

GREAT ESCAPES

Great Escapes features various travel news items. Send news leads to Hugh Gallagher, assistant managing editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers Inc., 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax them to (313) 591-7279.

TRAVEL CENTER

A full-service visitor information center Info T.O. has opened in Toronto. At the center, visitors are able to get advice from travel counselors; book hotel rooms and tickets for guided tours, theater productions and special events; pick up various Toronto publications; surf Toronto travel sites on the Internet; purchase high-quality "official" Toronto souvenirs; make arrangements for day trips to the Niagara area.

Info T.O. is located in downtown Toronto in a storefront location in the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, 256 Front St. West (across from the CBC). Open 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. May-September and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. October to April.

STRAITS FOURTH OF JULY

St. Ignace will hold an old-fashioned Fourth of July celebration kicking off with a street dance on Thursday, July 3. A variety of music will be featured including country, polka and rock and roll 6-10 p.m. on the waterfront. A hometown parade will be held at 1 p.m. July 4 and a firman's open house 9-5 p.m. A spectacular fireworks display over the harbor concludes the celebration. The Arnold Mackinac Island Ferry will be operating for evening cruising during the fireworks.

NORTHWOOD FESTIVAL

Tell us your travel story

We want to hear from you! Tell us about your recent travel adventures. Share your story and your pictures with friends and neighbors in your hometown.

We're also interested in hearing about tips you've learned to make travel easier. What's the easiest way around Metro, which airline serves the best food, what's the best way to send your child unescorted?

If you have a story or a tip to share, call Hugh Gallagher at (313) 963-2118 or fax him at (313) 591-7279.

On July 6, we are running a story of Ontario's Stratford Festival. We would like to hear any special memories you have of Stratford and plays you've seen. Send your comments by June 30 to Hugh Gallagher at the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.

Michigan offers kids much to do

LANSING, Mich., June 10 /PRNewswire/ -- A phrase that nearly every parent in the U.S. will undoubtedly hear from their child or children now that school is out, is: "I'm bored, there's nothing to do."

Before that happens, get a jump on the whining and call Travel Michigan toll free, at 888-78-GREAT, and talk to an experienced travel counselor about exciting Michigan summertime activities and events going on all summer long for kids and families.

Travel Michigan travel counselors have information on more than 1,100 festivals and events taking place in Michigan this summer -- many with special activities for children. Watch a parade, ooh and ahh at fireworks displays, and what kid doesn't like elephant ears?

Want to follow the beat of a different drummer? Load the kids into the van and go explore Michigan's great outdoors.

Just call 888-78-GREAT, to begin planning your Michigan family getaway. Travel counselors are available to assist travelers in planning vacations and weekend getaways, 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. (EST) Monday through Friday, and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Visit Travel Michigan's web site at: <http://www.travelmichigan.state.mi.us> Recorded information about upcoming festivals and events is available.

Northwood University in Midland will hold its Music Fest July 9-11 in the tent at Black Forest Hall (Hoyt and Quick Roads) in Harbor Springs.

This year's performances, the 18th annual, will feature pianist Don Irwin 7 p.m. July 9 and the jazz sounds of Christopher Brubeck, Dan Brubeck and Mike DeMicco 8 p.m. July 11. For information, call 517-837-4389.

WATER SAFETY

Michigan AAA is offering some tips on water safety.

"No matter what type or size of watercraft you're on, all boaters must use proper safety equipment, know the body of water they are boating on and have total control of the watercraft they are using to safely enjoy Michigan's lakes," said Jerry Basch, AAA Michigan community safety services manager.

State figures show that in 1996, there were 946,847 registered watercraft, up almost 90,000 -- nearly 7 percent from just last year before. Most of the increase can be attributed to

smaller boats like personal watercraft.

"They can be great fun, but in the hands of untrained, inexperienced drivers, boats such as PWCs can be a problem waiting to happen," Basch said.

In 1995-96 there were 637 boating accidents in Michigan, resulting in 20 fatalities. Fifty percent of the fatalities involved alcohol.

This summer the state Department of Natural Resources will step up its enforcement campaign with 30 officers in boats

and on PWCs who will target problem areas to enforce boating laws.

"If you're new to the water, attend a safe boating class. Contact your local DNR district office, sheriff's department marine safety division or the Coast Guard Auxiliary for times and dates," Basch said.

Here are some other "rules of the water."

■ All persons 12 to 16 must complete a safe boating class to operate a motorized boat or be accompanied by someone at least

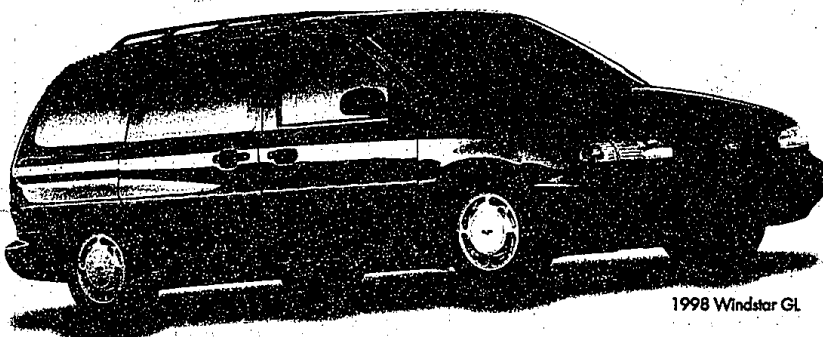
16 years old.

■ All boats, canoes and kayaks less than 16 feet must have either a wearable life jacket or throwable personal flotation device for each person aboard on Michigan inland waters only. If boating on the Great Lakes or connecting waters, Coast Guard rules require a wearable PFD for each person aboard regardless of the size of the boat.

■ Children less than 6 years old must wear PFDs at all times while aboard.

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2-Driver and front passenger crash tests U.S. Government data only useful in comparing vehicles within 500 pounds. *Always wear your safety belt and secure children in the rear seat.