

The Colonie Historical Oracle

Quarterly Newsletter of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie

Volume 11, No. 1

January - March 2015

The Snow Cruiser !

Submitted by Kevin Franklin, Historian, Town of Colonie



The Snow Cruiser on the Menand Road

This winter was a tough one for anyone who had not been fortunate enough to head south for a few weeks. The seemingly never ending snow and frigid temperatures were enough to make you think you lived in the Arctic or Antarctic! In late January I was sent a rather poor photograph of a large wheeled vehicle coming down the old Menand Road in Menands. The sender asked if this machine was some kind of fire truck. At first glance the vehicle could double for one of the very large fire

vehicles used at major airports in this country, but it was not.

I immediately recognized this vehicle as the behemoth called the Snow Cruiser. My late father, who grew up in Menands, remembered seeing this huge machine as it lumbered down the old Menand Road in late 1939 escorted by a squad of New York State Police Cars and Menands Village Police. The residents of the Village crowded the sidewalks on each side of Menand Road

gawking at this vehicle with its monstrous tires and brilliant orange paint scheme. A man stood on top of the vehicle ready to lift any low hanging wires that might snag as the machine crept by. My father described it as having wheels almost ten feet high and after it came down old Menands Road it made its way north up Broadway and then turned right onto the elevated concrete ramp leading to the recently constructed Troy-Menands Bridge (1933).

The Snow Cruiser came through Colonie on Rt. 7 out of Schenectady County. Residents in the Verdoy area snapped a couple crude photos of it as it traveled east on Rt. 7. The vehicle most likely made its way around the old Latham Traffic Circle and then headed south on Rt. 9 where it turned east down the Menand Road and into Menands. The Snow Cruiser probably only spent a short period of time here in Colonie but anyone who witnessed it would remember its huge size. What was the Snow Cruiser? What was its purpose? Where was it made and where was it headed? In the early 20th Century explorers from several nations were exploring both the frozen Arctic and Antarctic areas of Earth to document the geography, weather, possible ports, and other conditions and to lay claim to areas that were (and some still are) largely unexplored.

One of the nations that explored areas of the Antarctic was Germany in the very early 1900's. Germany was the first nation to use a hot air balloon to chart areas of the Antarctic. Some countries, including Germany were still hunting whales for their oil which was used in the production of soap and margarine. German explorers were looking for a spot with a suitable port to build a whaling station. German explorations continued in December, 1938 under Hitler's Nazi Germany. The German Kriegsmarine (Navy) sent the steamer Schwabenland to Antarctica. The ship carried two early sea planes which were launched to fly over portions of the Antarctic and drop markers with the Swastika flag of Nazi Germany to mark sections of the continent for possible land claims which never materialized because of WWII. Hitler's expansion in Europe continued and Nazi Germany invaded Poland on September 1st, 1939 sparking the beginning of WWII in Europe. America was hesitant to become involved in yet another major war in Europe, but Germany's explorations of Antarctica did not escape notice of the United States. One of America's explorers of the early 20th Century was Richard E. Byrd. Richard Byrd, a United States Naval Officer and early aviator, had explored areas of the earth's northern ice cap and accepted a Congressional Medal of Honor for supposedly being the first individual to fly an airplane to the geographic North Pole. This claim was disputed by other explorers, however;

Byrd had become a national hero and his name synonymous with Polar exploration.

By the late 1920's Byrd began extensive explorations of the Antarctic. His first mission there included the use of Ford monoplane, Fokker Universal and a Fairchild monoplane along with advanced radio transmitters and receivers and photography equipment to take high altitude photographs of the topography below. Byrd's first and second explorations of the Antarctic were privately funded, but by the late 1930's the U.S. Government decided to help fund retired Rear Admiral Byrd's third expedition to the Antarctic which now included the wondrous new machine called the Snow Cruiser.

