

As People Drive Less, Resulting Drop in Gas Tax Revenue Cuts Into County Road Budgets

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less fuel. For each gallon of gas sold, 19¢ is collected by the state as gas tax. Of that money, 39.1% is distributed to the Michigan Department of Transportation, 21.8% is given to cities and villages, and the remaining 39.1% is divided among Michigan's 83 counties. Counties receive funding based on a formula that considers the county's population, the number of registered vehicles, and miles of county roadway.

To adjust to the shrinking operating dollars, the Mackinac County Road Commission this month will not fill one of nine seasonal positions. Seasonal employees, depending on weather conditions, are employed from November through April.

Coupled with the revenue loss, road commissions are facing a continued rise in the price of materials and supplies.

Since 2001, the cost of plow drag blades, diesel fuel, and tires has tripled.

Last month, road commissioners approved a plan to dispatch plows on county roads on nights and weekends only after at least a four-inch to six-inch snowfall. This is the same policy adopted last year, a result of years of falling revenues.

This year, a new measure is that straight salt will not be applied on county roadways, although there are exceptions to every rule, such as in freezing rain, said Mr. Heckman.

Salt now is too expensive, he said, so crews will mix sand with salt or a chloride brine solution, creating a 10 to 1 ratio of sand to salt, called ice sand.

The product provides traction, he said, although the roads still may remain covered with snow. In the past, a straight salt application normally would melt the snow down to the pavement.

The ice-sand will be applied on hills, curves, and at intersections, he said.



On the job since September 2, Dirk Heckman, Mackinac County Road Commission engineer and manager, plans to improve communications with local municipalities and citizens. He is attending township meetings, and this month road commissioners and Mr. Heckman will review the winter maintenance program with interested residents at a meeting set for Tuesday, November 11, at 7 p.m. at the Road Commission building on North State Street in St. Ignace.

"We don't have the resources to go out and sand and salt straight-aways on every county road," said Mr. Heckman.

The price of salt has shot up from \$30 a ton three years ago to \$53 a ton now. Salt already was ordered for this season before Mr. Heckman was hired, but next year his goal is not to order more than 600 tons of salt for use on county roads.

On average, a "very, very rough" estimate of the amount of ice-sand that will be used on a plow route would be one truck full, said Mr. Heckman, and that depends on the number of hills, curves, and intersections. One load of ice-sand

weighs approximately 10 tons and a plow route covers about 30 miles of roadway.

The road commission maintains 650 miles of county roads.

If Mackinac County experiences a rough winter, said Mr. Heckman, the road commission will do all that is possible based on available funds and material resources.

"There may be times when roads are impassable," he said, "and I think there have been times in the past when roads have become impassable. We'll do our best to keep them reasonably safe and convenient for public travel."

The budget for the road com-

mission in 2008 was \$5.8 million, although the amount is misleading, said Mr. Heckman, because the figure includes money coming from the state that is paying for more than 90% of a more than \$500,000 state salt shed being constructed at the East District garage.

Funds also are received through a state maintenance contract that generates approximately \$271,000 in revenue. The road commission maintains 61 lane-miles of state highway, which includes M-129 and M-134.

Townships contribute \$365,000 for road improvements and the budget also includes any pass-through funding. When asked, the road commission can act as a pass through agency for funding on other projects, including state park roads on Mackinac Island.

The commission, which is on the calendar year, is working on its 2009 budget now. The new budget must be adopted by road commissioners by December 31.

A 1994 graduate of LaSalle High School, Mr. Heckman said he is happy to be back working in his hometown, helping to contribute and make improvements to the community.

From his second floor office in the old State Police building on North State Street in St. Ignace, he can see the house he grew up in. Now, he lives in Marquette Township near the East District road commission garage.

Mr. Heckman came to Mackinac County after serving in the same capacity in Chippewa County. He had been the assistant manager and engineer there until his boss retired and he was appointed to the top spot.

He attended Michigan Technological University in Houghton for three years before transferring to Michigan State University (MSU), where he was graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in civil engineering in 1999. While a student at MSU, he was accepted for an internship

with the Michigan Department of Transportation, which took him to the Mackinac Bridge, where he served as a paint inspector.

One of his first priorities after stepping into the Mackinac County lead role, which was vacated when Karrie Abbitt resigned earlier this year, has been to improve communication with local municipalities and the public.

