Mackinac County attorneys to reach a letter of agreement on the current Burdette Street hospital property and debt. Hospital leaders plan to attend the Thursday, April 24, county commission meeting.

"It's my belief," said Mr. Nelson, "the issues we have with the county are almost resolved."

Mr. Mitchell said a committee established to work with commissioners on future plans for the hospital building has made efforts to meet with commissioners, although an article in *The St. Ignace News* had confused the issue. The intent all along, he

said, was to work with the commission. During a March 13 meeting, commissioners said they were unaware of any such hospital committee.

County commissioners, during their March 27 meeting, said they would be seeking a seat on the new hospital board. Under questioning by Councilman Don Gustafson at Monday's meeting, however, Mr. Mitchell said that is unlikely to happen.

"As far as having a designated seat for any particular group," said Mr. Mitchell, "no, we're not going to have it."

He cited legal issues for the decision, saying a municipality with representation on the board would also assume financial liability.

"The county really does not want a designated seat," he told Council, "and, legally, you don't either. As soon as you represent this group, then you assume liability in the decisions that are made."

Three incorporators are a part of the new board, said Mr. Nelson, including Mackinac Straits Hospital Board Chair Ron Mitchell, Mackinac Island Mayor Margaret Doud, and Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians board member Fred Paquin. Those members chose three board members from the community. Mr. Nelson said counties do not have the legal ability to appoint a member to a private, not-for-profit hospital board.

In two years, four additional members will be added. Board members now must be quality candidates with a vision for the hospital's future, have fundraising experience, political contacts, and represent specific areas of the county.

Hospital officials fielded questions regarding a pharmacy, union agreements, and transfer of services. The hospital has its own pharmacy, although no public pharmacy is planned as the board is sensitive to competing with the local store.

Some prescriptions, however, may be filled for emergency room patients on weekends, said Mr. Nelson, so they are not forced to travel to Cheboygan if the local pharmacy is closed.

Promoting the new hospital has been on track, although when the newspaper published concerns raised by the Mackinac County

Board of Commissioners about hospital property ownership, debt obligations, and the new private corporation's exemption from the Michigan Open Meetings Act, he implied the hospital board got caught off guard. Consequently, said Mr. Mitchell, the hospital has "had to scramble to do the things we had planned all along. It does appear we've gotten a late start. It was part of our plan to do it this way and it just got hyped a little too quick for us."

Services now offered at the hospital will be transferred, and none will be cut, said Mr. Nelson. Some services will be increased, including the dialysis unit, which will add three chairs for a total of six. The chemotherapy department will be expanded from four chairs to eight, and the new emergency room will be expanded from a one-bay trauma center to three bays, plus two bays for cardiac treatment. The hospital also may offer out-patient surgery. Areas also have been set aside for future growth.

"Every department has been expanded and enlarged," he said.

All union agreements will transfer to the new corporation

and current employees will retain their retirement plans.

St. Ignace resident Dean Baker said he has yet read a non-controversial, straightforward explanation of hospital plans in the newspaper.

"I think that would go a long way to reach the people," he said.

During public comment, St. Ignace resident Mike Buby asked council members what they thought the outcome of the May 6 vote would be.

"Unfortunately, as you know, our voters get all their information from the paper, not from the meeting where the facts are put out," said Mr. Buby. "The majority of our voters are misinformed, and that could be negative votes."

Mayor Grondin said he had confidence in the voters and he thought the hospital ownership transfer would pass.

Documents pertaining the hospital transfer and future plans are available for review at the St. Ignace Public Library, Mr. Nelson noted.

Council also conducted regular business during Monday night's meeting.

An agreement for reciprocal

police protection in the Straits area between the three counties of Mackinac, Cheboygan, and Emmet was approved. The agreement offers supplemental police protection for emergencies and special events.

The St. Ignace Community Garage Sale will be June 14, after council approved this year's request for the event sponsored by the Business Association. Proceeds from table rentals are used by the Association for advertising and future downtown events.

The City Manager's report to council, although not discussed during the meeting, provided an update on filming council sessions for the local cable access channel.

