

ThumbPrint News

An imprint of places and people at work and play in the Thumb of Michigan

MAY 2010



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The Captain of Russell Island

By **Ralph McKinch**

ThumbPrint News Staff Writer

Russell Island is a small private island of approximately 200 acres located between Algonac and Walpole Island and it separates the St. Clair River into the North and South Channels. Russell Island is actually made up of three islands, including Anderson Island on the northwest and "The Gold Coast" on the southwest.

Russell Island has about 150 cottages, which are summer homes for people from many different parts of Michigan. There are no cars on the island. The only motorized vehicles

that are allowed are golf carts. The islands are divided by many canals and cuts, which are connected by wooden bridges for walkers and golf carts.

The island is accessible only by private watercraft, or by the Russell Island ferry which is docked next to the Algonac ferry that takes cars and passengers across the St. Clair River to Canada. The Russell Island ferry is a passenger only ferry (though a few dogs manage to gain passageway with their owners.)

In the summertime, each weekend brings throngs of people waiting to board the Russell Island ferry. Usually



The Russell Island Ferry with Captain Bud Breitmeyer at the helm.

See THE CAPTAIN, Page 20

Let's Go Flying!

By **Diane L. Kodet**

ThumbPrint News Editor

"It is really freeing when you are up there. All the problems of everyday life are left below." These words were spoken by Robert Montgomery, who had just returned from flying at the Saint Clair Flight Academy, which is at the St. Clair County International Airport in Kimball Township.

Robert, who owns a house in Lexington and a condo in St.

Clair Shores, is a respiratory therapist who began taking flying lessons as a hobby and has now logged over 100 flying hours in Michigan, Wyoming, Montana and Florida. When Robert first began his lessons, it was at a different airport than the St. Clair County International Airport. He went through four instructors who didn't seem to be giving him the type of instruction he desired to have. That was when he changed



Keith Kodet of ThumbPrint News gets his first flying lesson.

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The Captain: Russell Island

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they bring with them are all sorts of boxes containing groceries, supplies and other necessary items for their stays on the island. There are no public lands there; the passengers must have cottages on the island or be guests of someone who does in order to board the ferry – and the captain makes sure of it!

The captain is Captain Bud

Breitmeyer, who is somewhat of a local legend in the area. He personally built the ferry out of the hull of a burned out steel 42-foot Chris-Craft Roamer pleasure boat. The windows were salvaged from an old school bus. He has maintained and been the captain of the ferry for the past 28 years, providing service six days a week throughout the season.

Captain Bud is even more of an

a year when the general public can get a glimpse of the laid back life style of the island – at their annual summer picnic when the island welcomes everyone. The all-day event draws hundreds of people. The island owners each cook delicious foods for a potluck at the park. Games for all ages give everyone something to do, while a band or disc jockey provides entertainment.

The whole event is reminiscent of times gone by.

Before the summer rush begins, Captain Bud is already working to make sure the ferry will be ready for its first annual passengers. This year, in April, the ice flows coming down the St. Clair River – wrecked havoc with the pylon

to which the ferry docks. The ice snapped it off below the water line. Captain Bud contacted a local diver, Keith Kodet, and arranged to have



Diver Keith Kodet prepares to locate the submerged, broken pylon.



Captain Bud and the Russell Island ferry.



integral part of Russell Island than just as the captain of the ferry. He also takes care of the roadwork on the island, the garbage service and the general transport of materials on and off the island. He will also help out with backhoe work and building new septic fields.

Captain Bud says that Russell Island is "Michigan's Unknown Treasure." There is only one time

a barge with a crane rendezvous with them at the ferry dock. The coordinating of the repairs was something to see, but to Captain Bud it was just another normal day of making sure that everything would be ready for the upcoming season. The Russell Island property owners know that Captain Bud Breitmeyer is "Russell Island's Well-known Treasure!" 🌱



The crane on the barge is used to remove the broken pylon.



Diver Kolet and Captain Bud coordinate their plans for removing the broken pylon.



Captain Bud readies the chain attached to the crane.



The replacement for the broken pylon