

# Receptive Services Seeks To Boost Mackinac Island Tourism

By Jessica Delaney

Why start up just one new business when it's possible to begin three? That was the ideology Lake View Hotel operator Ira Green took up six months ago when he began Mackinaw City Receptive Services, Mackinac Island Meeting Planners, and Mackinac Island Wedding Planners. All three, he said, are intrinsically connected by a common theme: An effort to bring more people to Mackinac Island.

The companies were born from changes in tourism and the people coming to Mackinac. Receptive Services, especially, is an attempt to reach out to new clientele.

"This business evolved out of demand," said Mr. Green. "Yesterday, tourists from Indiana could fill a hotel and there was no room for other markets. But today, we're reaching out to other groups, who don't necessarily know how to get here."

Mackinaw City Receptive Services assists travel agencies in bringing people, most specifically groups, to the Island, and

to other areas in Michigan. When a group wants to travel, they will lay out plans through local travel agencies. Most travel agencies have a department focused on group travel, and Receptive Services works with them to arrange transportation and lodging and to plan an itinerary for the visitors.

To coordinate visits to the Island, Mackinaw City Receptive Services has teamed up with two other Michigan companies, one in Detroit, the other in Holland. As a company, it needs to know all of the highlights in Michigan, as well as basic logistics throughout the rest of the United States. According to Mr. Green, an out-of-state traveler is generally going to want to see all of Michigan, not just Mackinac Island, so his company will assist travelers in seeing other state highlights.

"A group will fly in to Detroit, and they'll want to see other things as well," said Mr. Green. "Maybe they'll see the Henry Ford Museum, have lunch in Frankenmuth, do two or three days on Mackinac

Island, go down through Holland, and finally fly back out of Detroit. They want to see many things, and we're showing them the highlights of Michigan."

Mr. Green will also be offering a similar service for companies or associations that plan to hold a meeting on the Island through Mackinac Island Meeting Planners. It will provide packages specifically designed for the association, whether it be a teacher's association or a medical group.

Mackinac Island Wedding Planners will offer most components of a wedding: tuxedos, church rentals, food and beverages, photographers, everything but invitations.

"The bride in Dearborn or Chicago doesn't know what she needs to get married on the Island," said Alison Passino, director of travel and special events. "We step in and provide her with all of the options."

Mr. Green said he has always been focused on bringing motor coach travel to Mackinac Island and increasing group travel. This form of travel, however, has recently changed, he said.

"There's a gap between the seniors who do motor coach trips and those that fly in from out-of-state," he noted. "Today, there is a more sophisticated traveler, and we're selling to Europe, overseas, and to outskirting areas."

To gather business for the companies, representatives promote their services at travel shows, and, in the case of Wedding Planners, at wedding shows. They share strategies with the agencies on how to promote group tourism. According to Mr. Green, the shows

have thus far been successful, with many travel agencies interested in arranging trips to the Island.

One example of a travel package being promoted is one that is pitched to people interested in horses, and Mr. Green said he expects to find a good market in the Kentucky and Tennessee areas.

The three companies were formed about six months ago, but have only recently been fully up and running, with phone lines manned and a completed Web site. There are three full-time salespeople working for Mackinaw City Receptive Services, and 12 full-time staff members working with their sister organizations in Detroit and Holland.

Mr. Green believes that group travel is one of the most important forms of tourism to appeal to, calling the groups "the staple of the community." While day travelers will change plans owing to extraneous circumstances, such as weather or the cost of gasoline, he said,

pre-arranged group tours, conferences, and weddings will not.

To encourage more groups to come to the Island, he said professional services are needed to make certain that the guests enjoy their visit.

Ms. Passino agreed. "It all comes down to servicing the guest," she said. "That is our number one goal and our number one priority."

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## Blisse Beardsley, Emma Chambers Earn Little Stone Church Scholarships

Blisse Beardsley (left) and Emma Chambers were awarded scholarships from Little Stone Church Sunday, July 3. Ms. Beardsley will receive \$5,000 for four years while attending the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and Ms. Chambers will receive \$2,500 for two years while attending Ferris State University in Big Rapids. Little Stone Church has granted more than \$150,000 in scholarships over more than 10 years to Mackinac Island Public School graduates. Recipients are chosen for community involvement, academic achievement, and future potential. Standing with the students is the Reverend Vincent Carroll.

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