The issue was discussed at the last council meeting when it was suggested Mike Gustafson would volunteer his time and equipment for the taping. A follow-up conversation revealed Mr. Gustafson was not interested in providing the service free.

Council received in its packet a report on operations at Doc Holle's Silver Mountain. The information was not discussed at the meeting.

This year, lift ticket sales totaled \$11,489 and food sales equaled \$3,485.25. A total of 1,447 children lift tickets were sold at a price of \$5 each earning \$7,235. Adult ticket sales reached 709 at \$6 each and earned \$4,254.

Council approved a \$1 rate increase for Straits Taxi Service

of St. Ignace. The company made the request as a result of rising fuel costs. In town rates will increase from \$5 to \$6, and rates from town to the casino will rise to \$8. The additional passenger rate of \$4 will remain unchanged.

The service now provides a pre-paid commuter discount for daily passengers taking the taxi to work.

Council agreed to lower the flag at a City Hall to half-staff Saturday, April 19, in honor of former St. Ignace Mayor Raymond "Pete" France of Iron Mountain.

Mr. France died February 3, in New Jersey. The day marks memorial service scheduled for him at 2 p.m. at the Evangelical Covenant Church in Norway, which will be attended by Mayor Grondin and Mr. Dodson.

Mr. France served as mayor for the city from 1959 to 1961.

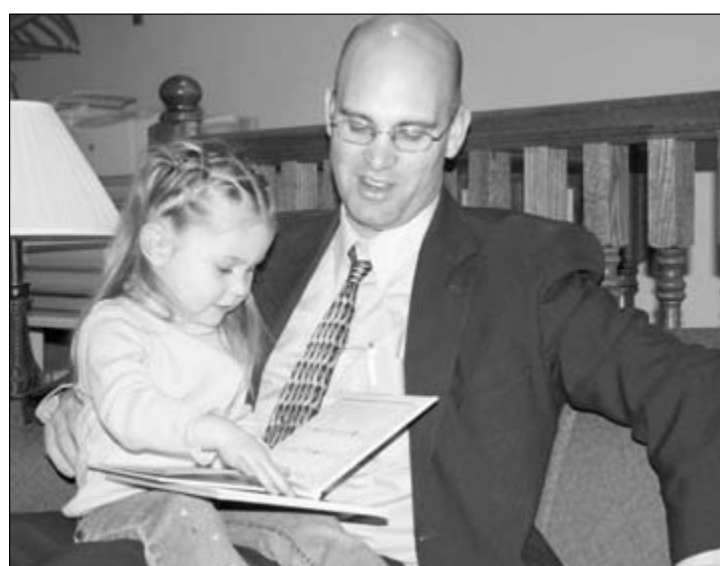
Council plans to schedule a charter work session when it meets in two weeks. At the future work session, council will begin reviewing all the comments members have made over the 1970-adopted city charter.

Individual review of the city's charter was finished Monday night.

Mr. Dodson now will compile all the comments and write a synopsis, and distribute the compilation to council within the next few weeks.

City Council next meets Monday, April 21, at 8 p.m. in Council Chambers in City Hall.

Children Can Still Enroll for Free Books



Mark Savoie and his daughter, Reese, 2, of Sault Ste. Marie, enjoy some father-daughter time while reading books from the Imagination Library. More than 600 children in the E.U.P. have received 5,470 free books as participants in the Dolly Parton Imagination Library project through the Intermediate School District and the Interagency Coordinating Council for Early Childhood Services. Through local sponsors such as education foundations, community foundations, Friends of the Library groups, service clubs, Delta Kappa Gamma Professional Women Society, and many individual sponsors, children have the opportunity to enroll in the Imagination Library to receive books. The library provides a book once a month to help children and their parents develop a love for reading. All children who live in Chippewa, Mackinac, or Luce counties are eligible to enroll. To enroll a child or to become a sponsor, visit www.eupkids.com and click on the Imagination Library link. For further information, call Becky Davis or Cindy Wagner at the Intermediate School District at (906) 632-3373. (Photograph courtesy of Becky Davis)

Local Students Earn Honors at SVSU

Katherine Springsteen of Moran was included on the president's list for the 2007 fall semester at Saginaw Valley State University. Students maintaining a perfect 4.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale receive this honor.

