

**Smithsonian Institution
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**Philanthropy Initiative
Oral History Project**

**Interview with:
Leanne Brodeur
Administrative Assistant, Ste. Anne's Church
Mackinac Island, Michigan**

**Interview conducted by:
Amanda B. Moniz, Ph.D.
David M. Rubenstein Curator of Philanthropy
National Museum of American History**

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Mackinac Island, Michigan**

AMANDA MONIZ: This is Amanda Moniz conducting an oral history with Leanne Brodeur at Ste. Anne's Church on Mackinac Island. Today is July 5, 2018 and we're in the parish hall at Ste. Anne's Church. Could you please state your name and birthplace?

LEANNE BRODEUR: Leanne Brodeur, born in Petoskey, Michigan.

MONIZ: Thank you. Did you grow up in Petoskey?

BRODEUR: No, I grew up here on the island. I was brought here when I was about three days old.

MONIZ: Can you tell me about growing up on the island?

BRODEUR: It was a wonderful place to grow up. We were outdoors all the time. I am particularly interested in horses and have been since I was old enough to sit up. Being on the island, of course, horses are the main mode of transportation other than biking.

MONIZ: So, did you learn to ride a horse when you were a kid?

BRODEUR: Yeah. My dad rode and my brother rode, so I was either riding with them when I was very little or being led on a horse with them. It was great fun. Then I got my first pony at eight and haven't stopped since.

MONIZ: Wow. Can you tell me about your family? What did your parents do?

BRODEUR: My father had Wandrie's Restaurant here on the island. Actually, it was his great-grandfather's, and then his father had it, and then he had it for many years. He'd been in business for a long time, and we went from a little restaurant business to gift shops and then bar/restaurant.

MONIZ: And you mentioned you had a brother?

BRODEUR: Yes. Matter of fact, one of them took over. One of the family was part of the church here before I came along.

MONIZ: I think you had mentioned when we talked before that you had an uncle who was a priest.

BRODEUR: Yes.

MONIZ: Am I remembering that?

BRODEUR: Yep, Father Ted Brodeur. He was in Detroit and studied there. Gosh, he was in quite a few different locations, but he got to retire here, and I got to work with him before he passed.

MONIZ: When did you start working at the church?

BRODEUR: Was it probably the year before he came, maybe? I was just doing winters. They had hired a gentleman here to do year round, and he decided he didn't want to be here in the wintertime. So, I took over the winters, and he did summers for a while. Then he decided he didn't want to be at Ste. Anne's, so they offered the full-time, year-round job to me, which is really nice.

MONIZ: Can you tell me a little bit about your role here?

BRODEUR: I am the secretary and a little bit of everything. Everything and anything that needs done, I try to keep up on.

MONIZ: I'm curious to hear about what the church is like in the wintertime. If you could talk about services and charitable work in the wintertime.

BRODEUR: Yeah. About November 1st things really slow down, and we go to one mass a week on Sundays at 10:30. We actually move the church down here into the parish hall. There's a false wall that goes up, and this front area where we're at right now is the church. Then the other section is left for activities. So, it quiets down quite a bit. It's very expensive to heat upstairs. It's all electric heat, which the island is pretty much all electric, and moving down here saves quite a bit of money in that respect, and plus, the lack of people. Typically, in the summer we have well over a hundred, probably closer to 200 people per mass. In the wintertime, we go down to 25, 30 per mass.

BRODEUR: We do move back up to church in the wintertime for Christmas, because it's beautiful, and we love to decorate it. Also, we have a concert or two up there. We try to move back up at Easter-time, depending on the weather.

MONIZ: I think you had mentioned that you provide meals to shut-ins during the winter. Can you talk about that?

BRODEUR: Yes. We do a Meals on Snowmobiles program. That was started ... Gosh, it's got to be 20-some years ago by Kathy Andress, who saw a need in the community to do that. So, she started down here in the kitchen and cooked

meals for just a few people, and now we do probably 25/30 people in the wintertime twice a week, two hot meals a week.

MONIZ: So, you said somebody delivers them on snowmobiles?

BRODEUR: Snowmobiles, yes.

MONIZ: Wow.

BRODEUR: If we can't use the snowmobiles, the fire department or the police department deliver, because in the wintertime those vehicles are out and about and used a lot more.

MONIZ: Can you talk about any other charitable work or missionary work in the wintertime?

