

Commander Little of the *Mackinaw* Began His Great Lakes Career at St. Ignace

Change of Command Ceremony Friday Will Give Ship's Leadership to Scott Smith

By Karen Gould
 During this winter, under the command of Commander John Little, the Coast Guard Cutter *Mackinaw* assisted 200 ships in ice and last summer, the ship and crew saved two lives during a rescue mission in the Straits. This Friday, May 16, Captain Little will say "goodbye" to the boat he has called home for the last two years.
 "I'm going to miss this like you wouldn't believe," he said, standing in the Coast Guard dock in St. Ignace Monday, May 5.
 St. Ignace is a buoy staging site for the *Mackinaw*. The ship made a quick stop at the dock to drop off some buoys and pick up others.
 Two years have passed since Captain Little took command of the cutter in April 2006, just two months before the 240-foot ice-breaking buoy tender was commissioned into service. For those in

the Coast Guard, Commander Little said, two years is a normal rotation period.
 His next assignment takes him to Washington, D.C., where he will be the regional director of international affairs. From his years aboard ships, he hopes to bring a level of experience and provide guidance to others who crew Coast Guard vessels.
 In a Change of Command Ceremony this Friday, Commander Scott Smith will take over the top duties of the multi-mission *Mackinaw*, which tends buoys in the spring and fall and breaks ice in the winter. The largest U.S. cutter on the Great Lakes, the *Mackinaw's* capabilities allow her to free vessels frozen in Great Lakes' ice. Year around, the ship performs national security duties and with a crew of 60, also carries out search and rescue oper-



Staging buoys in St. Ignace Monday, May 5, the Coast Guard Cutter *Mackinaw* uses the local Coast Guard dock as a base. Commander John Little of the ship took advantage of the brief St. Ignace stopover to visit with friends at Station St. Ignace. Commander Little ends his two-year rotation on the buoy tending icebreaker Friday, May 16. His next assignment is in Washington, D.C.



In a Change of Command Ceremony Friday, Commander Scott Smith will take over the top duties of the *Mackinaw*. (Photograph courtesy of U.S. Coast Guard)

while he commanded the *Katmai Bay*, Commander Little worked alongside the *Mackinaw* cutting ice in the St. Marys River. The ice was three to four feet thick in the river. In Whitefish Bay and in the Straits, they encountered 12-foot windrows. In December, eight ships were beset in ice and the winter hung on for months. Ice remained in the Marquette Harbor into June that year, he recalls.

While cutting ice on the St. Marys, he met his mentor, the original *Mackinaw's* Captain Carl Swedberg.

"The first time I worked with that ship, I was a 140 captain [refers to the ship's length] and we had worked for hours and hours getting a track cleared with just tremendous difficulty. It was horrible weather, it was snowing sideways up in the St. Marys," Commander Little told *The St. Ignace News* in 2006 of the *Mackinaw*. "The *Mackinaw* showed up and the sky broke and the ice just went away and the captain said, 'Is there anything else you'd like us to do, Lieutenant Little?' and I said right then, 'That's what I want to do.'"
 "You just can't believe what a phenomenal icebreaker that was," he said of the original *Mackinaw*.
 Captain Swedberg took Commander Little, then considered a junior cutter man, under his

people employed.
 "I just feel real proud about that."
 He began his Great Lakes career 14 years ago in St. Ignace, where he spent two weeks training on the *Biscayne Bay*. Upon arriving in St. Ignace from Texas, he now recalls with laughter, he thought he was on the North Pole. With his training finished, he became commanding officer on the *Katmai Bay* in Sault Ste. Marie, and later commanded the *Mobile Bay* in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin.
 During the winter of 1995 and 1996, one of the worst he recalls,

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Mackinaw Loads Buoys at St. Ignace

