

# Scenic MICHIGAN



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*Our mission: To preserve, protect, and enhance Michigan's scenic resources.*

Volume XIV - Number 1 • APRIL, 2010

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## President's Message

By Jim Lagowski

Good news! Scenic Michigan has met the 75 new member requirement for our 2009 membership challenge grants. As a result, Scenic Michigan will receive \$13,000 from 3 sponsors, plus \$4000 in new memberships. These new donations will make a huge difference in helping us to fund our legislative efforts in Lansing. Many thanks for your help! Please keep it up!

Our bill to place a moratorium on digital billboards (HB 5580), pending a Federal Highway Administration safety study, is in Committee, awaiting a vote. Please see details elsewhere in this newsletter. This is our highest priority effort at this time. Assuming a successful vote in Committee, the bill will then go to the full House of Representatives. Please thank Committee Chair Rebekah Warren with a brief phone call (517-373-2577) and her co-sponsors for introducing this bill. One sponsor is Scenic Michigan member Joan Bauer, who is also a State Representative. Please read her profile in this newsletter.

The Outdoor Advertising Industry is working very hard, with a powerful lobbying firm to defeat HB5580, even though a Frey Foundation sponsored state-wide poll found that Michiganders, by a 2 to 1 majority, favor the moratorium. Driver distraction has become, much to the efforts of Scenic Michigan, a national issue. Scenic Michigan was even featured on a front page article in the New York Times Business Section ([www.nytimes.com/2010/03/02/technology](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/02/technology)). Scenic Michigan is like David vs. the industry giant Goliath. We need your continuing help! More to come on this issue.

Please mark your calendar for June 25, 2010, from 5 -8 p.m. for our 5th Annual Waterfront Wine Festival in downtown Harbor Springs. Festival attendance has grown sizably each year and the event has become a significant source of new funds. Please keep checking our wine festival website at [www.waterfrontwine.org](http://www.waterfrontwine.org) for festival updates.

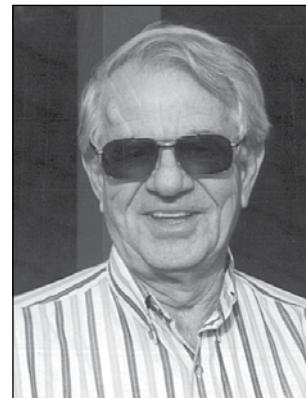
The enclosed envelope can be used by you or a friend to support our legislative efforts. Your friends can also join us at our website ([www.scenicmichigan.org](http://www.scenicmichigan.org)) Help us defeat Goliath!

## Save The Date....June 25, 2010

### 2010 WATERFRONT WINE FESTIVAL

Please join us for the fifth annual Scenic Michigan/Harbor Springs Chamber of Commerce Waterfront Wine Festival. Once again, this delightful event which showcases fine wines from select wineries paired with food tastings will be held from 5 p.m. to 8 pm. at the downtown Harbor Springs waterfront. An evening highlight features the sounds of the John Driscoll Ensemble, featuring jazz standards and original instrumentals. The event is a fundraiser for Scenic Michigan with advance tickets for \$20.00 and \$25.00 at the door. This year's festival includes a wonderful raffle of a Napa Valley Wine Weekend Getaway for two, including hotel and airfare. Raffle tickets are only \$10 each or 3 for \$25.

Tickets for the 2010 Waterfront Wine Festival will go on sale May 1st and will be available online, at [www.waterfrontwine.org](http://www.waterfrontwine.org), by phone, at 231-347-4929 and at select locations in Harbor Springs and Petoskey.





Editors note: This article ran on January 31, 2010 in the St. Paul Pioneer Press and is reprinted with permission from the Pioneer Press

## Digital billboard was rude surprise to neighbors

Residents say they should have had chance to object

By Nick Ferraro [nferraro@pioneerpress.com](mailto:nferraro@pioneerpress.com)



Nikki Laliberte has learned to deal with the traffic and noise that come with living off of busy U.S. 52 in South St. Paul.

But the new “giant eye pollution” near her home is too much, she said.

“I have Sean Hannity staring at me all

day, and I cannot stand it,” said Laliberte, whose home is just east of a billboard that features the talk radio host.

“It’s like that painting where the eyes move. He’s watching me everywhere that I go in my house.”

Earlier this month, Clear Channel Outdoor raised the 80-foot-tall dynamic “digital” billboard across the highway in West St. Paul. It stretches 48 feet, with an LED digital sign that changes advertisements every eight seconds facing north and the ad of Hannity pointing south.

West St. Paul officials in November finalized a deal with Clear Channel that allows the company to display the sign on the southeastern corner of the city’s sports complex property over the next 20 years at an annual cost of \$50,000.

