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Local Employers Anxiously Await New Worker Policy

Rules for Foreign Staff To Expire This Fall

By Ryan Schlehuder

Seasonal employers in the Eastern Upper Peninsula are closely watching the developing story of the federal government's attempt to pass a new immigration reform bill, as it may directly impact a policy that allows national foreign workers, under a six-month work visa program, to return each summer. Part of that program, which provides the H2B

visas, expires this fall.

If the policy is not renewed, area employers will be hard-pressed to fill staffing needs for next summer, as there will be a severe shortage of foreign workers throughout the country, says a national network of small and seasonal businesses called Save Small Business.

The H2B visa program caps the seasonal foreign workers at 66,000 a year, nation-wide,

At right: Miguel Ibarra Chavarria of Distrito Federal, Mexico, works as a street sweeper for Grand Hotel.

33,000 workers for winter businesses and 33,000 workers for summer businesses. A business cannot apply for visas any sooner than 120 days before it opens for the season, and local businesses found all the visas

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New Idea for Maplevue: Family Apts.

By Ryan Schlehuder

If not a hotel, then how about a building of family dwelling units?

This is the question Ira Green will pose to Mackinac Island Planning Commission and neighbors of his Maple View employee dormitory, which he would like to convert into family apartments, at a public hearing scheduled for June 13 at 3 p.m.

Mr. Green already was denied a plan to convert the dormitory into a hotel because the building is already a non-conforming structure in a single-family (R-1) zone. He is now asking to convert the 36-room building into 12 or 13 family apartments for year-around use, providing two-bedroom and one-bedroom apartments.

He told the Mackinac Island Planning Commission May 9 that he would like to convert some rooms into condominium apartments, but said he would make sure at least two-thirds of the building would be for year-around rental.

"For the past six months, I've heard a lot of information about what I should do with that place," he said. "What it's come down to is that people want it restored but they don't want it going towards anything commercial."

A multiple-family apartment building, he admitted, would be more in the direction of a single-family residential zone than a hotel would have been.

"My intention was not to get beat up again," he noted, referring to the planning commission's hesitancy to grant him a hotel there.

Mr. Green explained to the board that if he is allowed to convert the building into a year-around family living complex, he would improve the appearance while maintaining the exterior design.

Maple View sits on the Lake Huron side at the east end of Main Street, near Mission

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The Officer's Stone Quarters at Fort Mackinac overlooks Market Street, where Mackinac Island Carriage Tours takes Island visitors on a horse-drawn carriage ride around the Island.

House Puts \$200,000 Back in MSHP Funds

By Karen Gould

The State Budget Office proposal for fiscal year 2007 leaves Mackinac State Historic Parks \$200,000 shy of last year's appropriation of \$1.5 million. Appropriation subcommittees in both the Michigan Senate and House of Representatives have restored the funds, but approval by the full Senate and House is required before the final budget is presented to Governor Jennifer Granholm.

For the second year, Mackinac State Historic Parks is fighting to retain its eroding state appropriation, which supports park operations. The executive branch recommended cutting \$200,000 from the general fund for FY 2007 and suggested that the park commission replace the money through increased park operational fees.

Since 2002, Mackinac State Historic Parks general fund appropriation has been reduced by \$500,000, or 25 percent.

The 2007 fiscal year begins October 1 and the budget must

be approved by then.

The Mackinac State Historic Parks raises approximately \$150,000 in operational fees through motor vehicle permits, British Landing docking fees, airport fees, lease fees, and license fees, said Director Phil Porter.

The House Appropriations Subcommittee for History, Arts and Libraries is chaired by Representative Fran Amos of Waterford, who sponsored HB 5782 to return the funding, although since its introduction on March 1, it remains stalled at the appropriations committee level. On May 16, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee followed suit and also restored the funding.

The situation was similar last spring, except the state proposed the elimination of the entire \$1.5 million appropriation. The appropriation was subsequently restored in full, but the threat caused park staff to look for other sources of revenue to fund its \$5.7 million budget. It came

up with about \$200,000 by increasing fees, renting facilities, and licensing bicycles, but will raise only about \$21,000 of that this summer. The money will come from a \$15,000 rental of the Matthew Geary House on Market Street, \$5,400 rental of the east side of the Visitor's Center dock, and \$500 rental fees for its "Somewhere in Time" gazebo, which it is marketing for weddings.

Mackinac State Historic Parks is operated by the Mackinac Island State Park Commission, an agency under the Department of History, Arts and Libraries. Facilities include Fort Mackinac, four downtown museums, and approximately 80 percent of the landmass on Mackinac Island, and Colonial Michilimackinac, Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, and Historic Mill Creek on the mainland.

Commissioners will hold their first meeting of the season at the Post Hospital at Fort Mackinac Saturday, May 27, at 1:30 p.m.

Trends Predict Tourist Season

Island Business Owners Count on Summer Trade

By Bernie Nguyen

Season predictions come from every corner, and Mackinac's hotel and business owners, who depend on the summer for their livelihoods, have their own way of gauging how strong it will be and of setting strategies to keep business brisk.

There is no perfect formula to predict the season, business owners say, but there are indicators that can give relatively dependable clues.

Mackinac Island Tourism Bureau Director Mary McGuire Slevin uses several factors in predicting the summer.

"We look at industry statistics and Island hotel reservations during the winter, late spring, and throughout the season," she said. "Our requests for visitors' guides and our e-mail requests are up about 20 percent from last season at this time."

At the Mackinac Island Marina, reservations are about where they were last year, said Tom Paquin, the Michigan Parks and Recreation manager

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Free Employee Dinner Moves to Thursdays

By Leslie Rott

Mackinac Island summer workers are invited on Thursday evenings to enjoy a free dinner at Ste. Anne's Church this summer.

"The goal is to give people a place to go without going to the bars for one night," said Tim Leeper, who organized the dinners last summer.

The Thursday dinners are open to everyone and are held in the basement of the church at 6 p.m. They began two weeks ago, with Horn's Gaslight Bar providing food the first week and Yankee Rebel Tavern providing food

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