MACKINAC STATE HISTORIC PARKS COURT OF A CONTRACT OF A CO

SSOCIATES

PHIL PORTER RETIRED

P hil Porter knew it was time. It was the summer of 2019, and he started a conversation with Mackinac Island State Park Commission Chairman Daniel Loepp, indicating the 2020 season would be his last.

Mackinac State Historic Parks was once again humming through a strong season. Projects had finished on schedule, as usual, and the organization was planning a gala 125th anniversary season for 2020. Porter was comfortable with the progress of MSHP and the people who were in place.

Then the Covid-19 pandemic hit. Despite some uncertainty early, with the operating season off to a shaky start – he was still comfortable. 2020 was going to turn out OK, and he knew the time was still right.

"One of the reasons I'm comfortable leaving is that the key people involved are extraordinarily competent and dedicated," Porter said. "We have a talented Commission, our executive staff is in great shape, we have outstanding park managers, an outstanding CFO, our mid-level managers are incredibly dedicated. I'm feeling very comfortable about leaving."

After 49 years of dedicated service to Mackinac State Historic Parks, including the past 17 as its Director, Phil Porter officially retired from the organization, effective October 2. He'll move into a Director Emeritus role, offering his expertise and insight to incoming director, Steve Brisson.

"It's been a very fulfilling career—so much that you can't put it into words," Porter said. "I feel so blessed and thankful to have spent my entire career with MSHP.

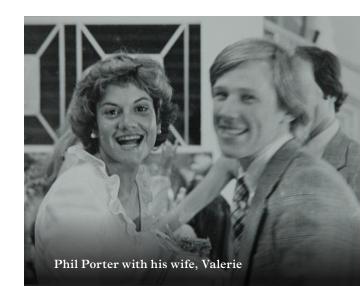
Porter's legacy with MSHP is beyond compare. He started with the organization as a 19-year old tour guide at Fort Mackinac in 1972 and was promoted to lead interpreter the following year. He continued working as a seasonal staff member while pursuing his Bachelor of Arts degree in history from Kenyon College and master's degree in history museum studies from the State University of New York, Cooperstown Graduate Program of History Museum Studies. He joined the permanent staff of MSHP in 1976 as Curator of Collections and was subsequently promoted to Curator of Interpretation in 1982 and Chief Curator in 1997.

His list of accomplishments during this time is a sight to behold. He successfully enhanced the commission's collection care program; implemented new interpretive programs across all of MSHP's sites, including the "Arrival of the Voyageurs" at Colonial Michilimackinac and the Court Martial reenactment at Fort Mackinac, among several others; led the research and restoration efforts of several restorations and exhibits, including Mission Church, McGulpin House, the Fort Mackinac Post Bathhouse, the Michilimackinac Powder Magazine, the Fort Mackinac Post Canteen, the Solomon-Levy House at Michilimackinac, "Firearms on the Frontier," "A Desirable Station," the Kids' Quarter's at Fort Mackinac, the Officers' Hill Quarters, the "Heritage of Mackinac" orientation film, "Treasures from the Sand," numerous special exhibits and dozens of other historical and natural history displays throughout the park, and much, much more.

But, as he reflects back on his early career, there are a couple of accomplishments that stand out: Creating the education outreach program and updating the live interpretation program at Fort Mackinac.

The education outreach program, implemented in 1988, is now the only statewide program of its kind in Michigan. Since its inception, historical interpreters have presented Mackinac's history, one classroom at a time, to more than 250,000 kids.

"It started in a real modest way," Porter said. "Here we are, 30 years later, having presented this program to thousands and thousands of students. It's been very successful, and it's because of the people, including Dennis Havlena, Jim Evans, Jeff Dykehouse, Lisa Brisson, Katie Mallory, and now Craig Wilson and LeeAnn Ewer. I'm really excited to see how we're moving forward, offering some new and diverse programs. We're now taking what we started with and moving it to the next level." Early during his time on the island, Fort Mackinac shifted to interpreting a 1796 early American impression. Later in the late 1980s, the interpretive program was shifted to the 1880s, which is still currently interpreted. "The current live interpretation works really well," Porter said. "It's unique, I think that we are the only historic fort interpreting the 1880s east of the Mississippi, and it's consistent with the layout of the fort, which is really important." After all of these successes, and after steadily climbing the managerial ranks, he was named director, in 2003. Since then, under Porter's watch, the commission successfully completed several major projects including the re-opening of Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, rebranding of Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park, creation of The Richard and Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum and Mackinac Island Artist-in-



Residence programs, reconstruction of Fort Holmes, creation of the Visitor First guest service program, the War of 1812 bicentennial, the reconstruction of the South Southwest Rowhouse at Colonial Michilimackinac, creation of the Straits of Mackinac Shipwreck Museum at Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, installation of the Mackinac Island Native American Cultural History Trail and Mackinac Island Botanical Trail within Mackinac Island State Park, and development of the Mackinac Island Native American Museum at the Biddle House.

