

Cure for constipation

Bernie Gray recalls kayaking trip to Florida

By Jack Evans

The Intelligencer

Some 2,500 miles from Point Traverse in Prince Edward County to Key West, Florida in 18 weeks was the saga seasoned sailor/kayaker Bernard (Bernie) Gray related to the Rotary Club of Belleville this week.

Gray delivered his talk with his sea-worn kayak, Hagar Twa, stretched in front of the head table in the Ramada Inn Park Room to an attentive and enthusiastic audience.

It was a great trip, he summed up, but he admitted he wished at several points that "somebody would steal my kayak so I didn't have to carry on."

That seemed to happen especially on days of strong winds and confusing seas.

But warmed by the many personal friendships and favors he had experienced along the way, Gray paddled on.

Right from the start, the trip was fraught with incorrect information. "What was promised to be a calm, moonlight night (on June 28 when he set out from Point Traverse) was windy, rainy and a course putting-off northwest wind," he recalled. "Nothing was right."

Delayed a couple of hours, and with the help of the United States Coast Guard, he finally made it to his first destination of Oswego having been fixed in his tiny kayak for over 12 hours.

"I slept like a log," he said.

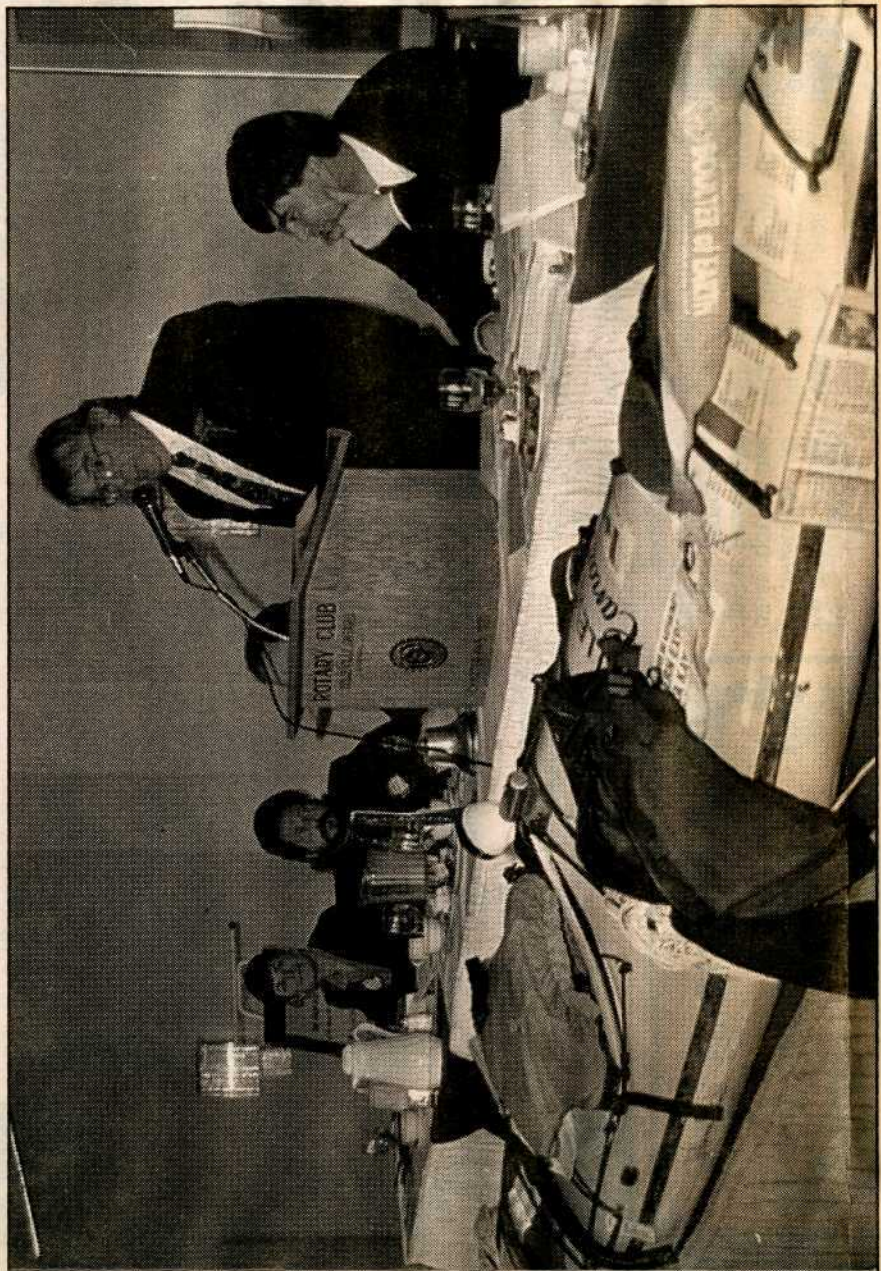
There followed a delightful trip down the old Erie Canal system with lock keepers putting him through at no charge and giving him much assistance, and "many impressive views, especially West Point," he said. But in the confined waters of the canal system, there were some "heavy wakes" at times, especially from the likes of 200-foot barges being pushed by tugboats.

And along the canal was a "graveyard of old industrial buildings," he noted.

As he got further south, Americans took great interest in his adventure, made much of his age — "I didn't think of myself at 56 as old" — and noticing his pronounced Scottish burr, often asked: "Does everyone talk like that up there?"

GRAY, Bernie

P.1
CONT'D



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Bernie Gray with his kayak, Hagar Twa, speaks to Rotary Club this week.

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