The rental price could go as high as \$60,000 a year if the south-facing side also becomes digital, City Administrator John Remkus said.

Mayor John Zanmiller said the area is zoned for an additional billboard, but the city is not planning to add one.

Laliberte said the billboard took her and her neighbors by surprise.

“I saw this tower going up, and it kept getting higher,” said Joan Lindusky, whose home faces the digital side of the billboard. “We had no idea this was going to be put up. I’m still flabbergasted.”

She described it as “an enormous plasma TV that I cannot turn off.”

As digital billboards have popped up across the country, so has the controversy about them. Opponents contend the flashes of images are distracting and pose safety risks to motorists.

Sen. Sandy Pappas, DFL-St. Paul, and Rep. Frank Hornstein, DFL-Minneapolis, plan to introduce a bill this legislative session that would place a moratorium on any new digital billboards until June 2013.

“I’m worried about the public safety aspect,” Pappas said.

She said the Federal Highway Safety Administration is conducting a study on how digital billboards affect driving behavior and safety.

It’s unclear how many digital signs Clear Channel Outdoor has in the Twin Cities, and calls to the company’s Minneapolis office were not immediately returned.

State law requires that municipalities must notify property owners who live within 350 feet of an area under consideration for a conditional use permit.

U.S. 52, which splits West St. Paul and South St. Paul, is 400 feet wide itself, so people in South St. Paul were not notified, West St. Paul city planner Ben Boike said.

Lindusky estimated that she lives about 450 feet from the sign. She called the 350-foot rule “absurd” and said West St. Paul officials should have notified South St. Paul residents.

“I can see farther than 350 feet,” she said. “People can see the thing from Inver Grove Heights, for crying out loud. That’s irrelevant to me.”

Remkus said the city does only what state law says it should do.

“When we put up antennas for a cell tower, clearly others are going to see that, too,” he said.

There are five homes directly west of the billboard in West St. Paul, including some that are within 350 feet, Boike said. Park land is directly to the north, while a storage facility is just south.

The city held two public hearings, but no residents spoke for or against the billboard, Boike said.

Zanmiller said he has received complaints from a few South St. Paul residents.

On Thursday, he received a letter from a West St. Paul resident who asserted the city had “prostituted themselves.”

“The fact is, there’s \$50,000 that’s going to go into the general fund that will pay for city services,” he said.

Laliberte said she plans to attend Monday’s South St. Paul City Council meeting and voice her concerns.

“I’m hoping there can be some compromise where the lights on both sides can be shut off at, say, 11 o’clock until

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## Digital Billboards

By HYONHEE SHIN  
Capital News Service

Digital billboards draw legislative, federal eyes

LANSING – Drivers might not see any new glowing digital billboards along Michigan highways for a while.

Rep. Rebekah Warren, D-Ann Arbor, has introduced a bill to establish a two-year moratorium on new digital billboards until a federal analysis is completed and safety recommendations are issued by the end of 2011.

Under the proposal, the state would issue no permits for new digital billboards or conversion of existing static billboards to ones with moving animation or flashing lights until Jan. 1, 2012. It would allow existing electronic billboards to remain in use.

Controversy over billboards and driver safety started after a 1951 Minnesota Highways Department study, which reported that an increase in billboards would boost the crash rate. Other studies have reached different conclusions. For example, the Michigan Highway Department found in 1952 that signs don't correlate with the number of crashes.

Distracted driving is a subject of growing concern among federal and state agencies, including the U.S. Department of Transportation.

However, it's still uncertain whether there's a correlation between attention-grabbing digital billboards and traffic safety.

There are two popular types of billboards, traditional and digital. A main difference has to do with shared space, according to EMC Outdoor, a Pennsylvania-based advertising agency.

For example, digital billboards let advertisers share their space with others as ads are displayed in sequence for six to eight seconds each. But there is only one advertiser on traditional billboards for an entire display period.

A Federal Highway Administration study is underway to explore that safety question, said Hugh McDiarmid, communications director of the Michigan Environmental Council. The study focuses on the effects of digital billboards on driver behavior and evaluation of their potential risk.

Scenic Michigan, a Petoskey-based environmental coalition, said the federal study could lead to guidelines, regulatory changes or legislative proposals. "It'll show how often messages on digital billboards should change – every six seconds, eight seconds or 10," said McDiarmid, a member of the coalition's board.

Currently there are about 16,000 billboards along Michigan highways, said Abby Dart, executive director of Scenic Michigan. "It's second only to Florida in the number of billboards in America."

Peter Steketee of Grand Rapids, a Scenic Michigan board member, said billboards detract from tourism, Michigan's second-largest industry.

