

## School's Mission Statement and Finances Impact Technology and Busing

By Michael Springsteen  
Superintendent  
St. Ignace Area Schools

We are over a quarter of the way through this school year. The Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year holidays are at hand. The year is going well from both an academic and athletic perspective. No two years are the same, and each brings its own opportunities. The economy the last few years has been providing our school system with plenty of reason to focus on what we find most important. Our mission statement helps in that process.

Our Mission: "The St. Ignace Area Schools as an innovative leader in providing quality and equitable education will develop all individuals to their highest potential for living and contributing in an ever-changing world."

Financial issues are a concern for your personal household budget as well as our public school budget. Unless you are the federal government, your spending can't exceed your income and budgets have to be balanced. You can dip into a savings account on rare occasion, but over the long haul,

your income determines what you can spend. You either have to raise your income or reduce your spending to make the two balance.

For public schools, the state has a funding system that guarantees an allotted amount of funding per pupil in attendance. Two factors, declining enrollments and inflation, severely squeeze most public school budgets. This year, those two factors resulted in St. Ignace Area Schools budgeting \$344,000 less in revenue than last year. In addition to reducing our overall expenditure, we have committed to using some of our savings account to balance the budget. We hope as the year goes on we may be able to find other savings.

The budget is an area that should reflect your main goals. When revenues are less, it becomes ever more important to focus the available dollars on those areas most likely to accomplish the mission. This year, even though revenues are down, some line items are up in spending. Additional revenues have been allocated toward technology. The St. Ignace Area Schools staff believes it is critical in this ever-

changing world for our students to be using the tools of their future if they are going to have the opportunity to reach their highest potential. This year's budget calls for spending \$100,000 per year on technology, specifically with a five year goal of putting a laptop computer in the hands of each student in grades six through 12. While we already have four stationary and five rolling mobile computer labs, these computers would be assigned to individual students for their personal use in the classroom and at home. Stored knowledge was once housed and catalogued in large libraries, and access to it was available depending on how close you were to the library and how large your library was. Today, all that knowledge is accessible via the computer and the Internet. It makes no difference where you live, so long as you have access to the appropriate technology. To make full use of the educational opportunities requires full access to today's technology.

In an indirect way that brings us to bussing, a critical component for parents in a rural school

district that encompasses 300 square miles. When the decision was made to put more of the resources toward technology, the decision was made to streamline bussing. Our goal is to continue to provide bus service for all who need it, but at the same time to decrease the cost of the service to the district and funnel the savings toward the increase in the technology budget. For that reason, those who ride the busses will have found that while the busses still travel the same basic routes, there are now more pooled bus stops and students in some instances may have to walk short distances. The amount we are saving by making adaptations in the bus routes will not fully fund what it takes to provide our commitment toward technology, but it helps. It isn't ideal that we are no longer providing door to door bus service, but we are continuing to provide bussing for all who want it while at the same time improving our focus on classroom technology.

Challenges are all around us. Life is about choices. Our mission helps to clarify those choices.

## Michigan Politics

By  
George Weeks



### The Colors of Enviro-speak

After meetings with assorted world leaders, Governor Jennifer Granholm has been promoting creating jobs in a global "green economy" that cleans the environment through alternative energy.

"We want Michigan to be a leader for the country in solutions to reduce global warming, create jobs, and provide alternative and renewal energy," she said after a September meeting with King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden, which has set a goal of total oil independence by 2020.

It's a good bet that Granholm, who last week cut short a Middle East visit to fly back to Washington to lobby there and on national TV for help for the auto industry, will have a green pitch for new energy technologies in her 2009 State of the State Address.

In an interview last week, Lieutenant Governor John Cherry, long a conservation champion in the Senate before becoming Granholm's running mate, said he is encouraging her to also promote a "blue economy – the sustainable use of our waters."

The subject came up when I asked about his earlier comment to me that eventually there should be a tightening of the recently-approved Great Lakes Compact that allows pumping and sale of water as a product in containers of five gallons or less.

Cherry, immediate past chairman of the Great Lakes Commission, said: "That's a pretty artificial distinction when you start putting bottles of five gallons on a truck. (laughing) OK? I mean, all of a sudden, that becomes a 'vessel!'"

He defended the position that the Legislature and Congress took in adopting the compact without the more restrictive provisions sought by U.S. Representative Bart Stupak (D-Menominee) and others because, Cherry said, "we would not have a compact. Now that we've got it, we've got to focus on keeping the water in the basin."

Strengthening the compact, he said, "is a debate that will occur in the next decade, and probably earlier than later."

The sooner the better.

Cherry said that water has great potential for development in two ways:

"One, is that we need to be absolutely stringent about keeping water here because it becomes a magnet to attract businesses to locate here.

