

Celebrating 50th Bridge Walk, Marketing to Canadian Tourists Are Among Plans for Season

Tourism: Continued from page 1

for the bridge celebration, boosting business.

This year's bridge walk is also an historic occasion, Mr. Bertchinger said, so the bureau is planning a fireworks celebration and will issue a commemorative coin. The first bridge walk was in 1958, making 2008 its 50th year. The first walk took place in late June, and all following bridge walks took place on Labor Day.

Differences between the bureau and the village council over marketing should be resolved easily, Mr. Bertchinger said. The council is concerned that focusing on the 50th anniversary of the bridge opening last year, and the 50th bridge walk this year, could be confusing.

"We feel that the walk on Labor Day has tremendous historic significance for the many families that have shared memories on that weekend over the past 50 years," Mr. Bertchinger said.

Shortly, the bureau will distribute 5,000 commemorative Bridge Walk coins to its 57 hotels and 107 associated businesses. They will be sold for \$4 each, and the Visitors Bureau expects strong sales.

Compared to years past, the Mackinaw City area faces a more challenging economic climate, but the economy will not necessarily hurt tourism in the Straits area, he said.

With the resignation of Executive Director Marilyn McFarland this spring, the bureau's full-time staff is reduced from four to three, making this a transition year. The reduction has enabled it to spend the same amount on advertising as last year. Part of its \$462,000 promotional budget will pay for ads in Ontario newspapers. This is the first time the bureau has done this, Mr. Bertchinger said.

The weak U.S. dollar makes vacationing here attractive for Canadians, and Florida is already enjoying a surge of Canadian business this winter, Mr. Bertchinger said.

At right: The Mackinaw Area Visitors Bureau intends to aggressively promote the area to tourists this year. Pictured Tuesday, April 1, (from left) are William Bertchinger, president of the bureau's board of directors, Diane Klose, administrative assistant, Deb Spence, packaging manager, and Donna Falor, treasurer.



"I think the falling value of the United States dollar will bring a lot of foreign travelers to the U.S. this summer," he said.

Looming gas prices may actually work in the area's favor, also, he speculates, as more travelers are likely to stay closer to home, making the Straits area an attractive regional option.

The bureau advertises in magazines and newspapers throughout the Midwest, with themes changing with the seasons. One running now features Mackinaw Crossings, an image of a British soldier firing a cannon, children at Thunder Falls water park, Mackinaw City's beach front, and images of Mackinac Island's shopping district.

The front cover of its main publication, the Mackinaw City Vacation Guide, will continue to highlight the bridge. Inside, the guide lists area businesses, particularly hotels, and attractions from mid-Michigan through the Upper Peninsula.

The visitors bureau has printed 60,000 brochures highlighting 20 attractions throughout northern Lower Michigan and the Upper Peninsula, which are handed out free at member hotels. The handouts take an all-inclusive approach, featuring attractions like Fort Mackinac, Soo Locks Boat Tours, the Mystery Spot on US-2, Garlyn Zoological Park, Mackinac Island attractions, and casinos, many of them with discount coupons.

Owing to its position at the tip of the Lower Peninsula, the Visitors Bureau has always taken the approach that Mackinaw City can

be a hub for everything in the area. The idea is for visitors to stay in local hotels and motels, take day trips to the locations it promotes, and return to the Straits area to sleep.

The bureau will continue a successful 10-year-old packaging campaign. It spends \$360,000 a year to create packages for tourists by booking ferry trips, selling tickets to attractions, and booking rooms at its hotels. This is a service to hotel members, Mr. Bertchinger said. He calls it a break-even budget designed to help member businesses, rather than a program to provide revenue for the bureau.

The bureau will continue providing an online reservation system through its Web site, Mr. Bertchinger said, enabling visitors to see rate comparisons and pick hotels.

Bureau members will continue to study the area's branding campaign, "Mackinaw City: Living History. Making History."

All communities "need to pull together in the Straits area to draw as much business as possible," he added, noting that St. Ignace, Mackinac Island, and Mackinaw City have a lot in common. He advocates joint advertising campaigns, working more closely to

coordinate area events, such as the St. Ignace Auto Show, which spills into Mackinaw City, and Mackinac Island's Lilac Festival, which draws visitors to all three communities.

Off and on for 13 of the last 23 years, Mr. Bertchinger has been president of the 11-member board that oversees the Mackinac Area Visitors Bureau.

"People that come up here were very surprised at what a great area this is to visit," he said. Many return, so "we got them hooked."

Mr. Bertchinger said he would like to see more tourist-based economic development in the area.

"Tourism is our lifeblood, and it should be the focus of all of our efforts," he said. He does not think

another industry is likely to replace tourism for Mackinaw City, St. Ignace, or Mackinac Island because the surroundings here are such a natural draw for visitors seeking relief from urban development.

"Think of the picturesque places you have stood in your life. It is hard to find anything to compare with the view from the Mackinaw City waterfront, where you can see the Mackinac Bridge, the Straits, the Upper Peninsula, and Mackinac Island."

