

# Resort's Artist in Residence Program Makes Use of Winter Solitude

**By Stephanie Fortino**

Taking advantage of the quiet solitude of wintertime on Mackinac Island, writer Patrick McBriarty of Chicago spent three weeks there in January working on his latest project. His stay is the first installment of a new Artist in Residence program at Mission Point Resort, through which other artists will travel to and live on the Island, tapping into the scenic setting and artistic atmosphere.

"There's a certain peace that you find in yourself being here," Mr. McBriarty said. "I can't say it was super surprising, but it was the most pleasant discovery of being here. As a writer, I tend to be fairly in tune with what I'm about and who I am. . . but it was a surprise that I didn't expect of rediscovering how important it is and how nice it is to be out here and just kind of be and not have to have any agenda."

"There's such a nice state of mind here," he said. "It's made for a great setting to do some intensive writing and work and research."

During his stay on the Island, Mr. McBriarty was able to spend significant time working on a story that will become either a screenplay or historical fiction novel. While it is set in Chicago, the location and time of 1812 lends itself to Mackinac Island.

"I'm from Chicago, writing about Chicago in 1812, but that whole war tied into Mackinac and the Island, and some early and interesting American history. It's been nice to have that kind of circle going on in the background as I do this work," he said.

The Island was an important stronghold during the War of 1812 and in later years served as an ideal summer vacation destination for Chicagoans seeking a northern retreat. Through the story, he intends to tell the story of the Battle of Dearborn during the War of 1812 through a cast of Chicagoans he's imagined. It has required extensive research and relies heavily on dialogue to tell the story.

Beyond writing, the stay at Mission Point offered Mr. McBriarty ample opportunities for winter outdoor recreation. He enjoyed his time on the Island so

much he extended his stay an additional week.

"I forgot how it is to be out in the woods and out in nature, and how it resonates with you as a person," he said. "Being in Chicago for as long as I have, as a kid I would always love the woods and the creeks exploring. . . That kind of stuff was in my DNA as a kid. It was really nice to come here and remember that and rediscover that sense of just going out and skiing."

Mr. McBriarty has gotten to know Mackinac Island through the Chicago Yacht Club's Race to Mackinac. He has participated in five races over 15 years and also volunteered on the race committee. Now, having lived there during the winter for nearly a month, he has a new perspective of the Island.

"It's nice to see how nice and quiet the Island is in the winter, and yet more active than people would imagine," he said. "And it's been great because the people have been friendly and are real nice, and yet they pretty much leave you be. For coming up here to do some writing and get some work done and not have a lot of distractions, it's worked out incredibly well. And at the same time, over the course of the last couple, three weeks, I've met a bunch of people that have been fantastic and made me feel very comfortable and at home, even though I'm here by myself."

Mr. McBriarty stayed in Straits Lodge at Mission Point Resort, which is becoming an artistic hub, said Liz Ware, who is the hotel's vice-president of public relations.

"Mission Point," she said, "is an ideal location to let the creativity of the human mind go. During the winter, it is quiet and it is peaceful, and if you're doing something that requires a lot of attention and focus, winter is the time to do it."

She and Mr. McBriarty have known each other through the Chicago Yacht Club for several years.

Mr. McBriarty came to writing late in life, after he lost his wife to illness in 1999. He turned to writing as a creative outlet and wrote his a coffee table book, "Chicago Bridges," with de-



**Writer Patrick McBriarty spent three weeks on Mackinac Island in January, working on a new project that is set in Chicago in 1812. He is the first artist featured in the new Artist in Residence program at Mission Point Resort.**

tailed profiles of the history and structure of the bridges and numerous photographs. He made it into a documentary.

He holds a master's degree in economics and worked in marketing and sales for many years, but Mr. McBriarty discovered a fondness of engineering through the book on bridges. He likes to explain complicated mechanisms in a clear and concise way, and he has a children's book series that explores the mechanics

of everyday things, like drawbridges, airplanes, and subway trains.

His first children's book was "Drawbridges Open and Close," and his next installment will come out later this year. If such books had existed when he was young, Mr. McBriarty thinks he would have discovered his love of engineering sooner. He hopes his books will inspire children and spark an interest in what could become a future career or interest.

Mr. McBriarty read from his book at Mackinac Island Public School, donated books to the library, and held writing workshops with students. Engaging with the children helped deepen his experience on the Island.

"Going through town, a couple of kids have recognized me now, so that's really cool," he said. "That's always the fun thing of kids getting excited about that and hopefully get them excited about writing, about something they want to do."

The next artist to stay at Mission Point Resort will be Ginnie Cappaert of Stephenson. The oil painter will arrive on the Island Friday, February 12, and will live and work here for a week.

"I'm excited for the solitude and the quietness of winter and maybe devote myself to some new direction in my work. The

pure silence is going to be magical," Ms. Cappaert told the *Town Crier*.

The residency was the coveted award of the Northern Exposures Art Contest at the William Bonifas Fine Arts Center of Escanaba. Ms. Cappaert won the juried show with an abstract landscape painting of a sky and water scene. Her works contain many layers of paint and detailed textures when viewed up close, yet powerful simplicity when viewed from far away, she said.

"I'm sure I'll be influenced by the landscape on Mackinac Island," she said. "I'll be bringing my snowshoes, walking around, and taking pictures."

More artists may participate in the program this winter after Ms. Cappaert's stay.

"We all know winter is such a time of beauty on the Island, and I think it inspires people, as well," Ms. Ware said. "I am thrilled with this program and the positive reaction we're getting. Patrick was so over the moon about it he stayed an extra week, and Ginnie is excited. It's fun to be able to do this."

In addition to the winter program, Mission Point Resort features works from local artists during the summer and houses the Mackinac Arts Council. The hotel's general manager, Bradley McCallum, also serves as the arts council president.

## Mackinac Island Friends Gather on Caribbean Cruise



**On their first day aboard Norwegian Cruise Line's ship *The Getaway*, a group of residents from Mackinac Island and St. Ignace, who ended up on the same cruise, pose for a photograph at port in Miami Sunday, January 10, including (from left) Stefanie Congdon, Stephanie McManus, Grace Yakuber, Sherri Plutchak, Katie Pereny, Chuck Pereny, Mary Joe North, Mike North, Pat McManus, and Tim Plutchak.**

A group of local residents took the same cruise to the Western Caribbean in January.

During the weeklong cruise,

the group traveled from Miami, Florida to the Caribbean Islands, Ochos Rios, Jamaica, Grand Cayman Island, and

Cozumel, Mexico. While at Jamaica, they visited maître d' Neil Cargill and bartenders Whaldy Scott and Leonard Jones of the Woods Restaurant, and Dwayne Brown of Best Western Harbour Point of St. Ignace.

The cruise ship also rescued 17 Cuban refugees on January 14, who had been adrift since December 24. The refugees were brought aboard the ship and given passage to Mexico.

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