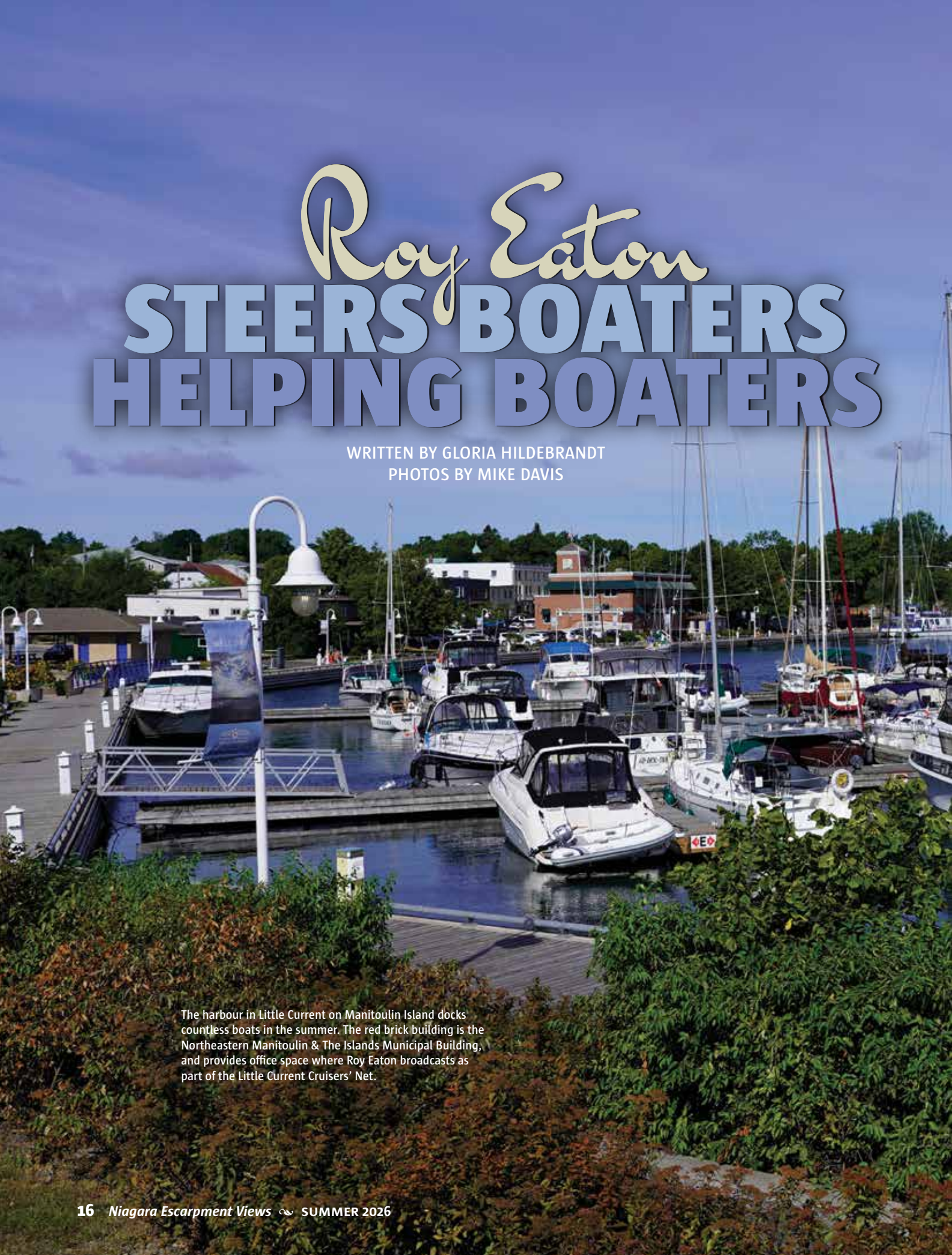
