

Listening to the Lake Radio Program
Shorelink Interpreter
8/24/05, KUMD Radio, Duluth, MN
5:13 minutes

(Opening music)

Welcome to Listening to the Lake. I'm Marie Zhuikov with UMD's Minnesota Sea Grant Program.

Today we'll meet Leah Ladehoff (LADEEHOF). This lucky lady gets to spend the summer along the North Shore of Lake Superior, interpreting its biology and geology for visitors. Her work is a new part of the Shorelink Program, which is trying to strengthen interpretation and cooperation among organizations along the shore. The Sugarloaf Cove Interpretive Center Association based out of Schroeder leads the effort.

I caught up with Leah at Canal Park in Duluth, where the topic of the day is exotic plants and animals that live in Lake Superior. A crowd gathers around her humble AV cart with sign, which is parked next to the gates on the pier.

[Leah] How long have you guys been here in Duluth?

[Boy] About a half hour.

[Leah] Just a half hour huh? Where are you from?

[Boy] We're from New Prague.

[Leah] Ah, so down in southern Minnesota, huh? Hello.

[Girl] Hi.

[Leah] How are you?

[Girl] Good.

[Leah] Have you had a chance to see a sea lamprey up close?

[Woman] What is it?

[Leah] It's a sea lamprey. It's a replica. It's not a real one.

[Woman] What do they do?

[Leah] What happens, do you see his mouth right there? What they'll do is they will latch onto fish like that, and then they feed on the fish's fluids – the blood and whatnot...

Leah teaches the visitors why exotic species like the sea lamprey are problems and gives them handouts that describe what they should do if they find any. This day, it's windy, so Leah anchors the publications down with rocks. In getting her message across, besides weather, Leah has to contend with the various sights and sounds that compete for a tourist's attention like ships passing through the canal, the Aerial Lift Bridge going down...

Sound of bell ringing.

...or the gulls.

Sound of ring-billed gulls competing for handouts.

Leah works for 35 hours, 5 days a week as Shorelink field interpreter, traveling from Duluth to Grand Marais, and places in between. She finds differences between audiences depending on location.

"The crowds that come down here to Canal Park are different than those that I find in state parks. People who are down here usually have a lot of kids, or you know, maybe ah, just 2 adults down here walking side-by-side and they're not really expecting to learn anything and so I think by having this down here, it gives people, whether they be tourists or long-time residents, the opportunity to learn more about Lake Superior. The crowds that I find at state parks, they want a lot more information, they I think sometimes maybe expect that out of a state park.... They're so happy to either build on the knowledge that they already have or just to learn about something that's new."

Leah talks to an average of 80 people a day about topics ranging from sea gulls and North Shore geology to rip currents. Andrew Slade, director of the Sugarloaf Cove Interpretive Association explains that Leah's job is funded by a grant from the Lake Superior Coastal Program. He describes the idea behind a roving naturalist.

"Rather than waiting or hoping that people will find a way to stop off the highway and find Sugarloaf Cove, which is hard to do, why not go right to where the people are? So the overall grant that it's part of is trying to strengthen interpretation on the North Shore through collaborative activities... and in this case, the collaborative activity is not only going to where the people are, but also working with the organizations like the City of Duluth, like Sea Grant, like the Sanitary District, like Minnesota State Parks, that have these things as their mission but might not have the opportunity to put someone down on the Lakewalk for 4 hours a day doing outreach programs for them."

Slade says the program meets a basic need that people have for information. He's received good feedback from park managers and tourists about the program.

Why put all this effort into informing people who may only visit for a short time? Slade explains:

"There's a couple reasons for that. One is that we all live in a watershed. So the work we're doing here obviously can have good influence other parts of the state. Another positive thing I hope down the road is all these projects that are working to protect the North Shore, most of them are funded through statewide funds and national funds and so if we can help strengthen the political will of the people of the Twin Cities to protect the North Shore then ideally, down the road, there will be some support, better support, for the kind of work, the important work that needs to happen up here."

Leah's work wraps up the end of August. The grant funding her runs out this year but Slade hopes to find a way to continue the program next summer.

I'm Marie Zhuikov for Listening to the Lake from the Minnesota Sea Grant Program at UMD. This is the second to last show we have planned. We'd appreciate your feedback about Listening to the Lake to help us decide whether to continue the show. You can call Marie at 726-7677 (repeat) and leave your comments.