

The St. Ignace News

and Les Cheneaux Islands Weekly Wave



Redesign Credited for Attendance Surge of 20% at Mill Creek Discovery Park

But MSH Parks Down 5% Overall This Summer

By Diane Ivey
Mackinac Island Town Crier
Since the opening of its newest features in June, Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park near Mackinaw City has increased its attendance close to 20%, a great achievement considering attendance at Mackinac State Historic Parks is down 5% overall, director Phil Porter told the Mackinac Island State Park Commission at its meeting Friday, July 25, at Fort Mackinac.

"We are facing a very challenging summer, tourism-wise," Mr. Porter said. "Mill Creek's success is remarkable, considering the downward trend in Michigan right now."

An adventure tour that includes a 450-foot aerial cable ride over a pond, a forest canopy bridge, a climbing wall on a 50-foot lookout tower, and an extended nature trail are some of the latest additions to the park. The renovations have been especially attractive to fami-

lies with children, although even senior citizens have enjoyed the zip line across the pond. The new attractions, at the site of a reconstructed Revolutionary War-era sawmill, Mr. Porter said, are responsible for the park's newfound success.

It is southeast of Mackinaw City.

Park Commissioner Jim Williams said he has been talking with families on their way out of the park, and they have been enthusiastic about their experiences.

"The parking lot is always

packed," Father Williams said. "It's affordable, and kids are saying it's fun and interesting."

The Mackinac Island State Park Commission owns and operates a number of historic properties in the Straits of Mackinac area, including Historic Mill Creek and Colonial Michilimackinac on the mainland, and Fort Mackinac and the Mackinac Island State Park on Mackinac Island.

Also at the meeting, Mr. Porter said museum collections have swelled by 51 pieces this summer. Recently-acquired items include an 1812 newspaper which details the surrender terms of Fort Mackinac, a Mackinac Island souvenir cup from 1900, a set of keys to the tower of Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse from the 1950s, and photographic prints of the Island by W.H. Gardiner, circa 1910.

Gerald Vieau and Scott Thompson, carpenters at the parks, along with exhibit designer Dave Kronberg, are constructing a replica 18th

century bake oven at Colonial Michilimackinac in Mackinaw City, Mr. Porter said. The outdoor oven, which is documented on early maps of the site, will be used by park interpreters for baking bread during historical demonstrations.

The park operations crew also completed kitchen renovations at the captain's and major's quarters at Fort Mackinac, which are used to house commissioners and other dignitaries, continued work on the airport terminal building, and began construction of a fence marking the perimeter of the airport.

Lilac curator Jeff Young of the University of Vermont's horticulture research center will work with the grounds crew to preserve healthy lilacs and choose new varieties that will replace diseased and damaged trees.

As of July 11, visitors purchased 1,239 vacation packages, designed to boost attendance by offering discounted services.

The Park Commission received a \$1,600 grant from the Mackinac Island Community Foundation to purchase benches for high-traffic areas in the park.

The summer archaeological field crew at Michilimackinac is excavating a layer of soil formed early 1781, when the fort was moved to Mackinac Island and the remnants on the mainland were burned.

Registrar Brian Jaeschke and three summer interns will complete the inventory of historic collections. Conservator Jennifer Lis and her staff are conserving the wood-burning stoves in the Post Schoolhouse and Hill Quarters.

The park's annual audience survey is underway at all Mackinac State Historic Parks sites. Exit interviews and in-depth questionnaires, as well as tracking and timing studies, will help park administrators gauge the satisfaction of visitors.

Capt. Heffernan Pulls Teen From Water

Eric Heffernan, a captain for Shepler's Mackinac Island Ferry, saved a teenage girl from drowning after she fell under the gangway while the boat was docked on Mackinac Island Monday, July 14.

As the young girl was walking off the boat with a group, she accidentally stepped between the boat and the dock and fell into the water. Capt. Heffernan said she hung onto a dock structural beam just above the water until she was rescued.

Capt. Heffernan, with assistance from another Shepler's captain, Mark Ingilis, and one of the group's chaperones, pulled the girl from the water.

Other than being a little shaken up, cold, and wet, the girl reportedly received only a scratch on her leg from the fall. "I let her wear my captain's vest for the day to keep warm,"



Eric Heffernan, a captain for Shepler's Mackinac Island Ferry, rescued a teenage girl after she fell between the ferry and the dock Monday, July 14. The girl suffered only minor scratches.

said Capt. Heffernan.

Eric Heffernan, originally from Farmington Hills and now

living in St. Ignace, has been a captain for Shepler's for the past nine years.

Mackinac County To Share in \$1.6 Million Police Grants

Police agencies in Mackinac County have learned they will share in a \$1.6 million federal grant to be received by Chippewa County, Mackinac County Sheriff Scott Strait reported July 31. The amount to be allocated in Mackinac County, which has yet to be determined, is expected to be several hundred thousand dollars, he said.