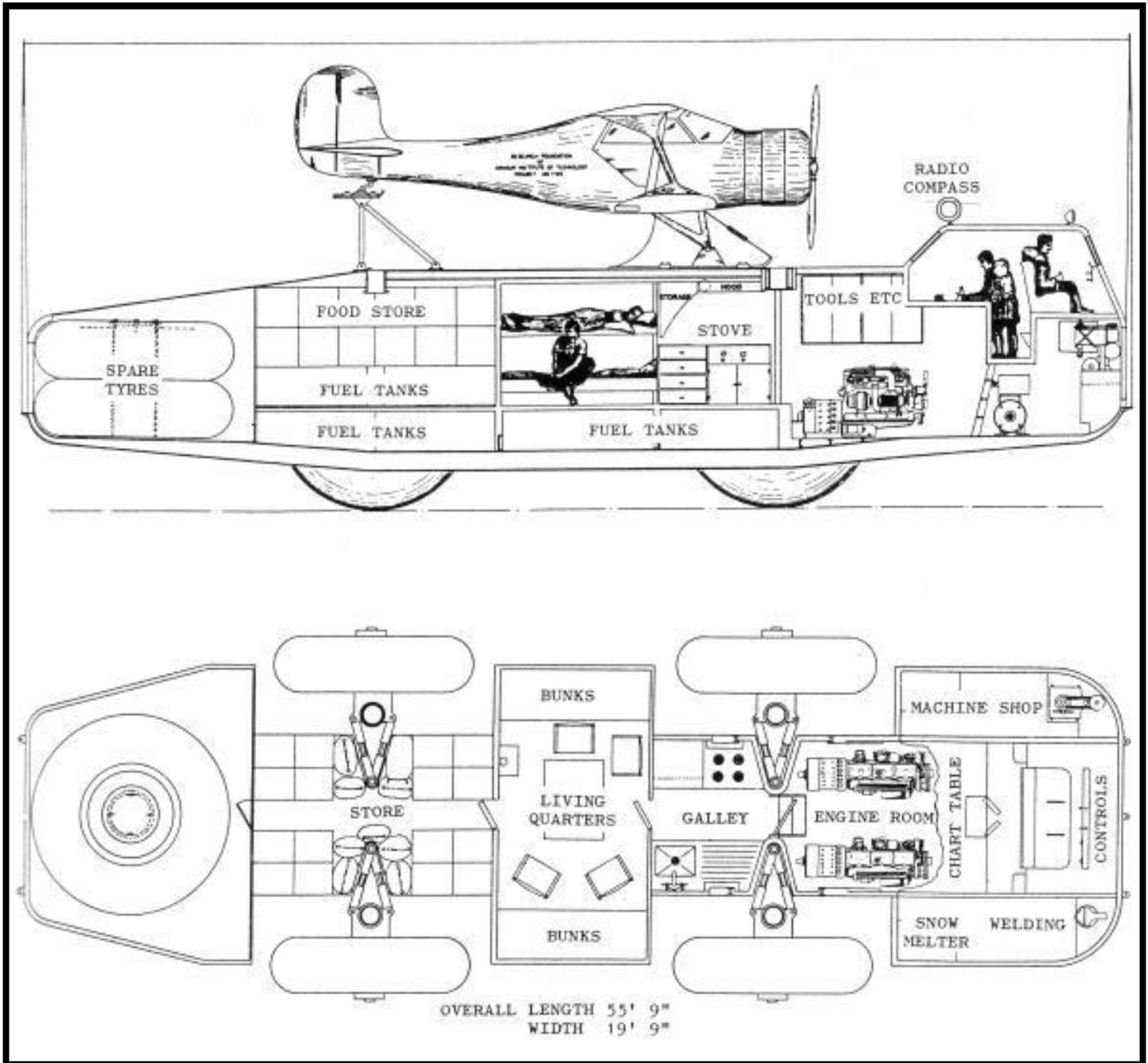
The Snow Cruiser was designed by Dr. Thomas C. Poulter, a scientific director of the Armour Institute of Chicago and a veteran of Byrd's 2nd Antarctic expedition. The Snow Cruiser was built by the Pullman Company (builder of famous Pullman railroad cars) and the \$150,000 cost of the machine entirely funded by 70 different manufacturers responsible for building different parts and equipment which made up the machine. The Snow Cruiser was 20 feet wide and 55 feet long. It weighed in at a hefty 60 thousand pounds. Its tires were 10 feet tall and each wheel driven by individual electric motors connected to generators powered by two diesel engines. It held 2,500 gallons of diesel fuel which was supposed to be enough to propel the machine up to 5,000 miles. It had a small galley for preparing food (enough to last its small crew of four men up to a year) along with sleeping quarters, a radio room and room for spare tires. The machine was designed to carry a small single engine fixed wing airplane on its back which would be equipped with skis to take off and land on ice and snow. Its wheels were designed to be retracted upward and the bottom or "hull" of the machine was sled-like which was supposed to enable it to slide down snowy slopes and once at the bottom the wheels could be lowered again to provide power.

Because the Snow Cruiser was so large (20 feet wide took up nearly the entire width of most roads of the time) it could not be transported by train and had to be driven from where it was built at Chicago, all the way to a Naval Port in Boston where it would then be loaded on board a freighter and transported along with other equipment to support Admiral Byrd's third exploration of the Antarctic. Once near Boston, the machine was said to be responsible for one of the largest traffic jams ever in Massachusetts up to that time.