After 23 years, and the development of many area attractions, Mr. Bertchinger's favorite pastime continues to be gazing at the bridge.

The bridge will always be on the cover of the Vacation Guide. "It defines this area," he said.

Contract Renewed, Debated for Island Recreation Director

By Ryan Schlehuder

Annual contracts and ordinances related to the beginning of the City of Mackinac Island's new fiscal year Tuesday, April 1, were approved by City Council at its meeting Wednesday, March 26. One contract, the recreation director's, was debated among the Council members, with some believing the position demands only part-time work.

Council voted 4-3 to renew Leanne Brodeur's one-year contract, with councilmen Frank Bloswick, Jason St. Onge, and Armin Porter voting against it. Mayor Margaret Doud's vote of approval broke the 3-3 tie.

Council unanimously approved the annual contracts of City Assessor Joe Stakoe and Building Inspector Dennis Dombroski.

Mr. Stakoe, a contracted employee, received a 2.85% raise, as did all city employees, excluding police officers, who received a 3.5% raise. His salary will be raised from \$35,991 to \$37,017.

Mr. Dombroski, who averages 30 hours a week, earned \$68,500 last year, at a rate of \$40.35 per hour. This year, his hourly rate is

\$41.50 per hour.

The one-year contract for the recreation director includes a \$22,083.88 salary with health insurance and 10 days of annual vacation leave. Ms. Brodeur has been the recreation director since 1999, working on an interim basis in her first year.

Other than agreeing they believe the workload of the city recreation director can be met part-time, the three councilmen had no other discussion during the meeting. Mayor Doud suggested that the recreation program be monitored by Council and reviewed in six months.

After the meeting, Mr. Porter told *The St. Ignace News* his "no" vote had more to do with cost savings than the quality of service.

"I'm satisfied with our recreation programs," he said. "I have no beef with Leanne. It's mainly to do with money. We're paying \$25,000, with salary and benefits, for a full-time job that I think can be done seasonally. I was just thinking of ways to get more bang for our buck."

Councilman Michael Hart, also the chairman of the city's Recreation Committee, said Ms. Brodeur's critics do not realize the

amount of time she puts into the position.

"I think it's a full-time job," he told *The St. Ignace News* Friday, March 28. "With writing grants and keeping abreast of state regulations, as well as planning programs, there are a lot of things she's doing."

Part of the misperception, Mr. Hart said, lies within her volunteer work with the 4-H Club and Mackinac Horsemen's Association, and not having office hours at City Hall. She works from her home.

"I think the board would like to see her in or around City Hall as much as possible," he said, "but there is limited space there. That's something we're going to work on."

Mr. Hart knows that many Islanders would like to see a summer softball league return, however, he said, because the Island's businesses and boat schedules run longer into evenings, not as many people are available to sustain a league schedule.

Ms. Brodeur said her job does not require her to be in an office eight hours a day, but was open to the idea of holding office hours a couple of hours a day for people to

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3 PROMOTIONS, 5 CASINOS ALL 4 YOU!

Player's Day - Sunday

Two for Tuesday - Tuesday

Senior's Day - Thursday

Upcoming Events

All Sites
Tax Relief Party
April 15th, 2008
Random Cash Draws!

KEWADIN'S TOP 50

Top place
pays
\$15,000!

April 1-30, 2008
All 50 places pay!

Christmas Safe Cracker!
April 20th, 2008
Random Cash Draws!

Gordie Howe
Special Appearance
at Kewadin Shores

St. Ignace, Michigan April 19, 08
Free Authographs from 1-3pm while supplies last!

Tournaments

Manistique
\$8,000 Video Poker
April 25-27, 2008

KEWADIN KLASIFIEDS



1-800-KEWADIN
www.kewadin.com

Go from High Point to High Definition! The Great TV Giveaway!

April 7th - May 1st, 2008
6:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m.
Monday thru Thursday
At each Kewadin Casinos



The highest point earner each day wins a 37" flat screen, high definition, LCD TV!

Weekly Events

Rapids Lounge Entertainment

Sault Ste. Marie

Comedy starts at 8pm - Thurs.

Apr. 17 Gayle Becwar & Lawrence Mullaney

Live Music starts at 9pm Fri. & Sat.

April 11 & 12 Mickey Rat

Northern Pines Entertainment

St. Ignace

Wednesday Comedy Shows start at 9pm

Apr. 16 Gayle Becwar & Lawrence Mullaney

Live Music starts at 9pm Fri. & Sat.

April 11 & 12 Touch of Class

Party At the Finish Line!
Begins April 27
St. Ignace
Call for party schedule

Entertainment



CARLOS MENCIA
FRIDAY, APRIL 18TH
SAULT STE. MARIE, MICHIGAN



MIRANDA LAMBERT
FRIDAY, JUNE 20TH
SAULT STE. MARIE, MICHIGAN

ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK
MONDAY, MAY 5TH
SAULT STE. MARIE, MICHIGAN

Promotions cannot be changed without prior approval by the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians Gaming Commission. Promotions can be cancelled at Management's discretion.