

## JANUARY/NEWS

## JAN. 2

**A fine day for a dive**

TRAVERSE CITY — Even without snow, it was a beautiful New Year's Day. Clear skies, bright sunlight, air as clean and sharp as the newly honed blade of a knife.

A fine day for a walk, perhaps. Or a little late-season yardwork. Or even, say, a little scuba diving at the bottom of Grand Traverse Bay.

Every year on Jan. 1, hardy divers from all around northern Michigan gather for an annual midwinter ritual, testing themselves and their equipment in the frigid waters of the bay under the watchful eyes of divemasters from local dive shops. For more than 20 years, the staff at Scuba North has sponsored New Year's dives near the Clinch Park marina in Traverse City, and this year's event brought out 24 divers from as far away as Cadillac.

"We open the shop around 11 in the morning so people who don't have equipment can rent what they need," said Scuba North divemaster Bob Thorpe, who's been leading New Year's dives for about a half-dozen years. Past dives have been held in screaming blizzards and bone-chilling winds, said Thorpe, but aside from a stiff breeze off the lake, this year's conditions couldn't have been better.

## JAN. 5

**Elementary may close**

GRAYLING — Facing a budget deficit of more than \$500,000 for the next school year, Crawford AuSable School District officials are looking at the possibility of closing Frederic Elementary and sending its students to Grayling.

Superintendent Milli Haug said the district is projecting a budget deficit of between \$500,000 and \$700,000.

The district is not anticipating an increase in the \$6,700 foundation grant per student from the state.

Meanwhile, student enrollment is dropping, from 2,112 in September 2001 to 2,086 in

September 2002. A current student count of 2,077 is expected to drop to 2,023 for the 2003-04 school year.

Haug said the district has lost students to home schooling and enrollment is declining due to low birth rates.

## JAN. 7

**Real estate pioneer dies**

TRAVERSE CITY — A longtime fixture of northern Michigan real estate sales, known by friends and colleagues for his honesty and business foresight, has died along with his wife as a result of a fire in their home.

Joseph F. and Elaine L. Schmidt died from injuries they suffered as a result of smoke inhalation after a fire Friday started in the living room of their Anderson Road home.

Traverse City Fire Chief Eddie Fisher would not say how the fire started.

## JAN. 7

**Building heights to stay**

TRAVERSE CITY — Finding the appropriate height for buildings in the downtown district continues to be a tall order for the city commission.

The city commission unanimously rejected a proposal from the city planning commission to increase the permitted building heights in the C-4a district downtown by an additional nine feet to a maximum 54 feet.

The proposed zoning change was prompted by the redevelopment plans for a law office on the northeast corner of Front and Park streets.

City officials have been struggling with the downtown building height issue for several years now, since before the present zoning code was approved in 1999. The city's zoning rules generally create a "step" approach by allowing taller buildings further away from the bay or from residential zones near downtown, up to 110 feet in the C4c districts along areas of State Street.

## JAN. 8

**Marina fire cause unknown**

WALLOON LAKE — The

cause of a fire that destroyed the Walloon Lake Village Marina late Monday may never be determined, fire officials said.

"We can't pin it down," said fire chief Dennis Howard of Charlevoix County's Melrose Township, who spent several hours Tuesday on the scene with a Michigan State Police fire marshal investigator.

"There is not much left to make a determination from," Howard said. "The building is flat. Aluminum snowmobiles melt down to nothing. And the trailers they were sitting on — all that's left are wheel rims."

## JAN. 8

**Gilbert's job back to normal**

TRAVERSE CITY — In Judge Thomas Gilbert's courtroom, business seemed to be getting back to normal.

Suspects were arraigned on misdemeanor charges, defendants pleaded guilty to shoplifting, driver's license violators were ordered to pay fines.

What was not happening in Gilbert's courtroom happened across the hall, in Judge Michael Haley's courtroom, where four defendants were arraigned on charges of drunken driving; and today, in Judge Thomas J. Philips courtroom, where 26 defendants are scheduled to be arraigned on that charge.

Gilbert has been indefinitely barred from hearing drunken driving and marijuana cases after he admitted to smoking marijuana at a Detroit rock concert in October. He took a leave of absence to attend a four-week rehabilitation for alcohol abuse and heard his first criminal cases since then in Traverse City Tuesday.

## JAN. 9

**Group seeks repayment**

CHARLEVOIX — An Eveline Township group seeking to recall two township officials in a dispute over zoning for wind turbines wants more than an apology from Charlevoix County after a clerk's error invalidated most of the group's recall petitions. Organizers want to get

repaid for their wasted effort.

Recall leader Nancy Ferguson has appealed to the county board of commissioners for \$1,287.50 that she claims covers time spent by petition circulators gathering signatures, mileage expense and the cost of making copies.

County Clerk Jane Brannon's office had told organizers of the recall against Eveline supervisor Dan Skrzeczkoski and clerk Don Hayden that petitioners had six months to collect signatures.

## JAN. 10

**Resort owner pleads guilty**

DETROIT — Sugar Loaf Resort owner Remo Polselli pleaded guilty Thursday to federal tax-evasion charges related to a Southfield business that could put him in prison for up to 30 months and require more than \$3 million in fines and restitution.

Polselli was arraigned Sept. 30 on charges he failed to turn over more than \$2.4 million in payroll and Social Security taxes withheld from employees at the Plaza Hotel in Southfield from 1993 to 1997. The money was supposed to be paid to the Internal Revenue Service.

## JAN. 10

**Residents file suit over pole**

TRAVERSE CITY — Months of controversy over Traverse City Light and Power's disputed utility tower on Wadsworth Street has culminated in a lawsuit over the project filed by three Central neighborhood residents.

The residents are seeking a court order to halt further installation work on the 80-foot steel riser just south of Front Street, pending a review of the project by the city's Historic District Commission.

The utility board last month decided to move ahead with the 80-foot tower after failing to reach a compromise with the neighborhood on masking the pole with a paint job or some other decoration.

Plaintiffs in the dispute are Wadsworth Street residents Pete Jurica and Mary "Stewie" Zacks and Fifth

Street resident Tim Hall.

Their suit alleges that the tower "blights the entrance to the historic district on Wadsworth Street and violates the intent and spirit of the laws preserving the historic district."

## JAN. 11

**Two sledders feared dead**

TRAVERSE CITY — Two men are feared dead after they failed to return home from a snowmobile outing Thursday evening around Long Lake.

Grand Traverse County Sheriff deputies and a multi-agency dive team searched Friday for Traverse City residents David L. Swanson, 32, and Matthew R. Wyn, 36, in bitterly cold temperatures at the north end of Long Lake.

The investigation into their disappearance began when a Long Lake Township resident, Tony Buday, heard screams coming from the lake at around 9:30 p.m. Thursday.

When sheriff deputies and fire department rescuers arrived and a Coast Guard helicopter flew overhead, all the rescuers found were two snowmobile tracks headed across the ice and into open water.

## JAN. 12

**Thin ice claims angler**

TRAVERSE CITY — For the second time in 36 hours, Long Lake has claimed the life of an outdoors enthusiast apparently unaware of dangerous ice conditions.

Martin R. Selby, 58, of Long Lake Township, drowned in the 2,800-acre lake Saturday morning when his snowmobile fell through thin ice.

Selby's apparently is the third such death in the partially frozen lake since Thursday night.

Selby's body was pulled from about 12 feet of water late Saturday morning, after authorities said his snowmobile apparently broke through the ice while he was ice fishing near his home on the Long Lake peninsula.