BRODEUR: Not so much in the wintertime. We do have a big Christmas bazaar the first part of December, and that is for all the churches and the medical center, and it's a community event. There's all kinds of handmade goods, and auctions, and food. It's kind of a fun activity. We do a tree lighting right down on Main Street, getting ready for Christmas. The proceeds are split. I think it was about \$10,000 that was raised. That's about the normal amount.

BRODEUR: So, in the wintertime, then, it's pretty quiet. We try to do our religious ed[ucation] programs for the kids at school, and that's it in the winter for the most part.

MONIZ: Am I right that there's one school on the island?

BRODEUR: Yes, we have a K-12 school. It has kind of two sections. One's the elementary end and one's the high school end. I think there's probably between 80 and 90 students right now, K-12.

MONIZ: Is that where you went to school?

BRODEUR: Yes.

MONIZ: I'm really curious to talk, as you know, about the summer outreach and charitable work. I know you hold dinners during the high season once a week for the seasonal workers. Could you talk about when that program developed?

BRODEUR: That I am not too sure of. It was here. It's been here a long time.

MONIZ: Oh.

BRODEUR: I believe Brother Jim and Father Jim Williams were probably instrumental in starting that, particularly Brother Jim, and it has been going on for quite some time, too. It's a weekly free meal for summer employees. They can come and congregate with their fellow workers and have a free meal. It's just a really nice thing to be able to do to appreciate our summer employees. They come here and they work hard. It's expensive to eat out all the time. Most of them live in dorm-style housing with no cooking facilities. So, they either have to eat at their place of employment, and they have to pay for that, or go out to restaurants, which is expensive. So, at least to be able to do that for them, and plus, to get to meet people.

MONIZ: Are the dinners held here in the parish hall?

BRODEUR: Yes, they are.

MONIZ: Can you describe how it works?

BRODEUR: Brother Jim came up earlier this year, and he's not here this summer, so this is kind of new and different for us. He went around to all the restaurants and hotels that have restaurants and asked them to donate a meal. They do all the prep work and sometimes deliver. Sometimes we pick up a meal. Then we provide something to drink, maybe a dessert, and then do all the clean-up and all the serving.

MONIZ: Did you say that in the early years church members cooked the meals, or have you always been having the restaurants provide the meal?

BRODEUR: I think they probably started out cooking some of the meals, if not all of them. I'm not sure. Again, that would be a Brother Jim question.

MONIZ: About how many people attend the meals?

BRODEUR: Gosh, well over a hundred. It could vary. It just depends on the time of year. This year we're only doing five meals, where previously I think we have done maybe eight or nine, maybe even ten meals. We'll see how it goes, and if we can stretch it out, we will. It's all volunteers, so finding the volunteer people to be here to cover all the bases is the hard part.

MONIZ: Who volunteers?

BRODEUR: We have a few gentlemen that took it on this summer, Tom McCurley and Jack Duvén. They're kind of spearheading. Val Porter's going to do the last meal for this year. So, that works out well. It's somebody that needs to be here to supervise and make sure all the volunteers do what they do. We have the same people come year after year, so a lot of them know the routine. But, then, making sure that the kitchen's all cleaned up and all the food's taken care of at the end is important. Yeah, that's a good program.

MONIZ: Why do you think it's a good program?

BRODEUR: It's so important for the kids that come up here, that they get shown that they're appreciated even a little bit, because they work hard.

MONIZ: Where do they come from?

BRODEUR: All over the place. You mean, where they come from off the island to here?

MONIZ: Yeah, yeah.

BRODEUR: There's a lot of foreign workers that are here, so it's nice to give them an opportunity to meet people from other places. Instead of just going from their dorm to work, this gives them an outlet to meet other people. Yeah, we have a lot of foreign workers: Philippines, Eastern Europe.

MONIZ: Do you have people attend who work in different types of employment?

BRODEUR: Yeah, yeah. It would be maids, housekeeping, dock porters, bar tenders, waitresses, waiters, cook help.

MONIZ: I'm curious, actually, first, how you advertise. How do they find out about these meals?

BRODEUR: A lot of times it's word of mouth. Matter of fact, I have posters to put out today, and it goes onto our Facebook page as well.

MONIZ: The summer workers who come, typically, are they Catholic, or are they not Catholic? Do you know?

BRODEUR: Not a clue.

MONIZ: You don't know.

BRODEUR: We'll take anybody, and everybody's welcome.

MONIZ: Do you do other sorts of charitable or outreach work in the summer?