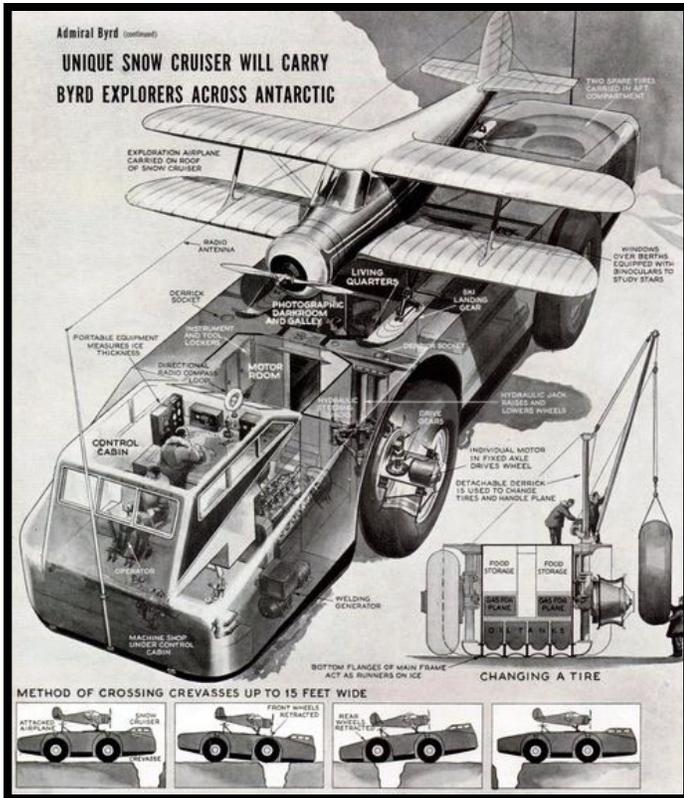
Once reaching the Antarctic, the Snow Cruiser did not live up to its expectations in the snow and ice conditions there. Its huge tires were balloon like and could not provide the necessary grip to move it along. Its great weight caused it to sink deep into the snow and the electric motors not powerful enough to pull the machine out once it got stuck. It could not make its way up an incline from the sea port to the top of the Ross

Ice Shelf where it was to begin its journey. The machine was eventually abandoned and rediscovered in the 1950's under deep layers of snow, but it disappeared again under shifting ice and snow conditions. The machine did succeed however in creating a sense of awe and National pride as it made its way through Colonie and Menands in route to Join Admiral Byrd's third exploration of the Antarctic.

(See related story on Page 5)



