

Sportsman of Year, Racer of Year Among Honors for Cedarville's James Hicks

By Paul Gingras

Reflecting on this year's Michigan Regional World PowerSports Association snowmobiling season, James Hicks said, "I wanted to really win. I don't like to lose."

Mr. Hicks achieved his goal. In the Michigan Sno Cross Racing Association's eight weekend events this year, he took first place in the pro-open class, first place in the pro-600 class, and third place in the pro-stock class. The 23-year-old racer from Cedarville also

"I like high jumps the best. There is nothing like it, up there, just you and your machine."

— James Hicks, snowmobile racer

earned sportsman of the year and racer of the year for the Michigan circuit. In addition to the Michigan races, he participated in four races in Canada and Minnesota, competing every weekend from Thanksgiving through early March, with the final race March 9 at Treetops Resort in Gaylord, where the awards banquet took place Saturday, April 5.

Participating in up to three races a weekend, he earned trophies and cash prizes.

The sportsman of the year

award is about helping others.

Snowmobiling in this circuit "is not dirty racing. It's clean racing," he said. Throughout the season, he spent time mentoring younger racers, coaching them, and helping them procure parts. The younger racers look up to the more seasoned racers, he said. This winter was Mr. Hicks' seventh racing season. He has been at it since he was a junior at Cedarville High School.

The racer of the year award is about sheer winning consistency.

This is Mr. Hicks' second season racing in the highly competitive pro-open class. Last year, he achieved his goal of placing in the top three of his chosen divisions, the same divisions he participated in this season. He set the bar higher for himself this winter, and met his goal again.

Prior to racing pro, he spent three years in the semi-pro division, which is also highly competitive.

The pro-open allows for the most modifications, enabling racers to lighten their sleds and maxi-

mize horsepower, leading to higher speeds on the challenging tracks, which include berms, tight corners, sweeping corners, and even 100-foot jumps.

The pro-600 limits sleds to 600 cubic centimeter engines. The pro-stock races do not allow for modifications. Mr. Hicks used two Arctic Cats to race in all three divisions.

So far, only racers are allowed to run the 2008 Arctic Cat 600 Sno Pros he uses. Not available to the general public for two years, the new sleds are more reliable than previous models.

"Snowmobile technology is changing a lot," he said. The new sleds are tougher, to take the inevitable beating serious racers put them through. They are also faster. The Arctic Cats have new chassis, and they handle better.

"I definitely give them some credit for my success," he said.

Having participated in high school basketball, track, and football, Mr. Hicks said racing is the most physically challenging of the all those sports, and with the excitement of the race, the challenge is as much mental as it is physical.

He exercises all year and races dirt bikes during the warmer months. He calls this "keeping an



James Hicks poses at his home in Cedarville April 10 amid the snowmobiles and trophies that define his most remarkable of seven seasons competing in the Michigan Regional World PowerSports Association (WPSA) snowmobiling circuit, and the Michigan Snow X Snowmobile Racing Association circuit. To his right and behind him are two tall trophies that honor him as the WPSA sportsman of the year and racer of the year. He sits on the modified 2008 Arctic Cat 600 Sno Pro he used to win the pro-open. (Hicks family photograph)

edge." "I like high jumps the best," he added. "There is nothing like it, up

there, just you and your machine." Professional snowmobiling is a family interest.

The Hicks home in Cedarville is equipped with a snowmobile lift, *Please turn to page 11: Hicks

Racers Preparing for Season's Last Tournament May 3



Radio-control race car enthusiasts gathered at St. Ignace Elementary School Saturday, April 19, to enjoy competitive racing. Casey Brake, race coordinator and owner of KC Hobbies and Raceway in St. Ignace, will hold his next race tournament at Kewadin Shores Casino in St. Ignace Saturday, May 3. Pictured are (back row, from left) Bob Franczak of Cheboygan, Adrian Millon of Cedarville, Randy Odell of Gaylord, Casey Brake, Tim Vantil of Gaylord; (front row) Dave Franczak, Casey Brake III, T.J. Vantil, Devan Lawes of Gaylord, and Steffaney Vantil of Gaylord.

