

Mackinaw City Council Mulls Employee Benefits

By Michael Ayala

Setting parameters for post-employment, two-year health insurance plans will enable long-time employees to know what they will receive from the village, the Mackinaw City Village Council decided at a work session Monday, November 23. The framework discussed may result in coverage that is lower than what retiring employees received in the past, which was roughly 95% to 100% of premiums.

Village President Jeff Hingston asked council members to give ideas on what they thought would be fair two-year retirement coverage for two people. He suggested a 95% coverage rate of premiums capped at the time of retirement, which would decrease to a capped 50% if eligible employees did not seize the deal in the first year of its passage. Employees would have to work for the village for at least 30 years to be eligible.

In other words, if the framework was passed January 1, eligi-

ble employees who could retire would have until January 1, 2011, to receive 95% capped coverage. Accepting the year afterward would result in 50% capped coverage.

Three employees currently have worked for the village for 30 years or more.

Trustee Belinda Mollen proposed a three-year-tiered variation of Mr. Hingston's proposal. The first year when parameters were set, eligible retirees would receive 95% capped coverage, the second year would be 80% capped, and the third year would be 50% capped. Trustee Richard Perlick said he approved of Mrs. Mollen's modification, explaining it would give time for long-time employees to receive post-employment health benefits similar to what their previous co-workers obtained. Younger workers would also understand what their retirement health insurance would be like in the future.

Trustee Paul Michalak agreed

with a three-year-tiered structure, but said setting an absolute dollar amount would be a better idea. He explained, in the worst-case scenario, insurance premiums could increase so high that a 50% coverage rate could cost the village more for one year than a 95% rate years before. Trustees Matthew Yoder and Steven Celez both agreed with a three year tier system and Mr. Celez said he liked the idea of setting a specific dollar amount.

The council was concerned about the amount of money that would be spent on post-employment health benefits. The village currently pays health benefits for 24 working employees, which costs roughly \$336,000 a year, Mr. Lawson said. The village is also paying for a two-year post employment health benefit package at a cost of between \$11,000 and \$12,000.

The discussion was spurred by the upcoming retirement of Mackinaw City police officer

Robert Desy, but the village also has three other workers with more than 30 years of experience who could retire.

The difficulty of setting framework for a two-year post-employment plan is that the council would be at the mercy of the economy, Mrs. Mollen said.

She stressed retiring employees should know exactly what they can expect in terms of post-employment health care when leaving the village. While the village currently grants post-employment health care to eligible employees at its discretion, trustee Janelle Bancroft said that practice has its own pitfalls. In some cases, granting retirement health care to one employee but not to another could appear discriminatory.

Since the meeting was a work session, no action could be taken on the matter. The council plans to submit ideas to the finance committee at the next village council meeting.

Local Opportunities for Holiday Giving

Several opportunities are available for donating to local needy families in the community during the holiday season, including the following:

• **Mackinac County Children's Toy Drive:** Donation canisters are located at the Zodiac Party Store, Holiday gas station, and the Big Boy Restaurant in St. Ignace and donation boxes collecting new toys, clothing, and electronics are available at the following locations: The St. Ignace News office, all locations of First National Bank, Glen's Markets, the Gold Mine, True Value, and U.P. State Credit Union. Donation cards displaying donors' names may also be found in local businesses. Kewadin Casino is collecting toys and winter clothes for the toy drive through Monday, December 7, as part of their "Care with us this holiday season." Donations may also be mailed to Mackinac County Children's Toy Drive in care of Wendy Colegrove, 152 Bertrand Street, St. Ignace Michigan 49781 or The St. Ignace News, P.O. Box 277, St. Ignace.

• **Santa's Elves:** Toys can be donated through Thursday, December 10, at Cedarville Foods in Cedarville. Gift requests can be selected from a Christmas tree at the store and wrapped gifts may be dropped off there with the request tag attached. Clothing is not a suggested donation. Cash donations may be made all year to Santa's Elves in care of Kate Ter Haar, 803 Islington Road, Cedarville Michigan 49719. More information is available from Mrs. Ter Haar at 484-3610 or Pat O'Brien at 484-3520.