Ashley Bishop of Pickford, Andrea Fulton and Jacob Swider, both of Engadine, and Eric Cowell of Mackinac Island were named to the university's dean's list for the fall semester. Dean's list students maintain grade point averages of 3.4 or higher.

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:

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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

The St. Ignace News

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 Moyalson

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.

Michigan Politics

By George Weeks



No News Is Not Good News

"Thank God for newspapers."
— Columnist William Powers, *National Journal* magazine

Thanks, indeed, across the land — from New York, from Detroit, from northern Michigan.

William Powers, who opines on media matters for the *National Journal*, a Washington, D.C. publication that presents authoritative non-partisan voices on politics, writes:

"When some people first heard the news about New York Governor Eliot Spitzer and a prostitution ring, they thought: How awful, how tragic, how corrupt. When I first heard it, I thought: Thank God for newspapers."

He referred to the *New York Times* breaking the story that ignited "the kind of 'firestorm' that prompts breathless news junkies everywhere to burble clichés like 'firestorm' as they drool at the TV screen and click desperately from channel to channel.

"After all, TV was just following the Times, as were the bloggers and Twitterers and Diggers and Yahoos and the Googles and everyone else in the media universe."

So it was recently when the *Detroit Free Press* broke the story of the follies of Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick. Great fodder for broadcast Twitterers.

So it was in 2003 when *Kalamazoo Gazette*, digging into a prostitution case, led to the ouster of a local official.

So it was in 1994 when two *Detroit News* reporters won a Pulitzer Prize for uncovering a scandal at the state House Fiscal Agency that led to convictions of four people, the downfall of a powerful lawmaker, and changed the way the legislature conducts business.

Newspapers, of course, sometimes get a tut-tut in the media universe. So it was when the *York Times* in February implied that John McCain years earlier had too cozy a relationship with a much younger, attractive female lobbyist. *Newsweek's* Howard Fineman called it a "salacious story thinly and anonymously sourced."

Nonetheless, as noted by Powers in the *National Journal*: "For the real thing, the stuff that outs corruption and hypocrisy, revealing the powerful for who they really are and shaking things up in the most immediate, consequential ways — in short, the scan-

dals that are truly scandalous — nobody can touch newspapers. Where would we be without them?"

After reading the *National Journal* column last week, I called the Michigan Press Association (MPA) for examples of outstate newspapers shaking things up.

"Number One—Traverse City [*Record-Eagle*]," said MPA Public Affairs Manager Lisa McGraw, citing coverage of campaign finance issues that made it a runner-up to the *Free Press* for top honors last year.

The outing of questionable practices and policies is not limited to daily newspapers. When the Michigan Department of Transportation tried a takeover of the Mackinac Bridge Authority, the fuss raised by *The St. Ignace News* was instrumental in Governor Jennifer Granholm putting an end to the move.

Across Michigan, newspapers large and small are effectively using two important tools to bring the bright light of public scrutiny on public officials and employees at all levels of government — the Open Meetings Act (OMA) and the Freedom of Information Act.

"The public has a right to hear your comments or your deliberations toward a decision that's ultimately made," Detroit attorney John Gillooly told about 30 municipal leaders from the Eastern Upper Peninsula at a recent St. Ignace meeting about OMA. "That's it in a nutshell."

Crusader for Transparency

Fourteen states and the federal government have Web sites that detail how taxpayer money is being spent.

Attorney General Mike Cox is blitzing the state to generate public pressure for the Track-Your-Taxes bill that would mandate a Michigan site and has been languishing in a House committee for more than 225 days.

"The House has had more than enough time to act" and "should not wait another day," Cox said last week in Traverse City. He calls the transparency bill "the OMA and FOIA of the 21st Century."

It was introduced by Representative Jack Hoogendyk (R-Kalamazoo), who has another uphill battle: He's running a long shot bid to oust Democrat Carl Levin, Michigan's longest-serving U.S. senator.