

Merchants Represent the Entire Town, Marketing Consultant Advises

Business Owners From St. Ignace and Nearby Areas Gather for Advice

By Mark Tower

Individual merchants represent their entire town to visitors who are traveling through it, marketing advisor Denise Hanson of Munising reminded St. Ignace business owners last week, and meeting the expectations of visitors with consistency and quality service must be their top goal.

Retailers from St. Ignace and surrounding areas gathered Thursday at five Experiential Retailing Workshops at the Village Inn Restaurant Thursday, May 14, and Friday, May 15.

Mrs. Hanson presented advice for businesses, ranging from understanding the culture of consumerism to using visual merchandising and customer service to give

customers a unique retail experience.

Mrs. Hanson has varied retail experience at Walt Disney Company, The Disney Store, and Victoria's Secret and has worked in areas as diverse as Los Angeles and Petoskey.

She spoke about the importance of understanding and using the culture of consumerism, citing as examples such retailers as Cold Stone Creamery, Bass Pro Shops, Build-a-Bear Workshops, and the Mall of America.

To accomplish this goal, she said, area merchants must align their desired image with their actual image, appeal to customers using visual elements and consistency, and provide an experience

that cannot be found anywhere else.

"Once you've done that, you're on a roll," Mrs. Hanson said, referring to the need to identify a distinct culture or theme to design a business around.

She also stressed the importance of curb appeal and quality customer service in gaining new and returning customers, and spreading positive word-of-mouth.

"You are the face of St. Ignace," she said to the merchants present. "You represent your business."

Cathy Edwards from the Zodiac Party Store in St. Ignace said after the workshop that an example of

customer service she had experienced involved a visitor from Grand Rapids and a lost wallet. After the wallet was left behind on the counter, she tracked the customer down and mailed it to him. Since then, she said, he has returned every year since, and recommended the store and the area to many friends.

Telling the story of a clerk with chipped fingernails trying to sell a set of \$750 gold-gilded porcelain ducks, Mrs. Hanson illustrated the importance of visual consistency to market oneself and one's products.

During her speech to new Mackinac Island ferry employees,

she advised them of the importance of professional appearance. Looking like they have been out partying all night, for example, would not meet the expectations of visitors, she said.

Eileen Evers from the St. Ignace Chamber of Commerce asked what she should do when, as the only one working at the counter, the phone rings while she is helping another visitor.

Mrs. Hanson advised helping the person who's standing there, and making sure a voice mail system is set up promising to call back the person telephoning. She also encouraged all retailers to get out from behind the counter, talk to

people, and help them on a personal level.

"Even if you sell them on dinner next door, you've done a service for your town," she said.

Jeff Behling of Northern Hospitality Furniture and Flooring in Sault Ste. Marie said he took some useful things away from the presentation, such as looking at retail space from a consumer's eyes.

"She had some good ideas," he said. "It refreshes you to hear this stuff."

The workshops were sponsored jointly by MSU Extension of Mackinac County, Michigan Small Business and Technology Development Center, and the St. Ignace Chamber of Commerce. Some of the area businesses represented at Thursday's workshop included Quality Inn, ACE Hardware, and the Museum of Ojibwa Culture. Consulting sessions were held for Star Line and the Deer Ranch.

Mrs. Hanson will return to St. Ignace Wednesday, May 20, and Thursday, May 21, to offer businesses free, individual, in-store consultations. Appointments may be made through the Chamber of Commerce office at 643-8717.

Les Cheneaux Community Schools

School To Offer Three New College-ready Classes in Fall

By Jonathan Eppley

Three college-ready classes will be added to the curriculum at Cedarville High School next fall, advanced placement U.S. history, college algebra, and college trigonometry. Students who successfully complete all three courses will be graduated from high school with 10 college credits.

Course outlines for the three courses were presented to the Les Cheneaux Community Schools Board of Education Monday, May 18, and Superintendent Rod Goehmann said the goal is to provide more advanced education options for students.

"They're over and above the dual enrollment concept," he said, referring to situations where high school students also attend college. "We're trying to offer more opportunities in students' schedules."

Both mathematics courses are offered through Lake Superior State University and will teach students beginning college-level mathematics. Students can take the courses through the high school's interactive television learning system and will not have to travel to Sault Ste. Marie. Students, however, will only be able to use the college credits if they attend LSSU after high school.

