

Community Physician Herbert Hamel Delivered 2,500 Babies, Helped Establish Hospital

By Karen Gould

The traditional black leather physician's satchel was always packed with bandages and medicine and ready at a moment's notice. As a rural practitioner in Mackinac County beginning in the late 1940s, Dr. Herbert "Herbie" Hamel worked day and night, with little time left for sleep. He treated a variety of conditions then, including broken limbs, injuries from farm accidents, cuts, stab wounds from altercations, hunting accidents, illnesses, and he delivered babies. He made emergency house calls to families across the county, from Cedarville to the east, Rudyard to the north, Naubinway and Epoufette to the west, and even Mackinac Island.

Dr. Hamel died Friday, January 30, 2009, in St. Ignace at Mackinac Straits Hospital, a hospital that in part was established through his efforts.

Being a doctor in 1947 in Mackinac County was not easy.

Dr. Hamel began his St. Ignace practice 10 years before the Mackinac Bridge was built. Hospitals were miles away. Taking patients who needed more extensive treatment to the hospital required a ferry boat trip across the Straits to reach Little Traverse Hospital in Petoskey or the Cheboygan hospital. Travel to War Memorial Hospital in Sault Ste. Marie meant a long car trip, even longer during winter storms. He



Dr. Hamel in his office in the early 1950s.

also saw patients by appointment in his office in the First National Bank building on State Street. Sterilizing equipment, an X-ray machine, and medication filled his second floor office in the red brick building.

For 32 years, Dr. Hamel, who was a general practitioner, cared for the people of the county. He delivered approximately 2,500 babies.

Before he arrived in town, most babies were born at home. Dr. Hamel helped establish relationships with the nearby hospitals, said Prentiss "Moie" Brown, Jr, so that many more births would be hospital deliveries.

One of those babies he delivered in a car while on the way to War Memorial Hospital.

Dr. Hamel saw the need and

was instrumental in establishing a hospital in St. Ignace, Mr. Brown recalls.

"About 1950 or thereafter, he was very active in promoting [the establishment of] Mackinac Straits Hospital," Mr. Brown said. "That's one of the great accolades he should receive. He was a physician who did that promotion from a doctor's standpoint."

Without a hospital, Dr. Hamel knew medical care here was limited, and it also made it difficult to enlist and retain new physicians.

After it was built, Dr. Hamel served as chief of staff at the St. Ignace medical facility, from 1954 through 1968.

Born in Detroit in 1917, Dr. Hamel had been a friend of the Brown family since the 1930s. He attended Albion College with Mr.



The Hamel family poses for a photograph at Christmas 1954, just seven years after Dr. Hamel started practicing medicine in St. Ignace. Pictured are (back row, from left) his wife, Jean, son Herbert Jr. "Tex," Dr. Hamel; (front) Carolyn, Tom, and David. (Hamel family photographs)

Brown's sisters, Mariana "Nan" and Ruth.

After he was graduated from Albion, he attended Wayne State University Medical School and then joined the Navy. He was transferred to the Marine Corps and sent to Guam with the 3rd Marine Division.

Following the war in 1945, Dr. Hamel was sent to Long Beach California Naval Hospital. It was there that he married Jean O'Flaherty. The two had attended Cooley High School in Detroit, although they did not meet until after graduation.

Dr. Hamel then was assigned to the Corpus Christi Naval Hospital in Texas, resigning in 1946, and returning to Detroit.

"He always had a great desire to live in Michigan," said Mr. Brown, who recalls his sisters suggested the couple move to St. Ignace.

Dr. John Darby, the town's family physician, had just retired, leaving Dr. Lyndon Shaftoe to serve St. Ignace and the county. The physicians and the community welcomed Dr. Hamel and his growing family.

"He did very well," said Mr. Brown. "He hired local people as

his nurses and helpers. He called on people at their house, if they needed him. He was very active in the community. He loved to play golf."

He and his wife also were great dancers, remembers Mr. Brown.

The couple had four children, Herbert Jr. "Tex," Tom, David, and Carolyn. Dr. Hamel and his son, Tom, who continues to serve as athletic trainer in St. Ignace, were inducted into the LaSalle High School Hall of Fame this December in recognition of their longtime contribution to high school athletics. Dr. Hamel served as an unofficial team doctor for St. Ignace teams for many years.