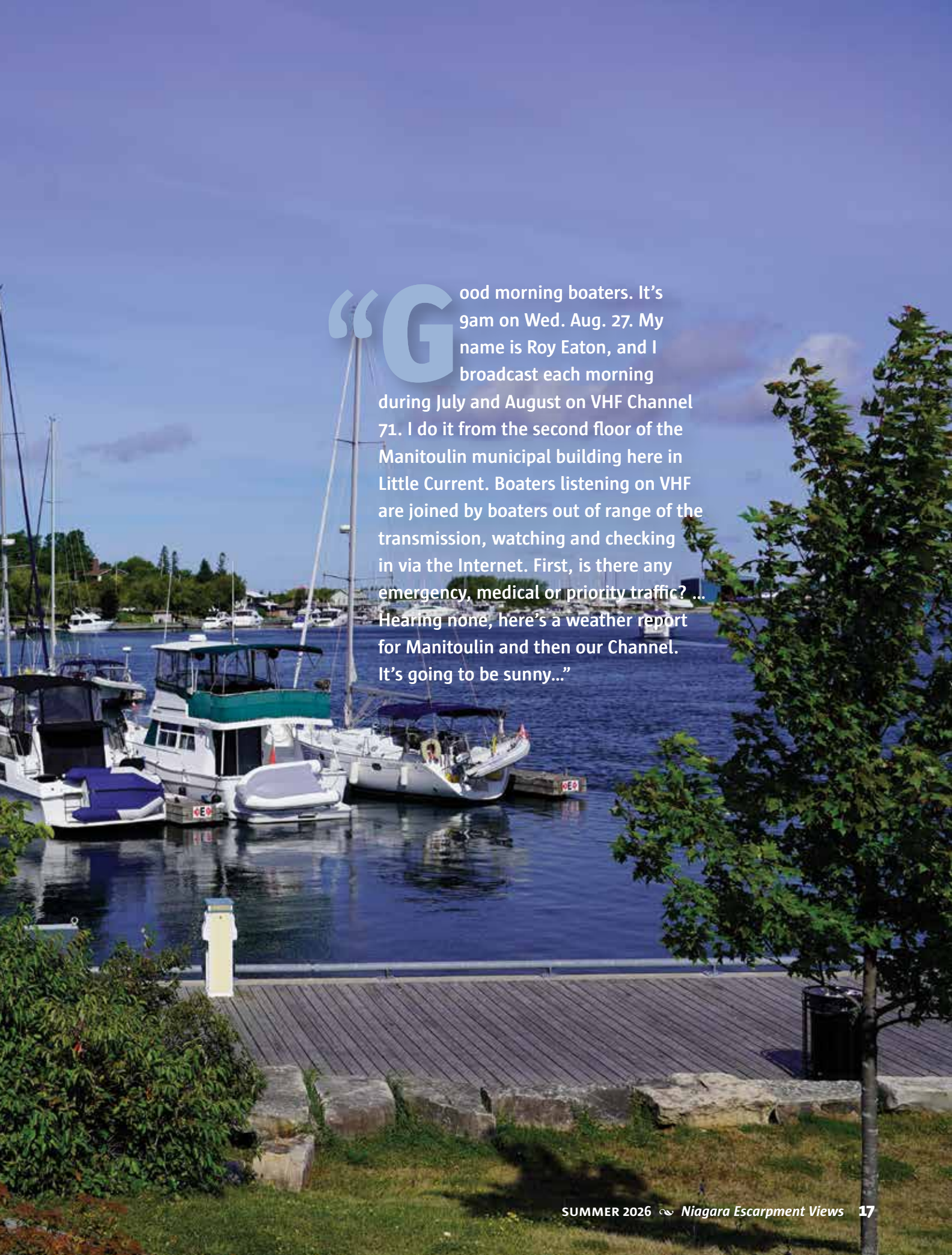