The U.S. history course will cover periods of America's history from the time of colonization to today to give students an understanding of social, economic, political, and historical trends throughout American history at a college level. Advanced placement (AP) accreditation is pending.

"Whenever you initiate a class like that, you need their approval," Mr. Goehmann said of the Michigan Department of Education. "Not just anyone can take those exams at the end of each semester and receive those credits."

Administrators expect the course to be approved in time for the new school year. AP courses are generally accepted at all public universities in the U.S.

A fourth college-ready course is also being developed for the 2010/11 school year. Principal Amy Scott said an advanced placement U.S. government curriculum and syllabus is still being developed.

Special board meeting scheduled

The board will hold a special meeting Tuesday, May 26, at 6 p.m. to allow third-party custodial vendors Hi-Tech Building Services of Jenison, and CSM of Grand Rapids to give presentations about how they could provide services for the district. The board is seeking bids from third-party vendors to operate custodial services in the district as a way to save money.

In other news, the board unanimously approved a bid by Huff's Repair of Cedarville to perform repairs and maintenance on school busses for two years at a rate of \$30 per hour. Huff's normally charges \$48 per hour, but will donate \$18 of that hourly charge back to the school because it is struggling financially. Bids were also submitted by Camper Tire and Exhaust of Pickford for \$65 per hour, and Wiz's Repair of Cedarville for \$50 per hour.

School board member Carl McIntire said the district has used Huff's Repair before and he was pleased with their work.

The board also unanimously approved a bid by Joe's Lawn Service of Hessel to cut the school grounds, including the football field and track area, at a rate of \$340 per cutting. A bid by E and M Lawn Care and Outdoor Maintenance of Sault Ste. Marie for \$485 per cut was also submitted for the one-year contract.

Volunteers Sell Flowers To Aid Hospital



Vicki Jersin (left) hands off a flat of geraniums to Mary Lou Krause during the Mackinac Straits Hospital Auxiliary's annual geranium sale in St. Ignace Friday, May 15, with the help of another volunteer, Rilla Jo Halberg. Flowers were \$3.50 each and proceeds went to the Hospital Auxiliary's budget for projects to aid patients and staff.

Commission Seeks Direction in EDC Research

Economic Development To Get More Study

By Jonathan Eppley

The Mackinac County Planning Commission will spend the next several months researching and discussing the idea of a county-wide economic development corporation (EDC) and whether it will work in Mackinac County. If the commission thinks forming an EDC is a good move, it will recommend it to the Mackinac County Board of Commissioners, which asked the county planning commission to research the project earlier this month.

To learn more, the planning commissioners plan to contact other county EDCs in Michigan as well as regional planning entities like the Eastern Upper Peninsula Regional Planning and De-

velopment Commission and the Northern Lakes Economic Alliance, a four-county economic development nonprofit organization in the northern Lower Peninsula. The commission decided to conduct the research at its Wednesday, May 13 meeting, expecting it to take six months or more to complete.

"I think we're all kind of in concurrence that, as a county, we need to do something, we're just not sure how or what yet," Commission Chair Ken Drenth said. "We need to start getting some input and direction as to how we're going to do this, because it's one thing to say, 'Yeah, we're going to do this,' but the next question is, 'How are we going to do this?'"

He said the planning commission's task is to find ideas and goals that will benefit the county as a whole, rather than just one community, to present to the county board, including improving infrastructure that allows for future growth, attracting new businesses to the area, and expanding the county tax base.

"Everybody was talking about what they wanted to see the EDC do, and everybody had a different idea. Can you imagine being employed as the director of an EDC and have all these different expectations of what you're supposed to do? You can't do it," he said about a recent county board meeting. "We've got to try to come

up with some specific goals and objectives for what we want in an EDC. Otherwise it's not going to work. Our expectations are too broad and we've got to focus them down."

County Board Chair Dawn Nelson, who attended the planning commission meeting, said a basic set of goals needs to be agreed upon before an EDC can get off the ground and a director can be hired. She said that's why a previous attempt at a countywide EDC failed in the 1980s.

She estimates at least \$100,000 per year will be needed to hire an EDC director and staff a nine-person EDC board.

