

Kitesurfing Sport Taps Wind, Waves at Mackinac Island

By Leslie Rott

It's a bird. It's a plane. It's a kite? That's right, and the sport of kitesurfing is happening right here on Mackinac Island. Well, at least Rob Kalmbach is doing it, and he is quite possibly the first person on Mackinac to ever try the activity on Mackinac Island.

Mr. Kalmbach is the son of West Bluff cottager Melissa Croghan, and discovered kitesurfing in Los Angeles, where he has lived for four years.

Kitesurfing is a combination of windsurfing and wake boarding, which was started in Oregon in the early 1980s and became popular in Hawaii in the mid-1990s.

The activity is dependent solely on the wind, Mr. Kalmbach said, and is mainly a solo form or recreation. While another person is often needed to

help with set up, he said, "the second you're out on the water, you're pretty much on your own."

A kitesurfer uses a blow-up kite with a harness and holds on to a bar while standing on a board, similar to a surf or wake board. The kite allows the rider to catch waves, but float gently back to the water, rather than landing hard, like on a surf board.

Kitesurfing is a competitive sport, Mr. Kalmbach said, but he is only competing against himself and the wind, and his goal is to make it to Round Island and not get hit by any ferries along the way.

"Mackinac is this untapped spot for it," he said, although the rocky beaches add challenge.

An avid skier, he said the most important thing a person can do is to take a lesson or two



Rob Kalmbach kitesurfs on the shores of Mackinac Island.

with a small razor blade that can be used to cut the kitesurfer loose if lines get tangled.

He believes the best wind is 12 to 15 miles per hour. That way, he can just hop into his car and hit the beach.

"It is definitely a growing sport," he said, adding that if John Kerry were president of the United States, the sport would be even bigger, as he was a kitesurfer in the early days of the activity.

Equipment for kitesurfing costs between \$500 and \$2,000, depending on how interested a person is in making kitesurfing an occasional hobby or a full blown obsession.

"It looks really complicated and expensive, but it's totally doable," Mr. Kalmbach said.

Originally from Philadelphia, Mr. Kalmbach was graduated from Indiana University in 2000, where he studied film. He now makes commercials for Direct TV.

For more information on kitesurfing, Mr. Kalmbach recommends ikitesurf.com, mackite.com/boarding, or the United States Kitesurfing Association at maui.net/~hotwind/uska.html.

before going kitesurfing alone for the first time. The most dangerous part, he added, is launching the kite, and a kitesurfer

should never go out farther than he can swim, in the event the wind dies.

Harnesses now are equipped

Master Plan Hearing Set August 29

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ing to speak, the time will be limited to two minutes. The exact time will be determined before the public portion of the meeting begins. Speakers will go in the order they signed in. Comments will be recorded for reference and someone will be highlighting comments on a board so attendees can have a

visual reference of ideas expressed.

During their Tuesday, August 16 committee meeting, members said they were disappointed with the low attendance at the last public meeting August 4, when approximately 50 people participated. Ms. Dimond, who is expected to attend the upcoming public meeting, assured members the turnout was high. Participating

August 10 by telephone, she told the committee she worked with one community of approximately 50,000 residents and only 20 people showed up at a public forum. The Island has more than 500 year-around residents, but no data on the number of summer residents.

The committee was also discouraged by a poor response to the survey they had prepared and decided to extend the deadline for responses. They also decided to hand survey forms out during the upcoming public forum, but they have not yet decided on a new deadline for those surveys. Kelly Bean, assistant to the Mayor, advised committee members that more than 200 surveys have been distributed around town but only 18 completed surveys have been returned. Ms. Dimond confirmed the response rate is low.

The original deadline to return them was Monday, August 15. Ms. Bean said she will accept late returns and that more surveys are available in her office for anyone who still would like to fill one out.

From the last public meeting which was held as a work session, committee members reviewed the results of priority lists voted on by residents. Organized into three groups, participants listed Island assets needing protection and issues they felt the community should address, adding to items identified by citizens five years ago. Participants were then asked to vote for the most important issues. The Master Planning Committee next meets Tuesday, August 23, at 5:30 p.m. on the second floor of Community Hall.

The public hearing will be Monday, August 29, at 6 p.m. on the first floor of Community Hall.

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