The *Mackinaw* finished breaking Ice April 14, and began making preparations for her next mission of buoy tending. Twice yearly, the ship is responsible for 42 buoys in lakes Huron and Michigan.
 While in St. Ignace Monday, May 5, buoys were hoisted off the ship's deck with the ship's crane and lifted onto the dock, while others on the dock were transported onto the ship, filling all the open spaces on the deck. Once the work was complete, the *Mackinaw* left St. Ignace with 170,000 pounds of buoys and equipment. Setting them, Commander Little said, would take about two days. The entire spring mission of deploying the buoys takes four to six weeks, depending on weather.
 Summer buoys weight between 6,000 pounds and 12,000 pounds. The buoy's sinker weighs between 5,000 pounds and 18,000 pounds; their weight is determined by ice and water currents. The chain that connects the buoy to its sinker weighs about 2,000 pounds.
 To avoid damage from the ice, the large buoys are pulled out of the water each fall. They are replaced by winter markers, smaller buoys that are more resilient to the stress and pressure of Great Lakes ice. Made of metal, they mark shoals and provide winter commerce with a radar return indicating the shallow area.
 The first load of buoys was heading to the Door Peninsula, Wisconsin, area. Once they are placed, the *Mackinaw* will return to St. Ignace, filling up its deck again before heading off to the Sleeping Bear Dunes area. Eight buoys will be delivered to the Manitou Islands area.
 Placement of the bright yellow Northern Lake Michigan weather buoy operated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) also is the responsibility of the *Mackinaw*. The buoy provides information for NOAA and commercial and recreational boaters including wave height, barometric pressure, and wind speed.

Fred Paquin Faces 2nd Suspension

Fred Paquin of St. Ignace has been suspended from his post as the tribe's chief of police for a second time in eight months.
 Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians Chairman Aaron Payment, with tribal board member Todd Gravelle, has called in federal investigators in response to an anonymous e-mail Mr. Gravelle received that alleged "budgetary improprieties" in the police department. Mr. Paquin told *The St. Ignace News* Thursday, May 8. He was put on administrative leave Thursday.
 Mr. Paquin says the investigation and his suspension are politically motivated.
 "I am cooperating fully with the investigation, because there is nothing to hide," Mr. Paquin said. He has not been informed of the specific improprieties that are suspected in the department, he has not seen the e-mail in question, and he has not yet been interviewed by investigators, who are from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Federal Bureau of Investigations.
 "I am on administrative leave because they don't want me to have free access to the investigation," Mr. Paquin said.
 Mr. Payment announced the suspension in a May 7 statement to the

media, in which he said, "Details are sketchy as to the exact nature of the investigation, but it is confirmed that Paquin's employment has been suspended and he is the subject of a federal criminal investigation." The suspension decision was made by the tribe's Chief Financial Officer, Vick Matson Jr., Mr. Payment reported.
 Mr. Paquin said he does not personally handle any tribal finances or cash in his role as police chief.
 "I don't handle any money or any cash. All money for the department goes through my supervisor, which was Mr. Payment," Mr. Paquin said.
 No other tribal employees have been suspended in connection with the investigation.
 In August 2007, Mr. Paquin was suspended with pay from his position by the chairman, following a complaint charging him with assault and battery. The charges were dismissed in 91st District Court February 25 under a deferred prosecution agreement, and Mr. Paquin resumed his police chief post March 13.
 Mr. Paquin is an incumbent candidate for Unit 3 board representative in the upcoming tribal election. Mr. Payment is the incumbent candidate for the tribe's chairmanship.

Mackinaw Crossings Files Property Tax Appeal at Mackinaw City

By Paul Gingras
 Litigation is expected to begin soon between Mackinaw Township and Jim Wehr's Mackinaw Crossings in Mackinaw City, which appealed its property value assessment to the Michigan Tax Tribunal about one year ago and seeks to reduce its property taxes by about 50%. The township was notified in March by the tribunal that dates for litigation will be established shortly, said Cheboygan attorney Tim MacArthur, who is representing Mackinaw Township in the case.
 Mackinaw Township, Mackinaw

City Public Schools, and Mackinaw City stand to lose funding if the tribunal rules in the shopping mall's favor. For the village, "it would be a substantial reduction" that could reach \$50,000 in lost revenue, said Mackinaw City Village Manager Jeff Lawson.
 It is too early to speculate on how the village would respond to the loss, he said.
 This case has delayed the village's attempt to formalize a three-party contract to pay for fire service. Mackinaw Township recently

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ations.
 The *Mackinaw*, Commander Little said, helps keep commerce moving, by setting navigational buoys to cutting a path through ice for freighters.
 Commander Little grew up in Southern Tennessee and before he joined the Coast Guard, he helped move commerce on the Western

ivers in the commercial towing industry.
 About a half million jobs, he said, depend on commerce moving in the Great Lakes.
 "All those jobs are impacted by what we do," he said, "and that's what I love about this so much. I'm a ship guy."
 Their work, he said, helps keep

