"It's such an honor to be part of this"

Video reflects on Mackinac Bridge's U.S. flag device design

November 4, 2019 -- This Veterans Day, it will take just one person to unfurl a 30-foot by 60-foot American flag from the north tower of the Mackinac Bridge. A new video details how a new device designed and built by Mackinac Bridge Authority (MBA) staff – plus a little outside expertise – made that possible.


McLennan and Fitzpatrick recount the challenges of building the device and the feeling of success when it functioned as intended.

"It seemed like it was never going to happen; it was one hurdle after another," Fitzpatrick said. "That happened a number of times along the way, so when (finishing the device) finally did happen it was almost unbelievable."

"When it came down and everything went successfully and as according to plan, I couldn't have been happier," McLennan said. "I think Bill and I were on cloud nine that day."

While the new device was designed and built by MBA staff, O'Brien, who is also a seamstress, was called in to reinforce the flag against the Mackinac Straits winds.
"I think I jumped around a little bit when he called and asked, and I said, 'Well, yeah, I would love that,'" O'Brien recalls. "It's such an honor to be part of this. I really am impressed with the work that was done in this project and feel that it's very special."

Purchased in 2016 and first flown from the bridge's south tower on Memorial Day 2017, the flag is displayed on six holidays each year: Memorial Day, Flag Day, the Fourth of July, Labor Day, Patriots Day, and Veterans Day.

Hanging the flag required stopping traffic and roughly a dozen staff to unroll it as it was hoisted beneath the tower. Removing it each time took about the same time and effort, also delaying traffic during the process.

The device, roughly 36 feet long and 5 feet in diameter, also stores the flag and protects it from the elements when not in use. Crews worked on the device sporadically over the past two years, fitting it in between the year-round maintenance of the bridge.

The maintenance staff painted the device, matching the iconic ivory of the bridge towers. Installation on the tower took several days of calm weather to complete, and it was first used on July 4, 2019.

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