The Mackinac County funding will pay for overtime patrols, personal protection equipment for deputies, including survival suits and ballistic protection equipment,

and specialized training.

In addition to the Sheriff's Office, state, city, and tribal police in Mackinac County will share in the money.

The grant was given by the Homeland Security office for increased border patrols in Chippewa County, which will disperse funds in the coming months. Chippewa County is sharing the money with Mackinac County because I-75 and the Mackinac Bridge are direct egress routes to the border, Sheriff Strait pointed out. The Mackinac Bridge has ties

not only to the international border in Sault Ste. Marie, but also is on a direct transportation route from the Bluewater Bridge and to the western U.S. and Canada, he said.

Mackinac County agencies, including the Sheriff's Office, were among those that formed a research team to determine needs of local police forces in applying for the grant, Sheriff Strait said.

The money will be received over the next three years and equipment purchases are expected to begin in the next few months.

Truck Scales Upgraded at Mackinac Bridge

By Karen Gould

Accurate screening of trucks and other commercial vehicles was set in place last month at the Mackinac Bridge as 13-year-old weigh-in-motion scales were rebuilt and the system's computer software was upgraded. The changes, say bridge and law enforcement officials, will help protect the infrastructure of the bridge and nearby roads.

The bridge was designed for three-axle trucks weighing a maximum 72,000 pounds, said Bob Sweeney, executive secretary of the Mackinac Bridge Authority. Heavier loads are allowed on Michigan roadways, so an analysis of the design of the bridge was performed and it was determined that trucks up to 144,000 pounds, with restrictions, could cross the bridge.

Those trucks require 500-foot spacing and must travel at lower speeds, which is essential to prevent the bridge from being damaged from these heavier loads, he said.

Regulations for trucks are enforced from the toll plaza in St. Ignace to the Jamet Street exit in

Mackinaw City and include a maximum speed limit of 20 miles per hour, using the right lane with no passing, 500-foot spacing and no tailgating, and use of four-way flashers. Trucks with a gross load of more than 40 tons must request an escort before crossing the bridge, and the maximum allowable vehicle weight is 72 tons (144,000 pounds).

Overweight trucks cause the greatest damage to the bridge and that results in higher maintenance costs, said Mike Litzner, chief financial officer of the Authority.

"That's why we want to keep weights to what the bridge was designed for," he said, "as overweight trucks will increase the wear and tear on the bridge."

In 2007, he said, 285,336 trucks crossed the bridge.

Mr. Litzner worked on the upgrades with MBA electronics technician Brent Garries, who managed the work on the project.

The new system, said Mr. Garries, is more accurate.

The bridge's project was done in collaboration with the Michigan

State Police Motor Carrier Division, which is charged with weight enforcement on Michigan roadways, including the bridge.

A narrow plate in the roadbed just north and south of the toll booth plaza weighs vehicles as they move toward the toll booths. Work at the site in July included installing new fiber optic cables.

The electronic data gathered as a truck passes over the scale is transmitted through the cables to a computer, and is displayed on a monitor in the operations room at the building just east of the toll booths.

The information is recorded and includes the truck identification, time, weight of the truck and axles, and axle configuration. The information also is used by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to track traffic patterns.

As a truck passes over a scale, if the overall truck or an axle weight is over the limit, an alarm is triggered in the operations room. Bridge staff then contact the state police.

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When upgrading the weigh-in-motion scales and software last month, the Mackinac Bridge Authority (MBA) worked with the Michigan State Police Motor Carrier Division, equipment provider D.C. Martin and Son Scales of Grand Rapids, and equipment manufacturer Metler Toledo of Columbus, Ohio. Standing behind the weigh-in-motion scale are (from left) electronics technician Brent Garries of the MBA, President Coby Martin of DC Martin and Son Scales, Michigan State Police Lt. Rodney Bloss, Senior Project Manager Tom Kimmel of Metler Toledo, and police officers stationed at the bridge, Craig Therrian and Dan Litzner. (Photograph courtesy of Mackinac Bridge Authority)

Enjoy a Walk with a New Friend!

Mackinac County Animal Shelter
980 Cheeseman Road, St. Ignace • 906-643-7646
Open Everyday 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. & Sun. 9-11 a.m. or call for appoint.
www.petfinder.com www.mackinacounty.org
adoptions-mcas2005@sbcglobal.net

 Griffin Beverage	 <i>In memory of Jo Sommerville</i>	 <i>In honor of Lucy</i>
 DECKED OUT Mackinac Island	 <i>An Animal Lover</i>	 St. Ignace Greenhouse

Mackinac Animal Aid Association
• A Non-Profit Volunteer Group Funded by Donations, 292-0046 •