Porter is quick to thank the commission for the ability to move forward on so many projects. "We are very fortunate to have a dedicated, competent commission that is very effective in their role," he said. "They are effective leaders of the organization at that commission level, and great at protecting the organization. They are really committed to our success. They allow us to excel."

The driving force behind these projects, though, has been Porter. Never one to rest on his laurels, he attacked every project with a passion to get it done, open it to the public, and move on to the next project. "The people who fund our projects like to see us get the money, spend it and accomplish what we say we were going to do. We design it, build it, and then we move to the next thing," Porter said.

A recurring theme when talking to Porter about his career are the various people in it. A few stand out. "We've been blessed with some great commissioners, and Richard (Manoogian) is at the top of the list," Porter said. "He has been supportive professionally, personally, and financially. Richard has been a rock of support and good counsel since he joined the Commission in 1999. Through their foundation Richard and Jane Manoogian have supported so many of our major projects over the years." The Mackinac Art Museum, which bears Richard and Jane's names, is especially memorable.



Installing "Mackinac – An Island Famous in These Regions" inside the Soldier's Barracks "It will be very hard to imagine Mackinac Island and the park without him," Manoogian said. He mentioned the work Porter has put into his position, and the team he has surrounded himself with. "The parks have a great future because of what has happened in the past."

As director, he forged strong relationships with the commission chairmen and has fond words for all of them: On Dennis Cawthorne: "He's a Mackinac insider, very savvy and insightful. He led us during a crisis where

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PHIL PORTER, Continued from page 1

they came for our funding. When things were sideways, he skillfully guided us through a very challenging situation." On Chuck Yob: "He had passion, and he was extremely effective at securing funding to support our work." On Frank Kelly: "He loved the commission, loves the island, and was very dedicated to the agency. He really cares about this place." On Daniel Loepp: "He is a real professional. He runs a great meeting, and through him we enjoy an outstanding relationship with the executive office. He uses his connections professionally and thoughtfully."

There are many other people Phil looks back on fondly in his career. See his column on page 3 of this issue of *Curiosities*. His thoughts on what Mackinac Associates means to him are very neatly summarized there.

"Great leaders like Phil Porter are hard to come by in today's world of constant change," said Peter Pellerito, former Mackinac Associates Board President. "Mackinac Associates knows and respects him because over his distinguished career he has continually set out to make a positive difference for the parks that he knows and loves, and for the people of the state of Michigan."

On top of all of his accomplishments within the park, Porter is also an accomplished author. Among his many works are *View from the Veranda: The History and Architecture of the* Summer Cottages on Mackinac Island, The Eagle at Mackinac, A Boy at Fort Mackinac, Mackinac: An Island Famous in These Regions, Mackinac Island's Post Cemetery, Fudge: Mackinac's Sweet Souvenir, A Desirable Station: Soldier Life at Fort Mackinac 1867–1895, and, most recently, The Soldiers of Fort Mackinac: An Illustrated History, published in 2018.

"As he comes to the time when he wishes to step down, we are all indebted to him for the truly outstanding leadership he has brought to his distinguished career," said Sheldon Smith, former Mackinac Island State Park Commission Chairman and current Mackinac Associates Trustee. "We extend our very best wishes for a long and happy retirement and sincere appreciation for his years of service."

Porter has served on numerous boards and committees throughout the region and state, including the Michigan Museums Association, Michigan Commission of the Commemoration of the Bicentennial of the War of 1812, City of Cheboygan Historic Resources Commission, Round Island Lighthouse Keepers Board of Directors, Regional Regranting Board for the Michigan Council for the Arts, the Historical Society of Michigan, the Cheboygan Community Hospital Ethics Board, and the Little Traverse Conservancy, among others. He has won several awards, including the Award of Merit from the Historic Society of Michigan in 2003, the President's Award for Outstanding Service to the Michigan Museum Community

by the Michigan Museums Association in 2009, and Citizen Award from the Michigan Historic Preservation Network in 2017.