Two of Mr. Brown's children, Mary Margaret and Benjamin, were delivered by Dr. Hamel in the 1950s.

He also delivered many Mackinac Island children, recalls Island Mayor Margaret Doud.

In those days, medical charges were much less and far easier to pay without insurance letters and bills going back and forth, Mr. Brown recalls of the years when Dr. Hamel first practiced medicine.

"You would go see him for

medical help and I know when you'd leave, at least I would say to him, 'What do I owe you, Herbie, for your help?'" recalls Mr. Brown. "Many times he would say, well pay me two or three dollars."

In 1970, Dr. Hamel suffered a heart attack. In 1979, under the advice of colleagues, he retired.

"He was a good, hard working, very honorable physician in this community," said Mr. Brown.

Former State Senator Walt North, a longtime St. Ignace friend, said Dr. Hamel was unpretentious, down-to-earth, respected, and very well liked. Mr. North served as toastmaster when Dr. Hamel was named St. Ignace Citizen of the Year in 1978. Dr. Hamel also delivered Mike North, the youngest son of Mr. North and his wife, Sally.

"He was a wonderful person to have in your community," said Mr. North. "I think you could go up and down main street and all over and not find anybody who had a bad thing to say about him, which is really admirable."

Dr. Hamel's obituary was published in *The St. Ignace News* February 5.

Group Seeks Governor's Support for Museum



Linking Straits State Park to the Father Marquette site with a pedestrian bridge over I-75 in St. Ignace is part of a plan to boost tourism and reestablish the Father Marquette Museum. Looking north, in this photograph taken from the Mackinac Bridge toll plaza, the state park hillside can be seen on the right and the Father Marquette site on the left. Federal funding is sought for the bridge, which is estimated to cost \$3.4 million. (The St. Ignace News file photograph)

By Karen Gould

A drive is underway to reestablish a museum at the Father Jacques Marquette National Memorial overlooking the Mackinac Bridge and a local committee will now seek the governor's help in the project. Designed to designate St. Ignace as the third point of the "Triangle of History," the proposed museum has the support of the Mackinac Island State Park Commission, Mackinac County, Moran Township, and City of St. Ignace. The Father Marquette Committee now will ask Governor Jennifer Granholm to appoint a broad-based state board to investigate the feasibility of redeveloping a museum here.

Coined by the Park Commission years ago, the "Triangle of History" identifies the three Straits of Mackinac communities established as military fortifications and trading posts. The French built Fort de Buade in St. Ignace, the French and British were established at Fort Michilimackinac in Mackinaw City, and British and American forces served at Fort Mackinac on Mackinac Island.

Today, the Park Commission has a presence in Mackinaw City and on the Island, although not in St. Ignace. The committee says it wants to complete the history triangle by revitalizing and developing the park.

Supporting documents and letters of support are being prepared and will be delivered to the governor within the next few months.

The committee, which met Wednesday, February 4, is pushing to rebuild the state-owned Father Marquette Museum that was destroyed by lightning in 2000. The facility, in Moran Township, was self-insured by the state and was never rebuilt. The property is owned by the Department of Natural Resources.

Congressman Bart Stupak is seeking federal funding for a \$3.4 million walkway over I-75 linking

Straits State Park to the Father Marquette site.

Committee member Father Jim Williams suggested the committee should take a tiered approach to the project. The initial focus, agreed the committee, would be to reestablish the Father Marquette Museum and to construct the walkway. Once that is accomplished, the committee would work on establishing a Mackinac Bridge Museum and a Transportation Museum on the site.

The committee discussed what the museum should be called, although it reached no decision

and agreed to discuss a name with Mackinac Island State Park Director Director Phil Porter. Suggestions included Father Marquette National Memorial and Gateway Museum and Mackinac Straits Gateway Museum. Discussion is expected to continue at the next meeting.

The site would serve as a gateway for visitors to the Upper Peninsula, and the committee noted that the U.P. extends both east and west from here.