Roy Eaton STEERS BOATERS HELPING BOATERS

WRITTEN BY GLORIA HILDEBRANDT
PHOTOS BY MIKE DAVIS

The harbour in Little Current on Manitoulin Island docks countless boats in the summer. The red brick building is the Northeastern Manitoulin & The Islands Municipal Building, and provides office space where Roy Eaton broadcasts as part of the Little Current Cruisers' Net.



“Good morning boaters. It’s 9am on Wed. Aug. 27. My name is Roy Eaton, and I broadcast each morning during July and August on VHF Channel 71. I do it from the second floor of the Manitoulin municipal building here in Little Current. Boaters listening on VHF are joined by boaters out of range of the transmission, watching and checking in via the Internet. First, is there any emergency, medical or priority traffic? ... Hearing none, here’s a weather report for Manitoulin and then our Channel. It’s going to be sunny...”



▲ Roy Eaton broadcasting from the studio inside the Northeastern Manitoulin & The Islands Municipal Building in Little Current.

Roy is Net Controller of Little Current Cruisers' Net, a boaters' network with a daily broadcast, that he began in 2004 as a free benefit for members of Little Current Yacht Club, which he headed from 2003 to 2006. He credits Bruce O'Hare and the Anchor Inn of Little Current, for initial financial support. In addition to giving a weather report, every day he summarizes world and local news, sport and community events, but his main focus is supporting the safety and comfort of boaters in the North Channel, the body of water separating Manitoulin from the north shore of Lake Huron.

Roy describes his broadcast

reach as "Bustard Islands in northern Georgian Bay to the end of the Whalesback Channel. But abnormal weather conditions have led to a clear signal being received southeast to Parry Sound and west to Mackinac Island."

Examples of help provided to boaters range from boaters arriving when someone has engine problems, to towing a boat through the North Channel, or towing a sailboat to Gore Bay, down to boaters meeting up to share their ice for drinks. Callers to the studio mention their thanks to other boaters for help of all kinds. The Net is registered with search and rescue organizations and is prepared to help with emergencies.

"Other boats will look for

a boat that's not responding and ask them to get in contact," says Roy. The group's motto is "Boaters helping boaters."

The morning broadcast asks boaters to call in with their boat names and locations. Some give water and weather conditions for their locations. Boaters will relay information to boaters who can't hear the broadcast from the studio. Boaters are asked for any questions they may have. A volunteer records details and on this day in August, there were 33 callers, texters and Zoomers during the half-hour broadcast time slot.

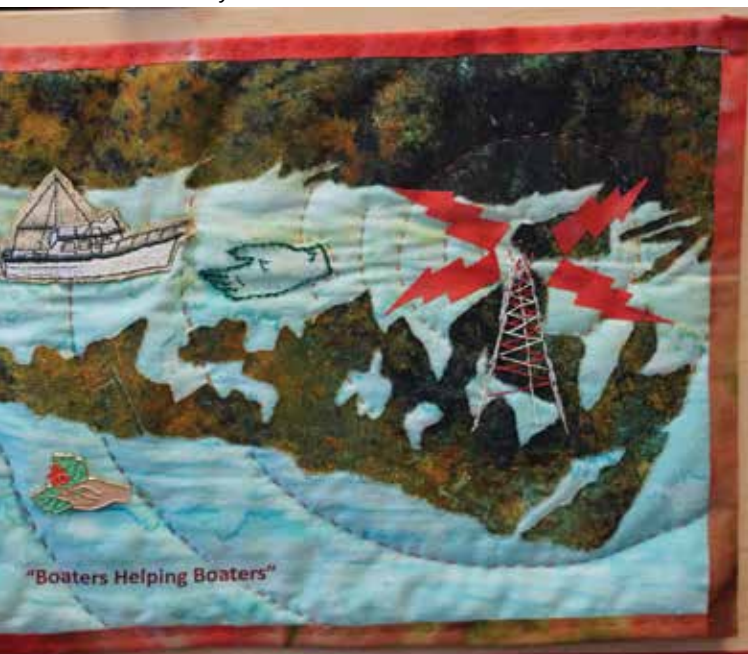
The impact being made by the Net is apparent from the more-than 200 boaters' flags lining the entire walls of the studio from floor to the





▲ The Cruisers' Net has been helping boaters since 2004.

▼ A quilted map showing Manitoulin Island, a boat in the North Channel, two helping hands, and a tower showing radio signals, is attached to the desk where Roy broadcasts.





