

Information Station, a Compass for Tourists
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BAYFIELD - To enhance tourists' visits to Madeline Island the Madeline Island Ferry Line (MIFL) has established the Madeline Island Information Station at the ferry boat landing in Bayfield. It is indispensable to making a visit to the island a rewarding experience.

The building has a unique history, according to MIFL's shore operations manager Robin Trinko-Russell. Formerly known as the "Transfer Depot" (circa 1883), the building was part of William F. Dalrymple's railroad dreams for the Bayfield and Red Cliff region. Ten years passed before only 3.9 miles of track was laid between the neighboring communities. The depot stood empty for many years following the default of the railroad until it was purchased by the Booth Fisheries Company that used it as a ticket office for the excursion boats they ran out on Lake Superior and the Apostle Islands.

Recognizing the historical significance of the building and its ideal location adjacent to the ferry boat landing, MIFL purchased the building from Bodins, Inc. in 2006. Trinko-Russell said extensive changes were made to the building. Bob Divine and Joni Brooks, ferry boats captains and crew, rebuilt the front deck and upgraded the interior after a new foundation was put in. Brooks has a background in theater and was a former Chautauqua stage manager who assembled the interior displays including old black and white photographs depicting island life, created a mini museum of Native American art work and history panels in the back of the building, put the original ticket window on display and organized the interior to provide a quick and comprehensive introduction to maximizing a visit to Madeline Island.

Island artist, Holly Turbot, painted a four-season border mural around the main display area that is a pictorial window into island scenes such as Big Bay Lagoon/Beach, the ice road and windsled used in winter, and fall foliage. Beneath the border are listed frequently asked questions by tourists: "Does the island go all the way to the bottom? Are reservations required for the ferry? Can I bring my pet on the ferry? Do the ferry boats ever stop running to the island because of weather? and so on.

Trinko-Russell spent as much time planning the exterior and the landscaping surrounding the building as the interior. Two island companies, Sylvan Design and Wellspring put in a system of dry stream bed drainage and terraced beds for erosion control and planted a beautiful garden with a laundry list of native and other plants that are both beautiful and environmentally sound.

Tourists coming and going to the island can be assured of a current and comprehensive orientation to island life at the information station by Ruth Goetz; an expert in terms of answering questions or securing information for visitors. Goetz was employed by the Wisconsin Department of Tourism for 30 years before retiring and is currently the president of Big Top Chautauqua, president of the Friends of the Apostle Islands and Friends of the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center. She understands the value of accurate and educational information as well as the importance of the tourist industry to Wisconsin's economy. "I love the island and Bayfield. It's part of the originality of travel experience in Wisconsin," she said.

As tourists enter the information station Goetz directs their attention to the border mural and begins the interchange of questions and answers. She passes out numerous brochures, encourages them to view the historic artifacts, and video playing of island life, and recommends they review the island restaurant menus on display. She'll talk about the golf course, marinas, restaurant locations where outside dining is available, the history museum, the ferry schedule, bike and moped rentals, kayaking and island novelties such as Tom's Broke Down Tavern. She'll explain there are 47 miles of paved road for those interested in taking their car and driving the

entire periphery of the island. She promotes the beautiful Big Bay State Park and Beach which is a 14-mile round trip, and encourages tourists to take one or both of three new tours.

There is a one-hour walking tours with knowledgeable island guides that will introduce visitors to island life including stops at the museum, school, health clinic, library, downtown La Pointe and answer any questions about what it is like to be a year round islander. This tour is run from June 29-Aug. 28, 2009. The group departs from the MIFL island office at 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Monday-Friday. There is a four-person minimum and reservations are encouraged by calling 715-747-2051.

Another tour is a self-guided CD tour produced by the Madeline Island Heritage Center. The CD can be picked up at the Madeline Island Information station, the Madeline Island Chamber of Commerce, the Island ferry office and the Madeline Island Heritage Center. Visitors are encouraged to return the CD so that others may enjoy it.



NEW this year... Tour a ferry with the Captain, La Pointe Island dock, 10:30am, Wednesdays only, July 1-August 26th. All ages welcome. Children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult. 4 person minimum needed for tour to take place/limited space available. Call the Ferry Line Office (715-747-2051) to sign up. Schedule subject to change.