Dr. Poulter's diagram of the Snow Cruiser



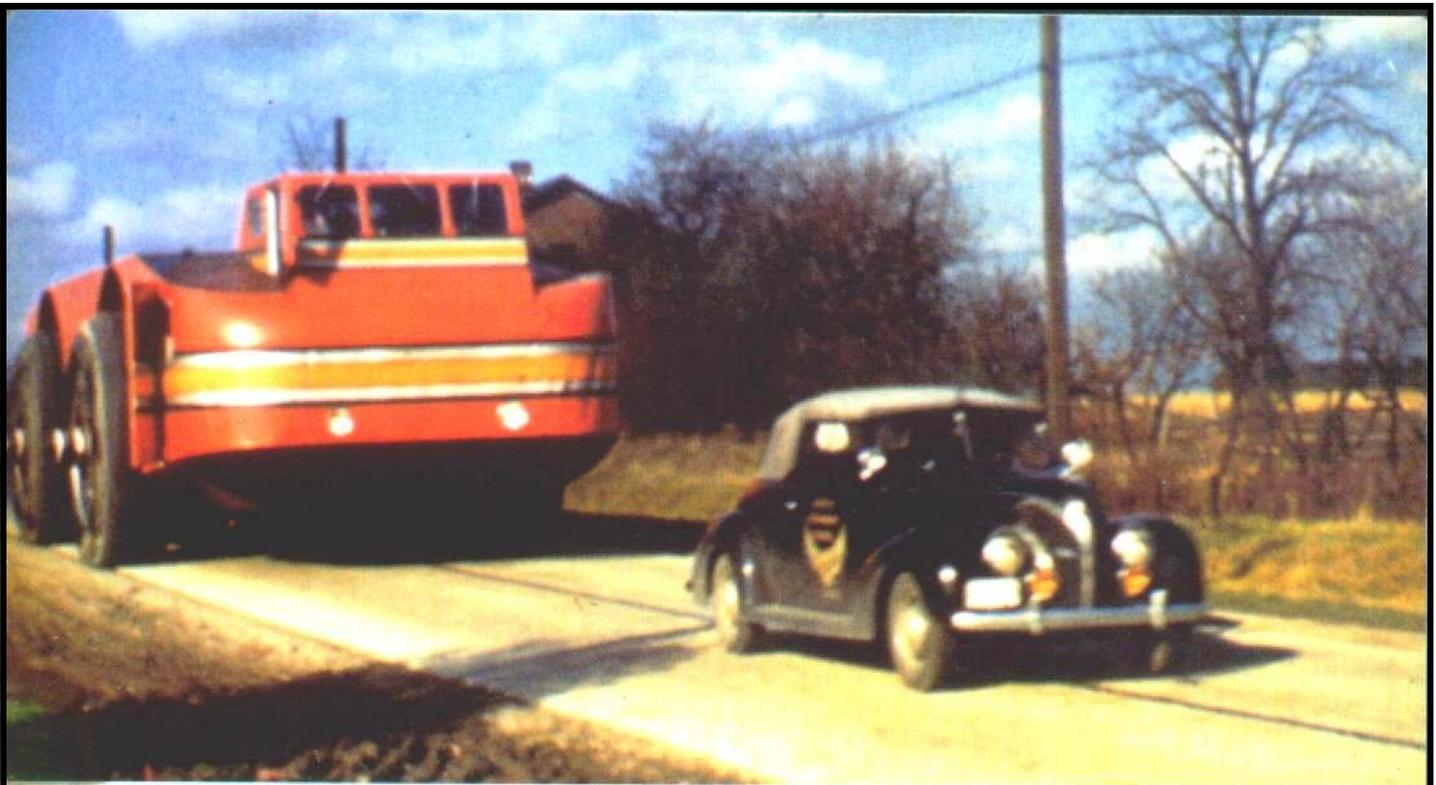
Layout diagram of Snow Cruiser with airplane



Snow Cruiser—unknown location

New Members !

The HSTC would like to welcome our newest members: Etta G. Wolferd; Patricia Barbaro; William & Mary Dickerson; Sharon McGivern Flood; Peg Harbour-Holland; Tom Murnane; David Stickles; Mark Giaconia; Worth Gretter; Karen Beck; Aeron Simendinger; Donald Witbeck and Erin McCabe. Welcome aboard!



ANTARCTICA SNOW CRUISER — entering Upper Sandusky, Ohio on November 1, 1939
 1938 FORD CONVERTIBLE — Ohio State Highway Patrol, Lincoln Highway, U.S. 30 North

Anthony Wayne

Last surviving member of Admiral Byrd's trip to Antarctica
By Jennifer Paley

Several years ago, I had the privilege of befriending a man named Anthony Wayne. It was quite interesting how we became friends. It all started with a newspaper article that I read about Mr. Wayne's amazing life and how he was the last surviving member of Admiral Byrd's trip to Antarctica. I saved the article to show my students in the after-school autograph club that I run. Since Mr. Wayne lived in Schenectady and I teach in Schenectady, I thought it would be a great way for my students to learn firsthand about the expedition by writing to him. Well, about a week or two after the article about Mr. Wayne was printed I was visiting a local nursing home with my therapy dog, Ella. It was there in halls where I first met Tony. He asked our group of therapy dog handlers if anyone had seen his article. No one in the group had, except for me. When I told him I had read it he said, "Good! Show it to the rest of them." He then walked back to his room. A week later I returned to visit Mr. Wayne. I had made him a knotted fleece blanket with a Navy ship pattern on it and my students had made him Veteran's Day cards. He was so appreciative and could not believe that we had done that for him. And that was how our friendship started.



Tony with t-shirt brought back from Antarctica by members of the local Air National Guard.

I would visit with Tony weekly and we would talk on the phone and he would send cards. Some of the cards were just friendly hellos while others would talk of his adventures as a Chief Warrant Officer in the Navy. Tony had such a knack for remembering dates, times, and the numbers of officers involved in various missions. During our visits, Tony would share with me videos of his time in Antarctica. One of the videos showed the Snow Cruiser being unloaded off of the boat and Tony engaging in play with seals and penguins. I do not know if he was with the cruiser or not as it rolled through Colonie. He would also tell me about Admiral Byrd and had nothing but kind words to say about the Admiral and his leadership. Tony would show me the amazing scrapbooks he had of his life and military adventures. He was a model for Charles Atlas and he had met kings and queens—all documented in his life albums. I remember one story Tony told me about his time as deep sea diver—you know the kind with the large metal head gear. If I remember correctly Tony told me the suit weighed about 200 lbs. Well, on one particular dive Tony came face to face with a hammerhead shark. Being a boxer he did what boxers do... he punched the shark, who then left him alone. That was the kind of grit he was made of.