BRODEUR: Well, the Vacation Bible School. It's just finishing up. That's a week. Volunteers come in and do that for the kids. That's non-denominational. We have the Jamaican masses once a week, Wednesdays. We have Brother Glendon. He works at the Grand Hotel and has been there for many years. He comes down and leads that. That's at 10:00 at night, and actually sometimes it's later than 10:00, because it depends on their schedule—a lot of the wait staff and kitchen staff. It's fun to have them here.

BRODEUR: Val Porter does some work with our Mexican workers, and Brother Jim did, too. We have a square dance, which is just something fun to do. We're going to try to get one in this summer. Oh, gosh, what am I forgetting? We have AA here once a week. I think that's it.

BRODEUR: We've had English-speaking classes for the Mexicans before. Val would know more about that. Those are the ones that I can think of right off-hand.

MONIZ: When did you start holding Jamaican masses?

BRODEUR: Oh, gosh. It's been a long time. I have no idea.

MONIZ: What makes them distinctively Jamaican?

BRODEUR: Their music.

MONIZ: What kind of jobs do the Jamaican staff hold?

BRODEUR: Pretty much housekeeping, serving, cooking.

MONIZ: Do you know if the same people come back each summer, or is it different people each summer?

BRODEUR: I know that there are a lot of them that have been here for years. But, with the HB2 changes, some of that has been the same. Yeah, a lot of them come back year after year. I mean, we kind of depend on it.

MONIZ: What about the Mexican workers? What sort of jobs?

BRODEUR: The same with them. They do a lot of the same type of work.

MONIZ: Remind me what the program was for them that you offer. You mentioned some outreach for them.

BRODEUR: Yeah. That would be Val Porter. She does some outreach with them ... and Brother Jim, of course.

MONIZ: I'm curious if you could talk a little about how you've seen the island change over the time you've lived here.

BRODEUR: Well, I think that it used to be, of course, not as busy; but, even at that, the boat schedule. In the past, the boats quit earlier in the day, and the island was more local. The workers were more local. We had softball leagues, and volleyball leagues, and baseball. That's kind of changed some now. Now there's soccer. We do have a year-round rec director, so that helps. Then the influx of foreign workers coming in, too.

BRODEUR: But now the boats run late, and there's double shifts, and people work different shifts all the time. So, trying to get people together to do things has become a lot more difficult. There isn't that time. So, as much as the softball leagues and all that stuff has kind of gone by the wayside ... I mean, there's pickup games and things like that; but, back in the day, it was a big deal.

MONIZ: Do the summer staff get to know one another, do you think?

BRODEUR: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I think they definitely interact quite a bit. I mean, I'm an oldster now, so I don't get into that too much anymore. When I was younger, I always used to hang out with all the summer workers, and do fun things, and be out and about, and go to the bars and dance, and there's always bands going on. But, again, now with the work schedules for a lot [of people], it's probably not quite the same.

MONIZ: Why have the work schedules changed so much?

BRODEUR: Because of the lengthening of the season and also the lengthening of the boat schedules.

MONIZ: I see.

BRODEUR: I mean, I think there's a boat off the island at 11:00 at night.

MONIZ: Oh, wow.

BRODEUR: Before, at 6:00, boats were done-

MONIZ: Okay, I see.

BRODEUR: ... and so you had the whole evening. Summer evenings are long, and there was plenty of time for everybody to get together. But now, it's a little bit harder to fit everybody's schedule in.

MONIZ: Have the visitors changed as well as the workforce? Where the visitors come from? Like, tourists?

BRODEUR: Yeah, again, I think we see a lot more foreign visitors, which is kind of cool. They really come from very far away to come to Mackinac Island, which is pretty astounding.

MONIZ: Can you talk about how the church has changed over your lifetime?

BRODEUR: Again, it was just to me a little, quiet Catholic church, and it was the community church. Then, as time went on, we've expanded that to be more welcoming and more open to a lot more people.

MONIZ: Am I right in thinking that the priest here now was from Ghana originally?

BRODEUR: Yes.

MONIZ: When did he arrive?

BRODEUR: This is his second summer here. He arrived in January, and spent a month up in Marquette, Michigan, and then came straight to the island. This is our second priest from Ghana. Our first was here a year. What a culture shock: getting them on a snowmobile, and wearing all the jackets and clothing, and just snow itself.

MONIZ: Oh, yeah.

BRODEUR: So, definitely a culture shock for them.

MONIZ: Yeah. I can imagine it was quite a change. Can you talk about how the church's history shapes its work today?

BRODEUR: Well, I think because it was always a missionary church for so long, that that's sort of part of the church here; to be a missionary type of operation, to be sure that we get out there and make sure everybody knows we're here and are welcome here.