"He managed to do something that sometimes eluded other directors, and that was to strongly bridge the gap between the commission and the community," said Dennis Cawthorne, former Chairman of the Mackinac Island State Park Commission. "It's often trite to say that a successor will have big shoes to fill, but, in this case, it is very true. He embodied many virtues that will be very difficult to duplicate."

Porter will still be a fixture on Mackinac Island in retirement and in his role as Director Emeritus. He plans to spend additional time at his home in Cheboygan and travel with his wife, Valerie, who has been at his side for 48 of his 49 years at MSHP. He is also excited to have more time to visit with his five children and nine grandchildren.

"I'm looking forward to this next chapter in my life," Porter said. "My life for the past 50 years has been pretty routine, and it's exciting to have some options for some different experiences. My family is growing, and I'll have the opportunity to travel and see them, travel to other parts of the world and country."

Porter's legacy with MSHP will not be forgotten. "He is truly a tribute to his family, past and present," said Marlee Brown, member of the Mackinac Island State Park Commission and Mackinac Island resident. "He has been priceless for Mackinac Island."

ANNUAL MEETING ROUNDUP

At the annual meeting August 25, Todd Callewaert, of Mackinac Island and Grosse Pointe Shores, and Natalia Wohletz, of Mackinac Island and Milford, were unanimously voted to the Mackinac Associates Board of Trustees.

Callewaert is the CEO of Island House Hotel and restaurants. He has spent his summers on Mackinac Island, and has assumed just about every role in the Island House business family, from dishwasher and busboy to server and confectionary artist at Ryba's Fudge Shops. He moved into Island House Hotel administration in the late 1980s working alongside his father, Victor. Proud alumni of Central Michigan University, Todd has held leadership roles with the Michigan Restaurant & Lodging Association and Mackinac Island Tourism Bureau. He is active in the day-to-day operations of the Island House Hotel during the May to October season and is visible to employees and guests alike. He enjoys working beside his wife Jennifer and sons William and Andrew, each involved throughout the family businesses.

"It is very exciting to be appointed to the Mackinac Associates board," Callewaert said. "Mackinac Island State Park has a very special place in my entire family's heart, and I am excited to be involved in making it even better."

Wohletz has been a summer resident of Mackinac Island since 2006. After graduating from Kalamazoo College with a BA in Mathematics and minor in Studio Arts, she turned down the corporate analyst world to become an entrepreneur and printmaker. Currently she is the proud owner of Main Street Art in Milford and treasures working with customers to create the perfect pieces for them. Additionally, she owns Mackinac Memories with her mother Jennifer which captures Mackinac Island in books and fine art.

"Mackinac State Historic Parks has been an integral part of my experience on Mackinac Island, from learning and playing in the Kid's Quarters at Fort Mackinac as a child to writing my college senior thesis on Mackinac's summer monarch butterfly population," Wohletz said. "I hope that by serving on the Mackinac Associates' Board of Trustees and working to preserve the straits area's culture, history and environment, I will be able to ensure the same opportunities for others."

Callewaert and Wohletz replace Peter Pellerito and Ann Parrish, who were termlimited off the board.

"We're very fortunate to have Todd and Natalia join the Board of Trustees of Mackinac Associates," said Phil Porter, Mackinac State Historic Parks Director. "Todd brings a wealth of community involvement and leadership to the associates, and Natalia brings a great perspective to the board as a young person who has collaborated with Mackinac State Historic Parks in many ways."

Additionally, at Mackinac Associates' regular meeting August 28, the board of trustees elected Harriet McGraw of Petoskey president, Jeb Burns of Cheboygan vice president, Nancy Porter of Mackinac Island secretary, and Tom Lockwood of Mackinac Island treasurer. Other members of the Board of Trustees include Jack Barnwell, Kathy Lieder, Wes Maurer, Stephen Murray, Todd Petersen, Sheldon Smith, and Skip Young.



The annual G. Mennen Williams Mackinac Celebration is the unofficial kick-off to summer on Mackinac Island. Photo from the 2019 event.

2021 EVENT DATES

It is our hope that we will be able to move forward with 2021 events as planned, but please continue to watch future newsletters, e-news or the Mackinac Associates website for the most current information on events.