"But secondly, we can become a world leader in export of technology that helps other regions learn how to preserve their water, clean their water, and improve their access to water just by handling the water they have in a more environmentally sound way."

Cherry, who is Granholm's point man in dealing with university presidents and met with them last week in Traverse City, cited Michigan Tech, Michigan State, Michigan, Wayne State, and Grand Valley State among those schools that could help foster the blue economy.

Although Cherry repeatedly referred to a "blue economy," his office touts the initiative as "The Blue Water Economy – Great Lakes Protection and Michigan's Economic Transformation," subject of a speech he gave November 10.

For political spinners, "blue economy" is too suggestive of our economic blues.

#### Governor's 2010 Race

At this stage of the race, prospective candidates in each major party talk of "considering, exploring." Not Cherry.

John Cherry, like the John McCain of yore, is a straight talker. This was evident last week in our chat over coffee when as he candidly referred to himself among "those of us who are running for governor in 2010."

He said this as we talked about the budget woes that ex-Governors Bill Milliken and Jim Blanchard had when Cherry first ran and served in the Legislature in the early 1980s.

There have been budget woes for governors ever since, and Cherry figures they will face the 2010 winner.

He said, "The debate has been budget for 20 years [and] now as a candidate, I mean I have no guarantee I'll get elected, but I believe as a candidate I can at least shape" the debate.

Cherry won't formally announce until next year. Meanwhile, consider him "as a candidate" in waiting.

George Weeks retired in 2006 after 22 years as political columnist for *The Detroit News*. His weekly *Michigan Politics* column is syndicated by *Superior Features*.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Making Cedarville Bay a Boater Destination Again

To the Editor:

Two articles dealing with ecological issues of Cedarville Bay have appeared in this paper during the past month. Reporter Jonathan Eppley has effectively highlighted a number of points on those issues. Still, people have asked even more questions. This note is to hopefully clarify some of the critical Cedarville Bay issues and to identify the position of the Les Cheneaux Waterways Restoration Group.

Cedarville Bay is presently the equivalent of an unbalanced aquarium. A well cared for aquarium can be maintained for years without a major effort. That ecological balance is what we are striving for in Cedarville Bay.

Between 1994 and 2008, more than three tons of phosphorus have been discharged in the Clark Township Wastewater Treatment Plant polished lagoon water. Discharge volumes range from 25 to 35 million gallons per campaign and there are two discharge campaigns each year. The volume of each discharge is equivalent to one third to one half the volume of Cedarville Bay. With minimal water movement out of Cedarville Bay, the plume of nutrient-rich lagoon water fertilizes aquatic plants in the bay for at least three weeks before slowly dissipating.

The Waterways Restoration Group has three objectives: (1) Control the intense weed growth in Cedarville Bay with special effort on the invasive aquatic weed, Eurasian watermilfoil (EWM); (2) To limit the nutrient source for aquatic weeds; (3) To remove residual nutrients found in the bottom sediment. These objectives all support a common goal to make Cedarville Bay a boater destination again.

The major aquatic plant nutrient of concern is phosphorus. In our region, phosphorus levels in the water are a primary determinant of the ability of aquatic plants to grow. One of the selling points to develop the present treatment plant was to reduce nutrient levels in Cedarville Bay. The fact is that there is no substantial difference in the concentration of phosphorus in the water of Cedarville Bay in 2008 than was recorded 1994, as reported by AquaTerra Labs.

To address our first objective, at great expense and effort on the part of the Watershed Council and Flotation Docking Systems, nuisance weed

growth was well controlled in 2008. Aquatic weevils planted by the Watershed Council in 2007 have contributed to control of watermilfoil along the margins of Cedarville Bay. The Watershed Council also contracted with Flotation Docking Systems to manage weed growth using a mechanical weed harvester around the launch ramp, township dock, and navigation areas to the federal channels last summer. Boaters appeared pleased with the ability to traverse Cedarville Bay during 2008, compared to the previous several years.

To address our second objective, the Watershed Council conducted an experiment to identify levels of iron chloride to be mixed with the lagoon water. Iron chloride binds with phosphorus and the resulting complex settles to the bottom. Last spring, a discharge volume of about 25 million gallons contained only four pounds of phosphorus. This is contrasted with 500 pounds of phosphorus in each discharge experienced during early years of the present system. This is an improvement of 125 fold. If this level is reduced another fourfold, and can be consistently achieved, then the adverse impact of lagoon discharge nutrients on Cedarville Bay will be considered negligible from an excess nutrient standpoint. Other readily available, relatively cheap, and simple existing technologies can be used to lower the annual phosphorus to a desirable level.

Objective three is to remove a large portion of the nutrient-rich sediment from Cedarville Bay by dredging. How much volume should be removed without creating yet another ecological insult has yet to be determined.