"They're ugly," he said. "Although the number is now capped, there are still too many of them."

Michigan is in a serious economic slump, but tourism could be a bright spot in the economy, Steketee said. "Nobody takes a drive to view billboards along the highway, and many people detest them and go where they are not."

Steketee said digital billboards are much more distracting, and thus more dangerous to drivers than traditional ones. "They are just starting to go up across the state, but this process should be stopped."

However, Rick Imshaug, owner of Skyline Outdoor Advertising in Okemos, said there's no safety hazard from digital billboards.

"Not at all," said Imshaug. "Drivers are trained to look at signs. It's not like texting or looking at an iPod, which can pose a safety hazard. They routinely look at billboards through the windshield."

Anne Readett, communications manager for the Office of Highway Safety Planning, said her agency has not focused on billboards and any role they may or may not play in traffic crashes.

But Skyline's Imshaug said the temporary ban would hurt the proposed industry and is unnecessary. "I don't think there are too many billboards along highways. They're in some places but not generally. I believe the state has tons of other problems to deal with."

A poll by Lansing-based EPIC-MRA showed that by 2-to-1 ratio state residents support a moratorium on digital billboards. Seventy percent of those responding to the survey voiced "strong support."

The bill's co-sponsors are Democratic Reps. Daniel Scripps of Leland; Joan Bauer of Lansing; Robert Jones of Kalamazoo; Alma Wheeler Smith of Salem Township; Deb Kennedy of Brownstown; Sarah Roberts of St. Clair Shores; Gary McDowell of Rudyard; Mary Valentine of Muskegon; Gino Polidori of Dearborn; and Bob Constan of Dearborn Heights.

The bill is pending in the House Great Lakes and Environment Committee.

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*Digital billboard was rude surprise to neighbors  
continued from Page 2*

sunrise," she said. "That's my hope."

South St. Paul Mayor Beth Baumann said she and other officials were not aware the billboard was going up. She said West St. Paul officials had a digital billboard deal fall through several years ago and she thought it was a "dead issue."

"Beyond the 350-foot rule, I think it would have been a common courtesy for them to at least call the city," she said.

She said she could have at least sent a letter to West St. Paul officials requesting that they let South St. Paul residents speak on the issue.

But now that the ink is dry on the contract, she said, "there's probably nothing we can do, unfortunately."

Nick Ferraro can be reached at 651-228-2173.

# Scenic Michigan Interviews State Representative Joan Bauer

Interview by Abby Dart, Scenic Michigan Executive Director



**Q. You have a long history of public service, as a community activist, volunteer coordinator, and other positions. Was the decision to run for the State Legislature a natural “next step” in your career or was there a specific legislative agenda you were seeking that you felt needed statewide attention?**

A. I have lived, worked, and volunteered in the Lansing community for over 30 years. I have worked as a teacher, the director of the Lansing Community College Foundation, director of women’s services for the YWCA, and director of volunteer services at Ingham Regional Medical Center. My volunteer work has been extensive, particularly with organizations that support women and girls. I was elected to the Lansing City Council in 1995 and served for eleven years before running for the State Legislature. I felt that my professional experiences in the workplace, as an elected official, and with volunteer organizations gave me the background to deal with the major issues facing Michigan (healthcare, education, and the economy) and would allow me to “hit the ground running” in a term limited Legislature. Perhaps more important, my parents always stressed that it was my responsibility to “give back” to our community whether it be through public service, volunteerism, or one’s profession.

**Q. Tell us about your educational background and family.**

A. My parents moved to Holt, Michigan (seven miles south of Lansing) when I was nine months old and I have continued to live in the Lansing area for most of my life. My father was a high school government teacher and a coach. My mother taught typing and business subjects in a high school. I graduated from Western Michigan University with degrees in history, political science, and secondary education. After teaching for two years in a high school in Indiana, I moved to the Chicago area and worked for the YWCA as a youth director. In 1977 when I was 27, I moved back to Lansing where I have lived and worked ever since. I am the oldest of three children. My sister is a middle school physical education teacher and my brother is a county deputy sheriff in Colorado. I have been married to Doug Langham for seventeen years. Doug was the Director of Vocational Rehabilitation in the Workers Compensation Bureau with the State of Michigan and is now retired. Doug and I do not have children of our own but I have five absolutely perfect nieces and nephews!

**Q. Scenic Michigan appreciates your longtime membership in our organization. What motivated you to get involved with Scenic Michigan?**

A. I am so fortunate to have grown up in Michigan and have always loved our state’s scenic beauty and our incredible Great Lakes. Our natural resources define us as

a state and I have always felt that it is critically important that we treasure and protect them. I don’t remember how I first heard of Scenic Michigan, but immediately was drawn to the organization because I so completely support your goals and mission, especially as they relate to billboards. I have not been actively involved in Scenic Michigan but have supported the organization through my membership.