"It's important to market this thing as a gateway to the east,"

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Appeals Rescheduled at Moran Twp.

By Jonathan Eppley

The Moran Township Board of Trustees, meeting Wednesday, February 4, changed the schedule for property assessment appeals at the request of township assessor Dick Oliver. The Board of Review will hear assessment appeals Tuesday, March 10, between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. and Thursday, March 12, between 3 p.m. and 9 p.m. at the township hall. Original dates set for appeals were March 9 and 12, at the same times.

Mr. Oliver said the date switch will allow him to attend both appeal sessions.

"That way I can be at both meetings," he said. "In order to legally stay within state tax commission guidelines, I needed the board to make a resolution to change that first date."

The board continued to review and adjust line items in the township's 2009 budget, which is

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Black Pt. Road Paving Gets Twp. OK

By Jonathan Eppley

The Brevort Township board unanimously approved spending \$32,000 to pave a two-mile stretch of Black Point Road between Walker Road and Government Road at its Tuesday, February 3, meeting. The remaining cost of the \$239,000 project will come from \$32,000 from the Mackinac County Road Commission and \$175,000 from federal road funds. Work on the project is expected to begin in early June and be completed by July 4, said Road Commission Manager Dirk Heckman.

"I understand that's probably when Brevort Township is the

busiest," he said. "We hope everything will come together and be completed by the Fourth of July."

A letter from the Michigan Townships Association (MTA) was received by the township requesting "shovel-ready" projects to be submitted for federal stimulus funds by Friday, January 23. Clerk Susan Stelzer said the letter was received Thursday, January 22, the day before submissions were due. She worked quickly to submit two township projects to the MTA seeking federal dollars.

Projects submitted for consideration for stimulus funds include \$680,000 for a community center

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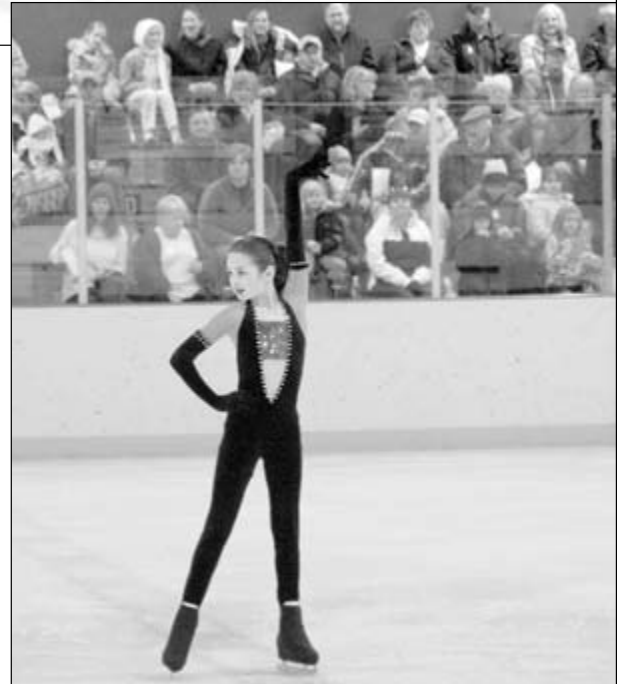
Skating Talent Draws 200 to Little Bear East



With caps topped with marshmallows and cups of cocoa on their shirts, Ellen Tilford (from left), Erika Edmondson, and Savannah Rancour skated with a Hot Chocolate theme. The skaters, who are members of the Twin Bays Figure Skating Club of Traverse City, performed at the Ice Follies at Little Bear East Arena in St. Ignace Sunday, February 8.



Katie Raynard's home run routine was a hit with the Ice Follies audience Sunday at St. Ignace. The 12-year-old Pickford resident is a member of the Hiawatha Skating Club of Sault Ste. Marie.



Featured skater Madeleine Rutledge of Sault Ste. Marie presented two programs Sunday afternoon at the Ice Follies in St. Ignace. Ms. Rutledge is ranked 20th in the nation for juvenile skaters. About 200 people attended the ice show, which raised \$700 for the Mackinac County Child Protection Roundtable's goal to prevent child abuse and neglect.