

# GLIA project manager visits Island

## *Goal is to visit all 19 GLIA member Islands*

By Peter Huston

As the project manager for the Great Lakes Islands Alliance, and a resident of South Bass Island, in Put-in-Bay, Lake Erie, Ohio for the past 16 years, I've visited several Great Lakes islands. My visit to Washington Island is my first visit to an island with an ice breaking ferry.

It's about an 11-hour trip, depending on how many stops you make from the Ottawa County Regional Airport (here in Ohio) to the end of Hwy. 42 in Northport.

My goal is to get to all 19 GLIA islands this year. So far, I have been to Wolfe Island (Ontario), Pelee, Kelleys, Middle Bass and South Bass (Erie), Harsens Island (Lake St. Clair), Mackinac Island and Beaver (Huron) and Madeline Island, Superior. And now Washington!

At 8 a.m., as I get closer, I pass the St. Patrick's Day seasonal sign, "County Door," at the border between Door and Kewaunee Counties in the south, marking the beginning of beautiful Door County. I take time to stop in Sturgeon Bay to sneak a peek at the new Miller Ferry MV Mary Ann Market being worked on in the shipyard there.

I top off my diesel fuel tank just in case I don't get another chance, and

arrive in Northport around 10:30 a.m. No one is at the Washington Island Ferry Line ticket booth, but I call the "800" number and get a wave from the folks inside at the terminal building.

The temperature has gone from a balmy 52 degrees Thursday in Ohio to 21 degrees and dropping at the ferry dock.

Before I left Ohio, I had emailed Ferry Line president and captain Hoyt Purinton, hoping to meet him once I get to Washington Island to talk about converting the ferries to electric power. As luck would have it, there is an unscheduled 11 a.m. ferry that arrives right on time at the dock. I change my reservation and board. It's just me and one other car. They seem to be sightseers, taking selfies and checking out the view.

Once underway, I get out my arctic winter jacket and go out to take some pictures. A young guy with a thin jacket yells to me, "Hey! Are you Peter Huston?" Turns out Hoyt was on this special ferry fetching some much needed ferry repair parts. He comes over and gives me the full story about breaking ice, lake swells, and ferry design insights on hull thickness and horsepower (2000hp!) and converting to electric.

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It is an awesome experience to feel the powerful engines of Arni J. Richter breaking ice all the way into the angled dock tie up. Once I arrive on Island, I go inside the ferry office. I need a map and directions to the WISCO Coffee shop owned by Miranda and Jake Dahlke. "It's easy," they say; I only make one wrong turn, but two helpful ladies at the post office point me in the right direction.

The helpful young woman at the WISCO counter introduces me to Miranda. Like many Islanders, she and her husband both have two jobs. Miranda is a middle school teacher and Jake works at the ferry. I am excited to get a great cup of coffee, a fresh piece of quiche and some great Island insights.

After enjoying my quiche, I take a chance and headed over to the Washington Island school. The kids are gone for spring break, according to business manager Sue Cornell, but it is a "virtual" in-service day for the staff. We talk about the omicron surge of COVID-19 and mask mandates and the fact that it kept the kids from playing in the Great Lakes Islands basketball championship in December which was held in Put-in-Bay. Sue talks about the camaraderie the kids shared when the Beaver Island school came over a few years before and paraded through town and the fun they had at the tournament in Mackinac.

After checking out the Community Center and health clinic that Sue pointed out, I head over to Mann's Market.

I just want Washington Islanders to know how wonderful your grocery is. What an amazing selection of dairy and fresh produce, too. Lots of Door County products and a fully stocked beer, wine, and liquor department. The lady at the register is incredibly friendly and helps me

to locate some Island products like honey, syrup, and lavender oils.

After leaving Mann's I begin exploring the Island, following the map, going to the end of roads, and enjoying the crunchy beautiful snow. The Island had a rain storm and warm up earlier that week, followed by freezing temperatures that turned the glistening carpet of snow into ice on some back roads. It strikes me that the vast majority of the Island roads are paved. Not too shabby. My goal that afternoon is to find access to the shoreline. I visit People's Park on Little Lake Road, Schoolhouse Beach, Jackson Harbor and locate the fire and police departments, and a lumber yard.

After a great day of exploring, I stop at Bethel Church. I have been given permission to park my van in their lot overnight. Just as I am taking some pictures, a pickup truck pulls up with Bethel elders, and Shipyard Marina owners, Andy Munao and his wife Lisa. It is reassuring to know that I am absolutely welcome and not a surprise! (Thanks to GLIA members Mary and Martin Andersen.)

I call Mary Andersen after that and ask if she and Martin would be interested in meeting up for dinner. Around 5:30 p.m. we meet at KK Fiske.

I want to point out again how fortunate you are to have not just one restaurant but three open on a Friday. We have a great walleye dinner (locally caught by the restaurant owner) and talk for almost two hours about tourism, transportation, tour trains, the Rec pool and side-by-side ATV rentals. As we depart, Martin invites me to the men's fellowship breakfast at Bethel Church Saturday morning.

*This is part one in a two-part article. The next installment will be in the April 14 issue of the Observer.*



PHOTO BY PETER HUSTON

Great Lakes Island Alliance project manager Peter Huston toured Washington Island recently, in his camper van, from his home on South Bass Island in Lake Erie.



Peter Huston enjoys his first crossing to an island on an ice-breaking ferry.