MONIZ: Could you talk about what the church's history means to you in particular?

BRODEUR: It's just always been here. It's nice to have that connection. We used to go back and forth to Florida in the wintertime, and I, of course, didn't like that at all. There wasn't that connection with the church there. So, this is home. You always feel comfortable at home.

MONIZ: What do you mean that there wasn't that connection with the church there?

BRODEUR: It was just so big and ... I don't know ... institutionalized that it just didn't have the feel, the closeness, up here.

MONIZ: Before we turn to me asking you about a few final reflections, I wonder if there are any experiences that particularly stick out in your mind that you've had with the shut-ins that the church works with in the winter, or with the summer workers, or really, any of the charitable work you do?

BRODEUR: I think the hardest part is seeing the list go down. I'm going to cry. We've lost people. That's hard.

MONIZ: Is the church membership declining?

BRODEUR: Yeah, to a certain extent, it is, and that's hard, too.

MONIZ: People have passed on.

BRODEUR: Or moved off the island. They get to a point where living on the island is difficult. So, that's part of the cycle of Mackinac.

MONIZ: What do they particularly find difficult about it?

BRODEUR: Getting on and off the island. Just being able to get out and about. You really have to be fairly mobile. Especially wintertimes. It makes it a little harder, although the police department offers seniors rides. Still, you have to get on a plane or get on a boat to get to where you're going. So, it's easier if you're on the mainland to be able to just hop in a car and go where you need to go.

BRODEUR: We do have a medical center here, which is very good. But, again, if it's something serious, you have to be transported off, and that can be tricky.

MONIZ: How often do you get off the island?

BRODEUR: When I had kids at home, it was at least twice a month, but now I can pare it down to once a month, and it's just a grocery trip. You try to do everything that you can when you go across: appointments, groceries, whatever, and then get back.

MONIZ: Do you take the regular commercial ferries to get off?

BRODEUR: Mm-hmm (affirmative). They have a commuter pass for the locals, so you get a break in the price.

MONIZ: I see. Well, are there things about the summer dinners that you think I should know about that I haven't asked about?

BRODEUR: Oh, gosh. It would be nice to talk to the kids that actually do it, and again, Brother Jim. Because he was here all the time, he would know more, have more interaction with them. They're a great bunch. I know they wrote thank you notes to the community foundation. Everybody signed this great big piece of paper, which was kind of cool. Our community foundation is instrumental in making our programs work and be available. We write grants for all of our programs pretty much.

MONIZ: Do they provide a grant for the summer dinners?

BRODEUR: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It's a small one, but it helps us. We purchase all the paper plates, and all the forks and knives, and all the added stuff that you need to have to go with stuff and things like that, so lemonade, the drinks, coffee. That grant helps pay for that.

BRODEUR: In the wintertime, they do the same. In the wintertime we actually cook all the meals. One of our local fellows that is a chef, he comes in and cooks, and he brings a few of his friends that are cooks on the island, chefs. They all get together and cook the meals. It's funny to see them get together and plan. They really put a lot of thought into the meals.

MONIZ: I'm sure the seniors really appreciate those.

BRODEUR: Yeah. They do that for, like, 10 weeks, I think. Probably about 10 weeks. So, it keeps them busy, and it's very nice. We give them a stipend at the

end of the year. It certainly doesn't cover their amount of time, but it's a good thing.

MONIZ: Let me ask for a few final reflections. Is there something that you regret or that didn't go the way you hoped with your charitable activity?

BRODEUR: I think you always want to do more. We're doing five meals this summer for the summer employees, and usually we do quite a few more. So, it's a little disappointing to have to cut back a little bit, but that's not to say we can't go gung ho next year. We just have to go with the flow.

MONIZ: Right. Of course.

BRODEUR: Mackinac can be unpredictable that way.

MONIZ: Oh, I can imagine. What is your proudest accomplishment of your charitable activity?

BRODEUR: That's hard to say. I think the Meals on Snowmobiles without a doubt has been, because that's our true local community that we're taking care of.

MONIZ: Is there an object that you think captures your philanthropic story or the church's philanthropic story?

BRODEUR: I don't know. Maybe the mural upstairs in the church.

MONIZ: I'll have to take a look at that. Thank you. This has really been a wonderful conversation. I'm so grateful for the chance to learn all about the church's work.

BRODEUR: Good. Thank you very much. I appreciate being able to share it, even if I cry.

MONIZ: Thank you.