Race To Take Place at St. Ignace Casino

A competitive radio-control race car tournament that features more than \$2,000 in prizes will be held at Kewadin Shores Casino in St. Ignace, starting at 8 a.m. Saturday, May 3.

More than 60 people and up to 125 cars are expected to participate in the tournament, coordinated by Casey Brake of St. Ignace. Races will be held in the casino's tent area.

Mr. Brake is the owner of KC Hobbies and Raceway and has held tournaments in St. Ignace throughout the year. This will be the last tournament to be held until October.

Entries fees are \$15 for the first car and \$10 for each additional car.

"We'll have four-year-olds and 80-year-old men racing, so there is no age limit," said Mr. Brake.

Rental race cars and repair parts and equipment will be available on site.

Those who would like to participate can either register at the tournament the day of the race or call Mr. Brake at (231) 445-0958.

Mackinaw City Agreement Reached on Bridge Walk Celebration for This Year

By Paul Gingras

Differences over promotion of this year's 50th Labor Day Bridge Walk Saturday, August 30, have been settled by the Mackinaw Area Visitors Bureau and the village council, which approved the bureau's marketing campaign Thursday, April 17. The campaign calls for a July 4 fireworks show, commemorative coins celebrating the event, and banners with the numbers 51 and 50 to be hung in the village throughout the summer.

To avoid confusion over the 50th anniversary, both numbers will appear on the banners, 51 referring to the number of years the bridge has been open to traffic, 50 referring to the number of years Michigan residents have walked the Mackinac Bridge on Labor Day.

Council members and the public had expressed concern in recent months that banners indicating any kind of 50th anniversary related to the bridge would be confusing, following the 50th anniversary of the bridge opening last year.

The unusual banners will be certain to generate curiosity by tourists, and the Visitors Bureau has a plan to handle it, said Bill Bertchinger, president of the

bureau's board of directors.

Businesses will be provided with posters explaining the 51/50 celebration, and explanatory handouts will be available at cash registers throughout the village, he said.

A new commemorative coin is expected to reimburse the Visitors Bureau for about half of the \$20,000 to \$25,000 campaign. The coin will also explain the 51/50 concept, he said.

Concerns over the closing of the two northbound lanes of the Mackinac Bridge for road work prompted discussion over a potential flood of traffic in the village on Memorial Day weekend.

Delayed northbound traffic is likely to produce traffic congestion in town, said Trustee James Alford.

"We might be the recipient of much extra business," he said.

Work is anticipated to be finished by Memorial Day, with the latest completion date set for June 18, said Bob Sweeney of the Mackinac Bridge Authority. The bridge authority will have alternate lane closures to accommodate the Memorial Day Bridge Run and a bike tour June 15, if necessary, he told *The St. Ignace News*.

Mike Grogan, Sue St. Onge Compete for One Seat on St. Ignace School Board May 6

By Karen Gould

Residents will be heading to the polls to choose from two candidates to fill one seat on the St. Ignace Area Schools Board of Education May 6. Incumbent Mike Grogan of Moran is seeking reelection to the four-year position and is being challenged by Sue St. Onge of St. Ignace.

Mike Grogan

Mr. Grogan, 50, has lived in St. Ignace all of his life. The LaSalle High School graduate and his wife, Joni, have a son in the ninth grade at the high school.

The disabled ironworker has served on the school board for four years, first as a trustee, and for the last two years as board treasurer.

Mr. Grogan is on the Finance Committee, Policy Committee, and is a member of the High School Improvement Team. During his time on the board, he also has been on the Elementary and Middle School Improvement Team, the District-Wide Improvement Team, and the Negotiation Team for support staff. He has attended four workshops on how to be an effective board member.

"I am running because I like working with and for kids. I am an advocate for healthy schools and have been involved with Mackinac County Wellness Coalition, which promotes healthy lifestyles for kids. I also run the 4-H archery program at the middle school," he said. The program is for students age six to 19.