"Public relations are key," he said.

Since September, he has been attending township meetings across the county. He also attended a meeting of the county's local chapter of the Michigan Townships Association.

The road commission plans to continue in 2009 with the county's

three-way match program for road preservation, said Mr. Heckman. The program calls for both the road commission and the county commission to match township funds spent for road work, up to \$10,000.

"Road commissions work very closely with townships," he said. "That's why I've made a point to meet with the townships. We're working with townships more than any other governmental entity."

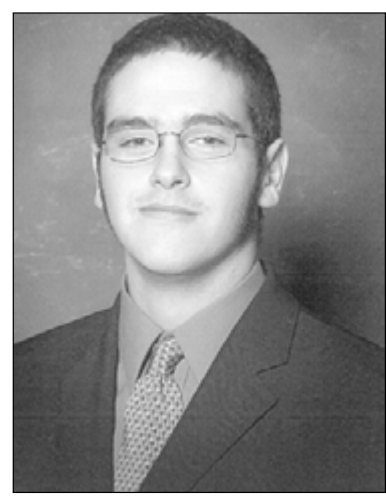
A meeting to review the winter maintenance program with residents, township officials, state and local law enforcement agencies, and the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians is scheduled for Tuesday, November 11, at 7 p.m. at the Road Commission building on North State Street in St. Ignace.

Man Jailed on Three Charges

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scheduled for 1:30 p.m. Wednesday, November 5, at Mackinac County Court House, although attorney Michael Hackett of Mount Pleasant, who is representing Mr. Roach, has the opportunity to request an extension before presenting his case, according to 92nd District Court.

Mr. Tamlyn is the son of Joanne Kompfi of Mackinac Island and Steve Tamlyn of St. Ignace, and a 2007 graduate of LaSalle High School. He was employed as a painter with St. Onge Latex and Groove on Mackinac Island this summer and worked part-time for the City of St. Ignace at Silver Mountain Ski Hill each winter since 2006, and also was employed by Ryba



Roy Roach (2005 file photograph)

Marine Construction.

Mr. Tamlyn's obituary is printed on page 9 of this issue.

Veterans Day Services Announced

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high students will read their Voice of Democracy essays.

Veterans and the public are invited to attend.

Mackinaw City
The American Legion will host

a Veterans Day potluck dinner Tuesday, November 11, at 6 p.m. at the American Legion Post at 106 South Huron Street.

Members and guests are asked to bring a dish to pass and tableware.

Sault Anniversary

Nov. 8th, 2008
6-10 pm Cash Draws
Grand Prize Draw at 10:15 pm
CASH!CASH!CASH!
\$25,000 in Cash Prizes!
20 Grand Prize Winners

Upcoming Events

Manistique Team Spirits Bar
Come Watch Footballs on Sundays and enter **FOOTBALL FINAL TV GIVEAWAY!**

12 Days of Christmas St. Ignace Northern Pines Lounge
Earn Entries Dec. 1st-12th by purchasing a beverage for various gifts given away on the 12th

Native American Pool Tour Tournament - St. Ignace
Dec. 12th-14th.
Sign up at: www.drpool.net

New Year's Eve Celebration!
All Sites - Plan on spending the night at Kewadin, Dec. 31, 08

Tournaments

Christmas \$8,000 Blackjack
Nov. 14-16, 2008

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Loverboy
Thursday, November 13th
Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan

King of the Cage
Friday, November 7th
Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan



Thunder from Down Under
Sunday, November 16th
St. Ignace, Michigan



There's no place like Kewadin.

Hessel's Snowblower Giveaway

Earn one entry per day NOW until Nov. 26th.
Four Grand Prize Draws!
Random Cash Draws on Wednesdays!

Weekly Events

Rapids Lounge Entertainment
Sault Ste. Marie

Comedy starts at 8pm - Thurs.

Nov. 5th Melanie Maloy & Steve Purcell

Live Music starts at 9pm Fri. & Sat.

Nov. 7 & 8 Touch of Class

Northern Pines Entertainment
St. Ignace

Wednesday Comedy Shows start at 9pm

Nov. 6th Melanie Maloy & Steve Purcell

Live Music starts at 9pm Fri. & Sat.

Nov. 7 & 8 Jager 4.0

Team Spirits Bar Entertainment
Manistique

Karaoke - Nov. 21st & 22nd

Nudge - Nov. 14 & 15