June 19th

G. Mennen Williams Mackinac Celebration

July 4th Red, White and Blue

August 14th Mackinac Associates Annual Meeting

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DIRECTOR'S OUTLOOK FAIL 2020: GRATITUDE

As I complete forty-nine years of service at Mackinac State Historic Parks my overwhelming emotion is one of gratitude. I am exceptionally fortunate to have been able to do the work I love in the place I love for my entire career. Mackinac State Historic Parks is an agency rich with tradition, blessed with a multitude of resources, and bolstered with the financial support necessary to carry out its mission. Of course, it is the people who have led, worked for, and supported this agency and my journey for whom I am most thankful.

My early bosses were great roles models and mentors. Keith Widder started my journey by hiring me as a tour guide at Fort Mackinac in 1972. A skillful and dedicated historian, Keith provided an excellent example of how to approach our work and I am fortunate that our friendship continues today. Dr. Eugene Petersen taught me how to have a passion for sharing history and the determination for protecting the resources of our parks. Marian Petersen was the wise and steady hand that quietly but effectively made sure that we operated in a professional and dignified manner. Dr. David Armour encouraged and supported me throughout my career and provided a sparkling example of how to live the values of your faith in the context of your daily work.

As director I have enjoyed the support and encouragement of outstanding commissioners and dedicated, hard-working chairmen. Their leadership, much of which happens behind the scenes, makes possible the financial and political support that underlies our success. The commission has provided this support while avoiding the pitfall of micro-managing the staff, thereby enabling our talented employees to do their best.

Speaking of the staff, I have been blessed to work with a most dedicated and skillful group of employees during my career. It is such a joy to be with people who truly care about their work and are passionate to succeed. There are too many to mention without possibly leaving someone out. So, let me just say that it is the totality of the staff, groundskeepers and curators, accountants and carpenters, archaeologists and equipment operators, interpreters and museum store clerks, guest service representatives and marketing specialists, and the rest of our MSHP family that help make this such a wonderful place to work. In particular, I am deeply appreciative of the dedication and support of our executive staff who provide such outstanding leadership.

For decades, our staff has been supported by a huge cadre of volunteers who have been instrumental in our success and assisted with our collections, exhibits, archaeology, marketing, and park operations. I am especially appreciative of the boy and girl scout troops who attend the Mackinac Island Scout Service camp and provide so much assistance to our programs during the summer months.

I am also grateful for the generosity of so many supporters who have helped us protect, preserve, and present our historical and natural resources. Our outstanding exhibits and comprehensive library have benefited from those



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– PHIL PORTER, DIRECTOR

who have donated to our collections, shared research, reviewed manuscripts, and provided oral histories.

Financially, we have been blessed with constant and generous support from Mackinac Associates. This wonderful group has been instrumental in nearly every major MSHP museum project over the past 35 years. Additionally, we have enjoyed the support of the business community, granting agencies, and foundations, most notably the Mackinac Island Community Foundation and the Richard and Jane Manoogian Foundation.

Richard and Jane's outstanding legacy of support is broad and diverse and will be enjoyed by local residents and visitors for many generations to come. Finally, I am thankful for the encouragement of my friends and support of my family. This career has been as much a lifestyle as it is a job and my family has eagerly joined me in this adventure and provided unwavering and constant support. Through it all my wonderful wife Valerie has been at my side and nothing that I have achieved would have been possible without her constant encouragement and unceasing prayers.

Mackinac State Historic Parks is a wonderful organization which will continue to thrive under the leadership of Steve Brisson and his dedicated staff. I encourage your generous support of Mackinac Associates to help them along the journey.

NEW DIRECTOR: STEVE BRISSON

At its September 25 meeting, the Mackinac Island State Park Commission appointed Steven C. Brisson as its next director. A full story about Brisson will appear in the next issue of *Curiosities*.

Steve Brisson

CANNON FIRING ON THE UPPER GUN PLATFORM

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Fort Mackinac interpreter Phil Porter leads a cannon firing demonstration on the Upper Gun Platform at Fort Mackinac in the early 1970s. He is wearing the uniform of a U.S. Artilleryman during the War of 1812. Porter started his career with Mackinac State Historic Parks as a tour guide at Fort Mackinac in 1971 and retired in early October after serving 17 years as its director.

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