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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Longtime Executive Secretary Sweeney to retire May 17

May 1, 2019 -- While he grew up in St. Ignace seeing the Mackinac Bridge nearly every day, Bob Sweeney couldn't have known that one day he would be responsible for the operation and maintenance of this modern marvel. And yet, as the executive secretary of the Mackinac Bridge Authority (MBA), that's exactly what he's done for the past 17 years, raising his family in his hometown and caring for the Mighty Mac.

Sweeney is set to retire from that position on May 17, moving on to lead the Department of Public Works for the City of Port St. Lucie in Florida. At 2 p.m. Friday, the MBA board is scheduled to name his interim replacement during a brief meeting and celebrate Sweeney's career at a reception to follow. Both are open to the public at St. Ignace's Little Bear Arena.

"Bob has exemplified what it means to be a responsible steward, leading his team in the preservation of and stable planning for our iconic bridge," said MBA Chairman Patrick "Shorty" Gleason, who has been on the board for 15 years. "We'll greatly miss his cheerful demeanor, servant leadership, expertise and professional integrity, and wish him the best in this new endeavor."

During his time at the bridge, Sweeney led the MBA through the first significant toll increases in the bridge's history, major changes in the Annual Bridge Walk (eliminating the buses but giving people the opportunity to start from either side or walk across and back), and guided development of a 20-year business plan to address more than \$300 million in preservation projects for the nearly 62-year-old structure.

"Basically, you are running a multimillion-dollar business: maintaining the bridge, controlling costs, collecting sufficient revenue and saving for future needs," Sweeney said. "Through it all, we have stayed accountable to the Straits communities and Michigan, while drawing national and international attention."

Sweeney's local cooperation has also been appreciated. In particular, Mackinaw City Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Jamie Westfall noted Sweeney's efforts to keep the Annual Bridge Walk tradition alive through changes.

"Bob has been a great collaborator with our communities and supporter of our annual events, recognizing the importance of the event as a source of regional pride and tradition, and gave our community an opportunity to attend meetings, speak, share ideas, and provide input to the Board during the complex transition of the event over the past two years," Westfall said. "We appreciate that and the many other kindnesses extended to our membership over the years. He will be missed."

Along the way, Sweeney says he's been supported by dedicated and talented employees, from the maintenance crews who keep the bridge in excellent condition to the friendly and efficient toll collection and auditing staff.

"We belong to a couple of international associations, and when we give presentations on our operations and maintenance, we are clearly envied for the talent, professionalism and efficacy of the work we perform in-house," he said. "Everyone here treats this bridge as if it is their own, and it is!"

Sweeney has also enjoyed the backing of the many different MBA board members over his storied career.

"I have been very fortunate to have had diverse, talented and supportive board members throughout my tenure," he said. "They have all provided me, and the Mackinac Bridge, with a lot of support during my nearly 17 years here and that has made my job very enjoyable."

A 1986 grad of Michigan State University with a Bachelor of Science in civil engineering, Sweeney worked in Chicago for airport design firm Landrum & Brown before coming to work for the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). He held positions in Alpena and Cadillac before coming to the Mackinac Bridge, joined in every move by his wife, Maureen (who will retire the same day from her own 33-year career at MDOT), and their children, Patrick and Molly.

"Maureen, Patrick and Molly have been very supportive of my career," he said. "St. Ignace and the Straits area are not only a great community to work in, but also a great place to raise a family."

Sweeney does not expect to be back for this year's Annual Bridge Walk, but he will return.

"Not this year. I will have to keep my head down and burn the midnight oil to learn the ins and outs of my new job," he said. "However, we are keeping our house in St. Ignace so I will walk the bridge again in the not-too-distant future. I will be a 'double-crosser' for sure!"

Photo caption information:



Larry Rubin, left, the first Mackinac Bridge Authority (MBA) Executive Secretary, and Bob Sweeney, the current MBA Executive Secretary, shake hands at the Mackinac Bridge stamp unveiling ceremony in 2010. MDOT photo



Bob Sweeney portrait. MDOT photo

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