• **Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood Sweater Drive:** The Les Cheneaux Community Library in Cedarville is collecting sweaters through Tuesday, December 15, to be donated to families in the community. The library is partnering with Cedarville Secret Santa and Cedar Post to distribute the sweaters. The sweater drive is hosted through WCMU Public Broadcasting Network in honor of Fred Rogers.

• **St. Ignace Moose Lodge 999 Christmas Food Basket Drive:** Baskets containing the ingredients for a Christmas dinner will be distributed to needy families by lodge members and members of the U.S. Coast Guard Saturday, December 19. Monetary donations may be sent to Moose Lodge 999, P.O. Box 305, St. Ignace Michigan 49781. Make checks payable to Moose Lodge and indicate Christmas basket fund. More information is available from the lodge at 643-8785.

• **Hope Chest and St. Ignace Food Pantry:** The Hope Chest building on Ferry Lane houses the resale store and the St. Ignace Food Pantry. Donations of resale items are accepted at the Hope Chest store Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. The food pantry is open for donations and for those who need food Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Right now, the pantry is in need of baby diapers, sugar, macaroni and cheese, Ramen noodles, mashed potatoes, canned ravioli and spaghetti, ketchup and mustard, pork and beans, and canned fruit.

For emergency needs, call the St. Ignace Area Hope hotline for assistance at 643-6780. Monetary donations are accepted for either program. More information is available by calling the store at 643-7360.

• **Cedar Post Thrift Store and Food Pantry:** Donations are accepted every day except Sunday at the store in Cedarville, from noon to 4 p.m. Monetary donations may be dedicated to the food pantry specifically. Right now, the pantry is in particular need of dry goods, blankets, winter footwear and clothing, paper products, dish soap, baby diapers, toothpaste, shampoo, and other toiletry items.

• **Mitten Tree, First National Bank:** A Christmas tree at the main office of First National Bank in St. Ignace is decorated with hooks, awaiting the donation of mittens, scarves, and hats that can be hung on the tree for needy children and families. Donations will be accepted through Wednesday, December 16. They will be distributed before Christmas with Mackinac County Children's Toy Drive donations.

• **Les Cheneaux Student Council Winter Clothing Drive:** Winter clothing may be donated beginning Monday, November 30, through Friday, December 11. Items such as winter coats, hats, mittens, boots, and snowpants may be dropped off at the Les Cheneaux Elementary office in Cedarville during school hours, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Student Council members will distribute donations to students in the school who are in need of such items, and the rest will be donated to Cedar Post Thrift Store.

• **West Mackinac County Food Pantry:** The pantry in Engadine is accepting monetary donations for utilities and food donations. The pantry is in need of paper products, meat, and frozen juice. Donations will be accepted Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturdays from noon to 3 p.m. Donations may also be made by calling Nancy Polachek at 477-1050.

• **Kewadin Casinos:** Kewadin Casinos is providing a drop-off location for food, toys, and winter clothing. Through Monday, December 7, each Kewadin property will have collection areas for food, warm clothing, or toys near each of the casino's restaurants. Customers will be able to drop off items in this area and then fill out an entry slip to be in a drawing for a local \$50 shopping spree. (Four gift certificates will be given per site)

Items collected will be donated to the following causes:

- Sault Ste. Marie - Feeding America (Formerly EUP Food Bank)
- St. Ignace - St. Ignace Hope and Food Pantry and Mackinac County Children's Toy Drive

- Hessel - Cedar Post Food Pantry and Thrift Shop
- Christmas - Alger County Women's Shelter and St. Vincent De Paul
- Manistique - St. Vincent De Paul and Good Neighbors Thrift Shop

In addition to the items collected, Kewadin will donate up to \$500 to the above organizations.

• **Secretary of State Food Drive:** Michigan residents may donate nonperishable food items at local Secretary of State branch offices to benefit needy families. Donated items may be dropped off at any Secretary of State branch through Friday, December 11.