A priority for him, Mr. Grogan said, is to be a part of a team that offers the best education possible to all students, whether they have a 4.0 grade point average or a 1.6 grade point.

The board, he said, has faced tough decisions, and solutions are not always popular with everyone.

"A board member has to think what is the best choice for the students and district, and move forward," he said.

Mr. Grogan would like to use the knowledge he has gained over the last four years to continue working as part of the board to improve the school and help students transition into successful adults.

"I've learned a lot in the last four years about how the school runs," he said. "I would like to do another term and use what I've learned to help the students be ready to move into the next phases of their lives with the tools they need to be successful."

Financing and curriculum alignment are top issues for the school. A tight operating budget requires creative thinking in limiting expenses while providing a high caliber of education, he pointed out.

"Financing is huge and very hard to plan for with the economy of the state and the number of kids leaving our area," Mr. Grogan said. Fixed costs to operate the school and ancillary costs continue to rise, while at the same time, as families



Mike Grogan

leave the area to find work, student enrollment is dropping. Having fewer students reduces state funding.

"We try to be as conservative as possible," he said of expenses, "and still have a quality program going."

Curriculum alignment, said Mr. Grogan, is strategic for students to make sure they meet state graduation requirements. An effective curriculum also helps students perform better on state tests, such as the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP). Curriculum work on the board level begins with those serving as representatives on the Improvement Team.

"As the requirements for students to graduate are getting tougher," he said, "the students are having to learn more at an early age. Our school is making very good progress in raising the scores on the MEAP test." The board, he said, reviews test scores and discusses with adminis-



Sue St. Onge

trators positive results and areas that require improvements. The improvement team provides input on adjusting the curriculum to prepare junior-year students for the Michigan Merit Examination (MME). The team also works on the curriculum to ensure students meet the new state graduation requirements.

Teamwork and being up-to-date on all issues are important for board operations, he said, and allows each member to make educated decisions for the district.

Sue St. Onge

Ms. St. Onge, 39, of St. Ignace is a La Salle High School graduate, with a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. She returned to the area four years ago. She is a youth services coordinator in the Education Department of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, and works from a classroom at St. Ignace Middle School. The focus of

her job is to work with students ages three through 18 in academic mentoring and cultural preservation programming.

She has had 13 years of financial management and business experience, having started a restaurant with a friend in Ann Arbor and later managing a fine dining restaurant in Kalamazoo. While in Kalamazoo, she was president of the Parent Teacher Organization for two years and the general manager of a more than 300-member cooperative health food store, where she was responsible for payroll, banking, state and federal tax preparation, ordering, marketing, and staffing. For the last 11 years, she has been a mediator, and previously served as a Michigan State Supreme Court appointed mediator.

She has two children, Gavin, 11, a sixth grade student at the middle school, and Helena, 4, who attends Sault Tribe Head Start.

She wants to serve on the board to represent tribal members, she said, and to offer her financial management experience.

"I am running for school board because I believe that I offer a perspective not often heard on our current board," she said. "In a school where nearly 60% of the student body is tribal, there should be someone representing their interests on the school board."

"I also believe I possess the skills to help our school weather the tough times ahead. I think an effective school board should consist of

members who have good facilitation skills, understand financial statements, and be able to be fair and objective decision makers. They should also understand that they are not meant to be a rubber stamp for the status quo, but rather should seek out input from all the parties that make up a school community: students, parents, teachers, and administrators."

The school budget, she said, is definitely a concern as it is affected by dwindling enrollment.

"The inequity of state and federal funding in rural areas compared to that of urban areas," she said, "leaves our schools in a tight financial situation."

The No Child Left Behind Act has had a negative impact on formal education, she said, and standardized testing is biased against minority students. State funding based on test scores leaves the neediest schools the least funded.

"I want my children's school to teach them how to think," she said, "not what to think. I want youth to be actively engaged in their education, not passive beings staring at the clock. When all we look at as a measure of how our schools are doing is test scores, we take the creativity and the wonder of learning out of our children's education."

The school board needs to become more proactive by creating an atmosphere that encourages students to remain in school. It also needs to respect and value both parents and students, she suggested.