

# By the Banks of Glory

By David S. Broder

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BEAVER ISLAND, Mich. -- The breaks in natural and human harmony have been blessedly few this summer on this beautiful island at the top of Lake Michigan -- and for the most part quickly repaired.

The big rumor is that Madonna rented the fancy new lodge called Deerwood for a weekend, found the beach too rocky for her taste and left early. Proprietor Jon Fogg, who jealously guards the privacy of his guests, refuses to divulge whether Madonna was actually there, but says, "I can swear she did not spend the night." In any case, most of us didn't see her entourage arrive and didn't know she was briefly in our midst, so we don't regret her departure.

The rural health center board was riven by controversy over the decision not to rehire a popular nurse-practitioner, and some angry words were exchanged at a jam-packed public meeting. But she has found another job on the mainland, and the well-qualified daughter of a popular former director of the Central Michigan University biological station on the island has applied for the position. Meanwhile, work on the expanded medical facility continues apace.

The debate over where to place the twisted steel and scorched concrete fragment of the World Trade Center that was donated to the island last year also has been resolved amicably. Some had advocated amending the bylaws of the Beaver Island Historical Society to allow it to be placed in Heritage Park, reserved for relics directly linked to events and people on the island. But that radical departure from precedent was rejected, and the memento of 9/11 will rest next to the firehouse, a fitting memorial to the heroic first responders in New York.

The only remaining concern is the continuing retreat of Lake Michigan, which every year ebbs farther away from us, exposing more yards of beach and adding to the boaters' hazards from rocks and shoals. The scientists all assure us that this is a cyclical phenomenon, perhaps magnified by climate changes, but not to be feared. Still, it would be nice to have the lake back in its full glory -- and not have to walk quite so far from shore to reach swimming depth.

Meanwhile, in Washington, an overdue effort has been launched to ensure the long-term future of all the Great Lakes. A bipartisan group of representatives and senators, drawn from the states bordering the Great Lakes, has called for creation of the Great Lakes Restoration Fund. It would authorize \$4 billion to finance a comprehensive plan to protect and enhance this extraordinary resource, the largest freshwater repository in the world.

I know that sounds like an awful lot of money in a time of budget deficits, but this is a national treasure, and it is in jeopardy. Democratic Rep. Rahm Emanuel of Illinois, one of the original co-sponsors, points out that in Lake Michigan, the number of beach closings rose from 162 in 1996 to 919 last year. Mercury levels are rising, alien species are invading and industrial and agricultural wastes threaten the source of drinking water for 28 million people.

The political support for this legislation is impressive. Emanuel, though a freshman, is well connected,

having served as a policy and political aide to President Bill Clinton. The lead Republican co-sponsor is Rep. Tom Reynolds of New York, chairman of the House GOP campaign arm, the National Republican Congressional Committee. The Senate co-sponsors are Democrat Carl Levin of Michigan and Republican Mike DeWine of Ohio.

The legislation is also of interest to the White House, eager to improve its environmental credentials and well aware of the fact that the band of states from New York and Pennsylvania on the east through Wisconsin and Minnesota on the west -- all of whose economies depend on the Great Lakes -- is a critical battleground in next year's elections.

Canada also has a big stake in these waters, and for a quarter-century the two countries, working through the International Joint Commission, have been trying to carry through the 1978 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. But lacking enforcement powers and a budget of its own, the commission reported in April that despite "a significant level of effort" in both countries, "much more work remains to be done."

With luck, that work will be accelerated by the new legislation, so when the water rises again, so will its quality.

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