The campaign is coordinated by the Food Bank Council of Michigan, which supplies the state's regional food banks through donations of food and money. The regional food banks serve food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters in every Michigan county.

People are asked to donate food items such as canned meats, dry beans, soups, beef stew, pasta products, peanut butter, and tuna. Envelopes are available for mailing cash donations, which are used to cover the cost of collecting and distributing the food.

To list a local holiday charity drive in this space at no charge, call 643-9150.

Christmas Fun Fair Is December 5

A Christmas Fun Fair will be Saturday, December 5, from noon to 3 p.m. at Little Bear East Arena in St. Ignace. Santa Claus will visit and games and food will be provided. The event is open to all children. It is sponsored by tribal board representatives Keith Massaway and Pat Rickley, St. Ignace Tribal Elders, United Way, and a recent soup and fry bread benefit.

Erickson Center Hosts Open House

The Erickson Center in Curtis is hosting a Christmas Open House Sunday, December 6, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. Holiday music will be provided by the Engadine Area Community Adult and Children's Choir and Allison Rall beginning at 3:30 p.m. Refreshments will be provided.



Old-time Christmas Celebration

Mike and Rose Miller with Santa Claus in the Great Lakes Boat Building School following the tree lighting in Cedarville Friday, November 27. Mrs. Miller is one of the organizers of the Old Fashioned Christmas in Les Cheneaux, which continues through this weekend. (Photograph by Margie Denoyer)

Northern Historical Societies To Work Together

By Michael Ayala

The Northern Michigan historical consortium is official, said the consortium's recorder Joann P. Leal of Mackinaw City, and already is making plans to create greater public awareness of their groups, enhance their operations, and improve communication among themselves.

The consortium includes historical preservation groups in nine northern Michigan counties, Alpena, Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Emmet, Presque Isle, Montmorency, Otsego, and Leelanau. About 40 preservation groups are known to operate in the region, Mrs. Leal said, and about 20 of them have attended at least one of the two

organizational meetings held this fall. A consortium will enable them to share their concerns, needs, goals, and solutions to the challenges they face, she said.

The group, tentatively called the Historical Consortium of Northern Michigan, organized following the strong turnout of organizations attending an exploratory meeting October 17 at Audies. Thirteen people attended a second meeting Saturday, November 21, at the Cheboygan Area Public Library to discuss goals and organizational structure. Among the participants were members of the Mackinaw Area Historical Society and the Great Lakes Lighthouse Keepers

Association.

Enhancing the preservation groups' visibility could be assisted by connecting with the Pure Michigan campaign. By linking their Web sites to popular travel Web sites, Mrs. Leal said, visitors are more likely to view each organization's Web site. Members also discussed obtaining permission to use "Pure History" as a slogan for advertising themselves.

Among inter-communications strategies discussed were compiling a master list of historical organizations in the region and creating a contact list that would be regularly updated. Fred Gray of the Mackinaw Area Historical

Society suggested members make coordinated visits to each other's facilities to familiarize everyone with what consortium members are doing and to get ideas for their own operations.

How the consortium will be structured will be determined in a future meeting, Mrs. Leal said. The group must determine if it wants to elect officers or take a more relaxed approach to its design.

Members will meet the third Saturday of every other month at the facilities of a different member each time. The next meeting will be at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, January 16, at Brush Creek Mill in Hillman.

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Tribe Offers Flu Clinic Thursday

Members at High Risk Eligible for Vaccine at Lambert Center

The Sault Tribe Lambert Center in St. Ignace is offering a H1N1 flu immunization clinic Thursday, December 3, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Lambert Center.

Immunizations are available for Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians members and current clients of the Lambert Center who are at high risk. Those qualifying for the immunization are pregnant women; persons who live with or provide care for infants six months and younger; persons six months to 24 years old; persons 25 to 64 years of age who have medical conditions that put them at higher risk for influenza-related complications, and persons 65 and older with compromised immune systems.

Those at high risk for influenza complications include people with chronic medical problems such as diabetes mellitus, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, coronary artery disease, rheumatoid arthritis, or lupus.

For more information, contact the Lambert Center at 643-8689.