Family Says Sense of Humor Helps During Long Hours in the Sugar Bush

Tassiers Make Maple Syrup at Cedarville

By Amy Polk
 As a young girl growing up on the McAdams farm near DeTour, Martha Tassier made maple syrup with her family. Years later, when she casually suggested her son and daughter-in-law make a little maple syrup, the idea gave birth to the area's largest retail maple products business.
 Dan and Deb Tassier have made syrup at Tassier Sugar Bush in Cedarville for 20 years, and their maple products are being sold in stores as far away as Detroit, Iowa, Arkansas, and Tennessee. They make and sell syrup, maple sugar and sprinkles, candies, maple coated nuts, barbecue sauce, vinaigrette dressing, and the two newest products: Gramma Shorty's Special Sauce and a meat rub.
 Every product is a time-honored family recipe, or has some humorous family tale attached to it. Gramma Shorty's sauce, for example, is named for Deb Tassier because of her diminutive height. She usually stands on tiptoes to peek inside the equipment to check on progress during the vari-

ous stages of making products. The label for the sauce, created by family friend and Cedarville High School graduate Andy Conroy, features a little woman standing on a stool to reach the pot on the stove she is stirring. She bears no resemblance to Mrs. Tassier, but the family loves the obvious humor used in the label.
 A sense of humor has been vital to development of the business over the years, and helps them cope with inevitable accidents like spilling gallons of precious sap on the floor. The family has just wrapped up weeks of late nights, boiling syrup sometimes into the wee hours of the morning. That's the way it always has been, but the late hours are a little easier now on Mr. Tassier, who retired from his full-time job at Michigan Limestone Operations' quarry in Cedarville three years ago. Mr. Tassier's parents, Martha and Jack Tassier, are retired and help out whenever they can. Their two daughters, Tammy and Sharon, have assisted since they were children. Friends often stop by to keep the family company during the many hours they



Dan Tassier places hot jugs and bottles of maple syrup in the candy kitchen to cool. They are packaged at high temperatures to kill any potential bacteria, and the whole syrup making and processing operation is inspected and must meet the Michigan Department of Agriculture's food safety standards. Once the items are cool, they can be shelved and sold.



Deb Tassier fills jugs, bottles, and jars with freshly made maple syrup, using the steam kettle (at right) in the evaporation room of the sugar house.

spend boiling.
 Boiling sap is a time consuming process that requires a significant amount of watching, testing, and moving the sap around from the evaporation pans to finishing pans, and finally to a steam kettle for bottling.
 Many northern Michigan residents associate the smell of boiling sap with spring. Like Martha Tassier, many other families living near maple groves boiled sap for maple products used in the home.
 Evaporation is the process by which maple sap is boiled to remove the water and concentrate the sugars. Sap has a sugar concentration of about 2.5%, and the sap the Tassiers collected this year ranged from 2.6% sugar to as low as 1.3% at the end of the run in April. The lower the sugar content, the longer it takes to make syrup. The Tassiers use a reverse osmosis machine to remove two-thirds of the water from the sap before boiling. The extra step has saved them time and money. Since the sap is more concentrated after reverse osmosis, they use less fuel because they don't have to boil as long.
 The Tassiers evaporate the sap until reaches the desired concentration of about 67.8% sugar. When it gets to that ratio of sugar to sap, it creates the much thicker and darker solution known as syrup. Modern evaporation is accomplished in stainless steel pans, with hoods to carry the

steam away, creating the characteristic steam cloud seen rolling out of sugar shacks in early spring around Michigan. The old fashioned boiling method was usually done outdoors, in a kettle over a fire.
 Maple sap starts to flow when the late winter nights are still cold, and days are beginning to warm. The Tassiers have started the collection and boiling process as early as February, and have collected through April. Ideal conditions are when night temperatures drop down to freezing, and day temperatures rise quickly by 25 to 45 degrees.
 A tapped tree normally produces up to 12 gallons of sap during a good year. It takes approximately 40 gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup, Mr. Tassier said. Tapping does not hurt the tree, he added, and in fact maple producers work hard to care for trees because their industry depends on it. Syrup producers use only about 1% of Michigan's maple forest resource, the Michigan Maple Syrup Association reports.
 A maple tree must be about 40 years old and have a diameter of 10 inches before tapping is recommended. The traditional collection method uses a bucket hung below the tap to collect the dripping sap, but most commercial operations now use taps with

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