**Q. One issue that is at the forefront of Scenic Michigan is the fight against billboard blight. What or how do you see as the best way legislatively to address this critical issue?**

A. I have always felt that billboards are visual blight and negatively impact the natural beauty of this magnificent state, especially along our scenic roads and highways. On the legislative level, I feel that we must be vigilant about protecting our current laws that cap the construction of additional billboards. I commend Scenic Michigan on getting this critically important legislation passed in 2006. I am also concerned about the proliferation of electronic billboards. The Federal Highway Administration is currently studying the safety impacts and implications of commercial electronic variable message signs and their findings are expected to be released in mid to late 2010. It is important that Michigan closely monitor this issue so we can fully understand the safety and visual implications which will result from the extension of digital messaging to our roads and highways.

**Q. Tourism ranks as Michigan’s second largest industry. With the current economic crisis in Michigan, how best can we take advantage of promoting our scenic beauty to create jobs, attract more visitors, yet protect this precious and finite resource?**

A. Our “Pure Michigan” promotional campaign has been effective and does a wonderful job of showcasing our beautiful state. The federal economic stimulus funds will help us improve our roads which is important to tourism. Though tourism is important to Michigan’s economy, we must continue to protect our natural resources. I am very proud that we passed the Great Lakes Compact and the water protection bill package as a major step in protecting our water resources. I look to the recommendations of Michigan’s active environmental groups, including Scenic Michigan, for ways that we must protect our natural

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resources. I commend the groups for publishing the 2009-2010 Environmental Briefing Book which is an important resource for legislators.

**Q. We know you are very busy with your legislative schedule, but if you had a free day, what would be your ideal way to enjoy it?**

A. Our family has a house on Lake Michigan in South Haven which was originally purchased by my great-aunt in 1939. My perfect day is spent there . . . with time to walk on the beach, sit on the back porch, read, be with family and friends, and, of course, end the day watching a beautiful Lake Michigan sunset.

What would you like our Scenic Michigan membership to know about your commitment to environmental protection and your future legislative goals to help promote Michigan's scenic beauty?

I am committed to working with Scenic Michigan and other environmental groups to protect our environment and ensure that the qualities that define our beautiful state are passed on to future generations. I support the 2009-2010 environmental priorities identified in the Briefing Book: Securing adequate and sustainable state funding for environmental protection and conservation, addressing the threat of global warming in Michigan, and protecting our children's health. As a State Representative, I welcome the opportunity to support these priorities at the legislative level.

## Legislative Update

### Scenic Michigan supports HB 5580— 2 year moratorium on digital billboards

Scenic Michigan has been working with State Representative Rebekah Warren in an effort to pass legislation (House Bill 5580) which would place a 2 year moratorium on digital billboards—those tv's on a stick---while the Federal Highway Administration completes a safety study on this new technology.

Joining in support of the legislation are the Michigan Municipal League, the Michigan Environmental Council, the Michigan United Conservation Clubs, former Attorney General Frank Kelley, former Governor William Milliken and First Lady Helen Milliken and many others. Testimony was heard by the Great Lakes and the Environment Committee on February 25 and a vote is scheduled to take place in the next few weeks.

The outdoor advertising industry has been aggressively fighting the legislation as the monetary stakes for them are high. The battle lines are drawn: Scenic Michigan is fighting for the safety of Michigan drivers who don't need another "weapon of mass distraction" on our roadways while the billboard industry is fighting to protect their monetary interest and refuse to wait until this first ever independent safety study is completed.

Stay tuned as the legislature continues to address the issue of digital billboards with House Bill 5580. PLEASE CONTACT YOUR LOCAL STATE REPRESENTATIVE AND STATE SENATOR AND URGE THEM TO SUPPORT HB 5580!



*To Preserve, Protect & Enhance  
Michigan's Scenic Resources*

Scenic Michigan strives to preserve the aesthetic amenities of our communities. We are a statewide coalition of grass roots organizations, elected officials, and citizens working to preserve and protect the beauty of Michigan's roadsides. Scenic Michigan is an affiliate of Scenic America, a national organization sharing our goals.

Attend  
Scenic Michigan's  
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WINE FESTIVAL,**  
*the Last Friday in June,  
in Harbor Springs*  
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waterfrontwine.org

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- \$35.00     \$50.00     \$100.00     \$250.00     \$500.00     \$ \_\_\_\_\_.
- \$50.00 Local Unit of Government

Please mail your form in the enclosed envelope to Scenic Michigan, 445 E. Mitchell Street, Petoskey, MI 49770.

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