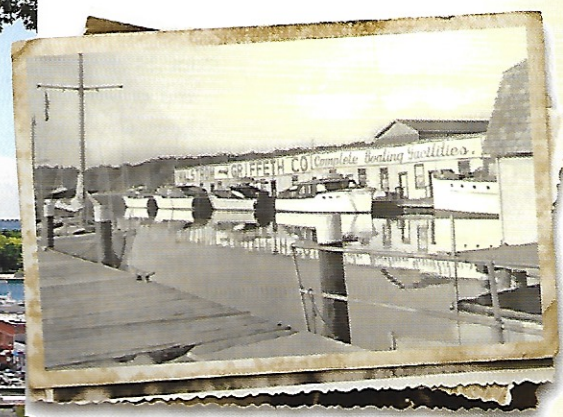
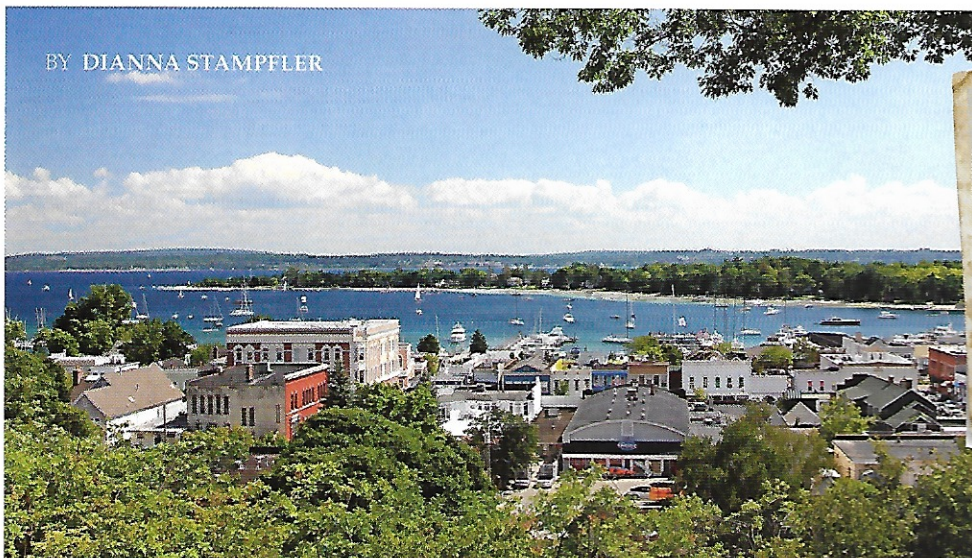


BY DIANNA STAMPFLER



Cruising into Michigan's boating history

BY THE TIME WALSTROM MARINE launched its operations in 1946, Harbor Springs was a well-established resort community stretching along the shores of Little Traverse Bay. Once called L'Arbre Croche, meaning Crooked Tree, by the Native Americans and later Petit Traverse (Little Traverse) by French traders, the village was incorporated under its current name in 1880.



Following service as Navy lieutenants in World War II, Ward Walstrom Sr. and Paul Griffeth returned to Michigan and purchased Melching Garage and Boat Works in Harbor Springs. The business boasted a two-story boathouse, the upper level of which was being used as the high school basketball gymnasium and later was used as a roller-skating rink complete with a Wurlitzer organ. It included 50 covered boat slips, a 50-ton lift built by Henry Melching, and the coveted franchise for the Michigan-built Chris Craft line.

The Harbor Springs community, primarily a summer destination, quickly took shape as a premier boating locale noted for having the deepest natural harbor on the Great Lakes. The bay was protected from often-aggressive wind and waves by high bluffs and the exclusive Harbor Point, an area favored by the likes of the Fords, Gambles and Wrigleys, as well as other Midwest tycoons.

Second-generation owner Ward Walstrom Jr. recounts stories of the elite who arrived for the summer in their elegant Rolls-Royce automobiles, driven by chauffeurs who doubled as captains of classic wooden boats and larger yachts to transport their employers to seasonal cottages on the point.

By 1960, Walstrom had developed a 100-slip yacht basin and storage/service facility on the east end of downtown Harbor Springs. Northern Michigan's first condo develop-

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY PETOSKEY AREA CVB (TOP LEFT); WALSTROM MARINE (TOP RIGHT & BOTTOM)

ment, Marina Village, soon followed. From there, it was further expansion, not only in Harbor Springs but also in Cheboygan, where a 30,000-square-foot heated building, haul-out facility with a 70-ton lift, and 40 deep-water slips were constructed along the river with direct access to Lake Huron.

To celebrate its 50th anniversary in 1995, Walstrom's original aging building was torn down to make way for a new facility, which today houses one of two Propeller retail locations (the other is in Bay Harbor).

The main company operations are now found at 500 Bay St. in a waterfront building that features a 10,000-square-foot showroom for boating lines such as Hatteras, Tiara, Pursuit and Chris Craft. Walstrom operates storage facilities, a service center and an accessory retail shop east of town.

Walstrom has become one of the most reputable marinas on the Great Lakes and proudly contributes to the state's important boating industry. Overall, Michigan ranks third in the country, not only for the number of registered watercraft (more than 900,000) but also for new marine expenditures — boats, engines, trailers and accessories — generating more than \$646 million.

Recognizing the role the fresh waters of the Great Lakes play in the boating industry, Walstrom Marine was one of the first companies in the state to be designated a Michigan Clean Marina, a program that began in 2005. Participants voluntarily pledge to maintain and improve Michigan's waterways by reducing or eliminating release of harmful substances and phasing out practices that can damage aquatic environments.

"These practices are active year-round as Walstrom Marine continues to improve and provide the best possible and cleanest environment for our family and friends to enjoy the boating lifestyle," Walstrom says. walstrom.com.

Freelance writer Dianna Stampfler is also president of Promote Michigan and resides in Petoskey.