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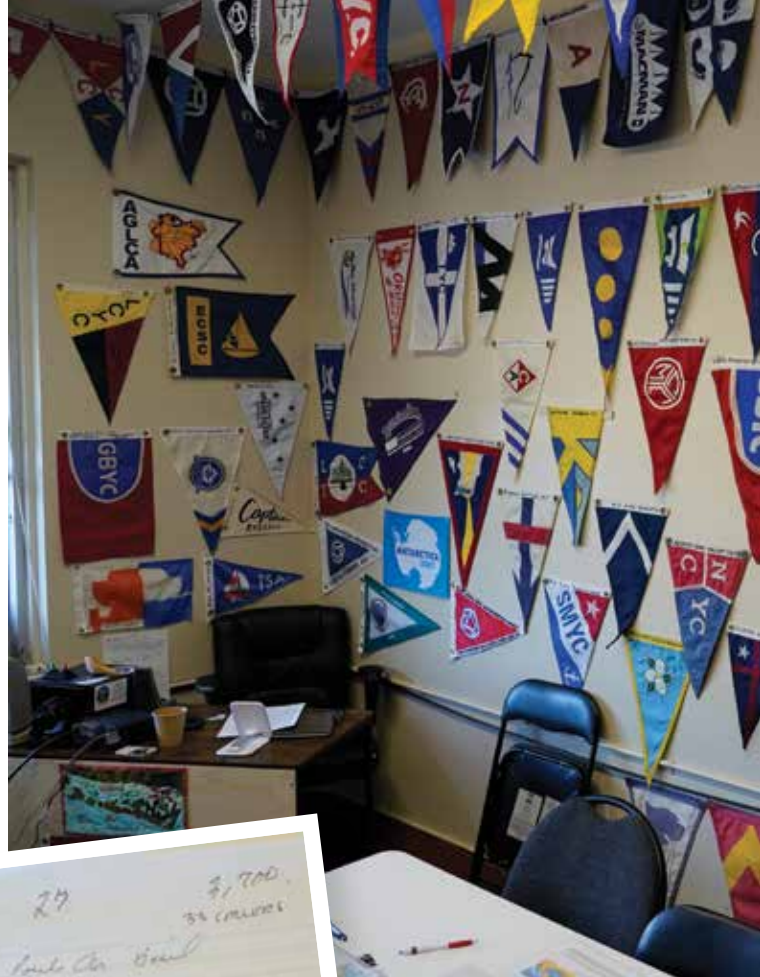
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▲ Careful notes being taken during Roy's broadcast.

► Notes about the 33 callers who contacted Cruisers' Net on Aug. 27.

top and even hanging from the ceiling. These colourful triangular pennants celebrate boaters' clubs, organizations and events from a vast area. There is a foreign wall displaying pennants from New Zealand, Australia, Turkey and other places around the world, including one from Antarctica. Another flag is presented to Roy today, by Glenn Grosskurth, vice commander of Lake Simcoe Yacht Club.

Community

"We really have formed a community in the North Channel," says Roy. "Strangers feel good about joining in."

Members of the Net meet at Anchor Inn, Little Current, the former location of the Net, every Friday afternoon

in July and August. Free hors d'oeuvres are provided for boaters. Once a summer, Roy and his wife Margaret host a potluck supper for the Cruisers' Net. Door prizes are given by local businesses.

The Net holds a poker run by dinghy, in which boaters go to five places to get cards to form their hand. Roy also organizes boater bags, which are provided by the Town, and filled with contributions





▲ Boaters' flags and pennants cover the walls and hang from the ceiling of the studio.



▲ Glenn Grosskurth, vice commander of Lake Simcoe Yacht Club, presents Roy with his club's pennant.



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from local businesses and magazines like *Niagara Escarpment Views*. Boaters can come to the studio to pick up bags or Roy and Margaret take them to boaters' meetings.

In addition to having fun, the Net gives back to the community, supporting such fundraisers as a lemonade stand to benefit cancer treatments, and collecting money from the international boaters' community for specialized equipment for Little Current's hospital.

Roy's Own Boats

Roy has always been involved with boats, saying that from childhood he grew up with runabout fishing boats. "In the early 1960s I had a 15-foot Starcraft and was looking for a larger powerboat we could sleep overnight. We ended up buying a secondhand Catalina and through reading learned how to sail. In 1983 we [he and Margaret] did a circumnavigation of Georgian Bay and in 1984 we bought a brand-new CS 30. We sailed all the Great Lakes. On July 2, 2001 we left Spider Bay Marina [west of downtown Little Current] on a nine-month sail, down the ICW [Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway] to cross over and West Palm Beach to spend three months in the Abacos [islands in the Bahamas]."

With Roy being a retired principal and Margaret a retired teacher, Cruisers' Net is well organized and well connected. Running the Net is a big commitment, notes Roy, and as of summer 2025 there was no succession plan. It is to be hoped that whenever the time comes that Roy wants to step back, there will be someone else willing and able to take the helm. **NEV**

Roy Eaton can be reached at roy.eaton@gmail.com or 705.698.4131.



◀ Gloria Hildebrandt, editor of *Niagara Escarpment Views*, being interviewed by Roy for radio broadcast.



▲ Anchor Inn, Little Current, serves as the social headquarters of the Cruisers’ Net, where members meet every Friday afternoon in July and August.

▼ The Swing Bridge, formerly a single-lane rail bridge and the only land connection to the island, in the North Channel at Little Current. When needed, it swings open once an hour to permit tall ships through.



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