It's not often that we get to meet people like Anthony Wayne. They don't make them like him anymore. He was one of kind--an American hero. And why we don't always know how or why people come into our lives, I'm sure glad Tony came into mine! My friendship with Tony lasted until his death in 2013. He is buried in the Saratoga National Cemetery.



Please visit our Facebook Page.
Just search:
Historical Society Town of Colonie

Announcement to Membership: HSTC Constitution and Bylaw Amendments

The Board of Trustees of the HSTC decided to assign responsibility to the Treasurer for tax reporting to assure compliance with the Internal Revenue Service and retain our Section 501(c)(3) tax exempt status in the future by adding the following sentence to Article 2, Section 7 of the Bylaws:

"The Treasurer has the responsibility of preparing the Federal tax reporting papers annually according to the IRS regulations and to submit them for Board approval in a timely manner."

The language in the Dissolution article of the Constitution was confusing, and the Board approved the following clarification for Article 9 of the Constitution:

"Dissolution of Assets Upon Dissolution. In the event of dissolution of the society, assets shall be distributed for one or more exempt purposes within the meaning of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future Federal tax code, or shall be distributed to the Federal Government or to a State or local government for a public purpose.

Yes, I would like to become a member of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie, New York, Inc. in the classification I have checked or renew my membership as noted.

My annual dues payment in the amount of \$ _____ is enclosed.

Classification	Annual Dues	Classification	Annual Dues	Classification	Annual Dues
<input type="checkbox"/> Students and Senior Citizens . .	\$10.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$15.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting	\$100—\$250
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	12.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Business	50.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor	\$250.00 & Up

Please accept my additional donation of \$ _____ as a gift to the Historical Society. *The Historical Society is a not-for-profit corporation.*

Name _____

Address _____

Cit/Town _____ Zip Code _____ Home Phone # _____

Cell Phone Number _____ E-Mail _____

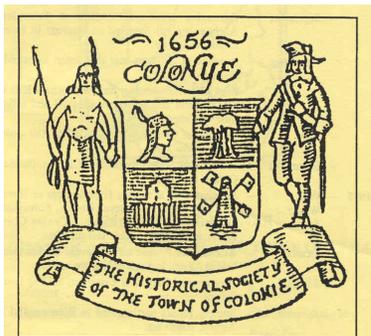
Please mail to Membership Chairperson c/o Historical Society, Memorial Town Hall, Newtonville, N. Y. 12128-0508

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THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE TOWN OF COLONIE

Kevin Franklin: Town Historian

Current Officers of the Society



Historical Society Founded 1971

MEMORIAL TOWN HALL
NEWTONVILLE, NY 12128-0508
518-782-2601

- President:** Mark Bodnar
- Vice Pres.:** Ed Engel
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- Corresponding Sec:** Ursula MacAffer
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Support the Society's efforts to stimulate an appreciation of the historical heritage of your community. Join Now!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Once again, our Town Historian Kevin Franklin has uncovered a story that's unfamiliar to most of us. Personally I had never even heard of The Snow Cruiser—until Kevin submitted his story to me for publication in this issue of our newsletter. Well, I always quote Harry Truman: "The only thing new in the world is the history we don't already know." Adding a related personal experience to Kevin's story, Trustee Jen Paley has included a touching story of her own. Great job, Jen and Kevin!

Warm weather has finally arrived and I know many of us are preparing our homes, lawns and gardens for a hopefully sunny, pleasant summer. For a nice evening out, I remind you that our 44th Annual Dinner is being held on Thursday, May 21 at 5:30 p.m. at the Shaker Ridge Country Club. Our keynote speaker is the well known, highly respected former Assemblyman Jack McEneny, whose topic is, "Got Roots? How to Propagate Them: The Heritage of Colonie." Announcements have been mailed out. If you haven't received it yet, please contact Bebe Morehead (694-8610) or Ann Eberle (713-4861) to reserve your seat. We hope to see many of you at the dinner.

Lastly, your Historical Society will again be represented at the re-enactment at Schuyler Flatts on Saturday and Sunday, August 15 & 16, from 9 a.m. till 3 p.m. Will we see you there? Mark your calendars. Wishing everyone a safe, pleasurable summer....

Mark Bodnar, President