"I'm pretty frugal. In I don't believe in throwing away the taxpayers' money. It's really hard for me to say, 'Yeah, let's go with this,' and in the back of my mind, full knowing we may not gain a lot," she said of forming an EDC in a sluggish economy. "We're hoping that if it's done right, it will work right. If you build a foundation right at the bottom, I think the top will come."

Serving on the planning commission with Mr. Drenth are Cheryl Schlehner, Oliver House, Don McArthur, Calvin "Bucky" McPhee, Dean Reid, Julia Kronmeyer, and Judy Luoma.

The commission moved up the time of its next meeting from 3 p.m. to 2 p.m. Wednesday, June 3, owing to scheduling conflicts. It meets at the Mackinac County Airport meeting room.

LaSalle High School Vandalized

District Investigating Without Police Help, for Now

Several unidentified people entered LaSalle High School Sunday night, May 17, and emptied lockers in the hallways. Superintendent Mike Springsteen said no doors or windows were damaged, so the suspects must have entered the school in a non-damaging way.

"It was definitely some of our seniors playing what they thought was a prank," he said.

He said the first step would be to find out who the individuals were before determining a course

of action.

From security videos, Mr. Springsteen said, administrators may be able to identify one of about four or five people involved. The school plans to handle the investigation internally.

"We think we maybe can handle it without getting the police involved if we can figure it out in the next day or two," Mr. Springsteen said. "Then we could come up with some consequences that we think are fitting."

Police have been contacted, but have not been asked to investigate.

Local Car Dealers Will Not Be Closed

Local dealerships will not be closed as Detroit-based automaker Chrysler LLC announced Thursday, May 14, it will cut 25% of its U.S. market by shutting down 789 dealerships, including 39 in Michigan, by Tuesday, June 9.

Dealers in the Eastern Upper Peninsula, O'Connor's Chrysler, Dodge, and Jeep in Pickford, Chippewa Motors in Sault Ste. Marie, and Newberry Motors in Newberry, will remain unaffected for now.

Barry O'Connor of O'Connor's in Pickford said Chrysler has been doing a good job of keeping dealers informed of company decisions.

"At least they've been keeping us informed. Every week Chrysler gives us a conference call," he told *The St. Ignace News* May 15. "It's not affecting us, thank goodness."

About 84% of the dealerships that will no longer sell Chrysler cars after June 9 do sell other auto franchises' cars and will still be able to operate, he said.

Dealerships to be closed in the Upper Peninsula and northern Lower Peninsula include Bero Motors in Escanaba, Riverside Auto Sales in Marquette, Fletch's in Petoskey, Northern Auto Company in Rogers City, and Rivertown Jeep in Cheboygan.

St. Ignace, U.P. Listed in Top 10

St. Ignace, Drummond Island, Munising, and Houghton offer some of the best deals in the Upper Peninsula, says *Money Magazine* in its current issue. The magazine and *cnmoney.com* listed the four communities, and the Upper Peninsula in general, as one of the top 10 last-minute summer getaways, primarily because of the great vacation home deals to be found here.

The area is "refreshingly untouristy," according to the publication, and is a "perfect place to bond with family while bunking together in a waterfront cabin."

Other sites listed among the top 10 best summer deals are Disneyland in Anaheim, California; Las Vegas; Rockland, Maine; Smoky Mountains; Jackson Hole; Alaska by cruise ship; New York City; Vancouver, and Maui.

Blood Drives Are This Month

The American Red Cross will hold blood drives Wednesday, May 20, from noon to 5:45 p.m. at Faith Lutheran Church in Sault Ste. Marie and Wednesday, May 27, from 10 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. at Sault Ste. Marie American Legion Post 3 in Sault Ste. Marie.

Fort Mackinac Open for Summer Season



The heavy wooden doors at Fort Mackinac on Mackinac Island swing open Tuesday, May 5, to welcome visitors for this season. In recognition of their grandmother, Anna Joyce Andress, who served as Lilac Queen 50 years ago in 1959, former Lilac Queens Melissa Bunker of 2006 and Sara Wessel of 2003 helped Mackinac State Historic Parks staff open the fort doors. Opening the doors are (from left) lead interpreter Geoff Woodcox, Ms. Bunker, Chief Curator Steve Brisson, Ms. Wessel, and interpreter Craig Wilson. (Photograph courtesy of Mackinac State Historic Parks)