As these three objectives are being addressed, a number of additional issues need to be clarified with the DEQ. First, is to identify which phosphorus removal technologies are acceptable to the DEQ. As the existing treatment plant went online in 1993 an engineering firm, Capital Consultants (presently known as C2AE) made several recommendations on handling of polished lagoon water. The DEQ position on these recommendations needs to be confirmed before updating a course of action can be discussed with C2AE. An updated recommendation from an engineering firm is required before action can be taken, but at a cost to the township of around \$25,000. It is prudent to have a preview from the DEQ on what approaches are, or are not, acceptable for Clark Township before committing to an expensive engineering review.

A second point is the quality of water being discharged. Among the 10 Les Cheneaux study sites, only Cedarville Bay has a phosphorus level higher than that of northern Lake Huron. This discharge act is in violation of Rule 98 of the 1986 Water Quality Standards and goes against recommendations of the Michigan Phosphorus Policy Advisory Committee (2007).

Third, once an effective system is designed for ecologically acceptable phosphorus levels, then that system needs to be sized to accommodate projected demand on the treatment plant at least 20 years from the time it goes online.

Fourth, the Waterways Restoration Group will work with the DEQ to identify state and federal grants to fund upgrades to the treatment plant.

Dredging of the federal navigation channels is a separate project being coordinated with the Army Corps of Engineers.

My graduate degree is a master's in microbiology from Central Michigan University, not a PhD.

"Lakeside" Bob Smith  
Cedarville

## The St. Ignace News

and Les Cheneaux Islands Weekly Wave

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The quotation under the flag of *The St. Ignace News* on Page 1 is from the 10 triads written by Dr. Fred Newton Scott, creator and teacher of the first continuous course in journalism in the United States at the University of Michigan in 1890. The 10 triads are chiseled on the parapet of the Detroit News Building at 615 Lafayette Boulevard, Detroit. They were headed "Ideals of the Press" or "The Newspaper in a Free Society," and serve as a reminder of what a free press means to us.

## St. Ignace News Policies

#### Letters:

All responsible letters will be considered for publication and may be edited. They must be signed and a telephone number must be included for verification. Personal thank-you notes, personal attacks against other people, form letters, and letters promoting political candidates are not accepted, although letters for or against ballot proposals are welcome.

#### Obituaries:

The St. Ignace News maintains a policy of not charging for obituaries and we do often add information or rewrite them for clarity and reader interest. Obituaries that the family wants published exactly as submitted can be placed in the newspaper for \$75. Photographs are welcome at no charge.

#### Weddings:

Weddings with photographs are published without charge within 45 days of the ceremony. After 45 days, a photograph can be included for \$35.00.

#### Internet:

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## Medicare Drug Program Holds Open Enrollment Until Dec. 31

Seniors citizens may take advantage of the Medicare prescription drug program's open enrollment period from November 15 until December 31, 2008.

U.S. Congressman Bart Stupak reminded northern Michigan seniors that they have the option to change plans, if desired, during this time.

"If seniors are happy with their Medicare prescription drug plan, they do not need to do anything," Mr. Stupak said. "However, if there is a prescription drug plan that would better serve their needs, seniors may switch between now and the end of the year."

The annual open enrollment period for the Medicare prescription drug benefit is from November 15 until December 31. On January 1 all selections are locked in for 2009. Changes can only be made during the open enrollment period and take effect January 1, 2009.

For beneficiaries enrolling into Medicare Advantage plans only, they can make one change in enrollment – enrolling in a new plan, changing plans, or disenrolling from a plan – between January 1 and March 31, 2009. The Medicare Advantage open enrollment period cannot be used to start or stop Medicare drug coverage, or to enroll or disenroll in a Medicare Medical Savings Account Plan.

"Once the New Year begins, the prescription drug plan that a senior is enrolled becomes their only option for the rest of the year," Mr. Stupak said. "I encourage seniors in northern Michigan to take this opportunity to review the benefits of their current drug plan, compare it with other drug plans and make an informed decision."

There are a number of information sources that seniors may use in comparing Medicare prescription drug plans. Detailed information can be found in the "Medicare and You" handbooks, or online at [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov). The information will include report cards that rate plans based on a range of factors, such as customer service, drug pricing, pharmacy locations, and how easy it is to have prescriptions filled. Beneficiaries may also compare out of pocket costs and pharmacy networks in their areas.

Beneficiaries can also call the Michigan Medicaid/Medicare Assistance Program at (800) 803-7174 or visit the program online at [www.mymmap.org](http://www.mymmap.org). This is a free health-benefit counseling service and provides education and counseling assistance to Michigan's Medicare beneficiaries and their families or representatives. It can answer questions about the Medicare prescription drug coverage and help seniors select a prescription plan.