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## De Pere city officials and residents debate names for new bridge

Some argue Claude Allouez name is etched in history

By **Patti Zarling**

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DE PERE — The soon-to-be-opened span across the Fox River likely will be referred to as the new bridge, the De Pere bridge, or the new De Pere bridge for quite some time. But city leaders still are debating its official name.

Originally, the City Council agreed to carry on the existing Claude Allouez Bridge tradition, with the idea the new bridge, located just south of the current crossing, simply is replacing the old — a "new and improved" sort of thing. The new bridge is set to open in October, when the old one will be closed to traffic.

But some aldermen argue the Claude Allouez name has its place in history, and the new bridge should have its own name and distinct identity.

The Green Bay Press-Gazette asked for readers' thoughts and received a mixed bag of ideas. A few would like the name to remain the same. Others think it should be named to honor various local historical figures. And some say it should be given a name that reflects its purpose to connect two sides of the city.

Donna Schlag is all for keeping things simple.

"Let's call it the West-East Bridge; the WEB for short," suggested Schlag, who grew up on the west side of De Pere. "It's easy and fits the vernacular style of today's society."

Pete Safford thinks things are fine just the way they are.

"I was at the dedication of the existing structure," he said. "And the French missionary's name was appropriate back then, and certainly should be retained today, and into the future."

Scott Crevier leans even more strongly in that direction.

"The new bridge in De Pere absolutely, positively must be named the Claude Allouez Bridge for all the same reasons as the original bridge was given that name," said Crevier, a



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Workers build pouring forms for bridge caps on Thursday during construction of the new bridge in De Pere. Residents are split on naming the new structure the Claude Allouez Bridge. H. Marc Larson/Press-Gazette

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### A few suggested alternates

Several readers have suggested the new bridge be named for Jean Nicolet, an early French voyageur and explorer of the area. Another historical figure showing up in several requests was Abbot Pennings, the founder of St. Norbert College. Some suggestions serve as descriptors, such as Settlers, Voyageur or Upper Fox Crossing. There's also a call for the Reggie White Bridge. Then there's the West-East Bridge, as well as the Unified Bridge of De Pere.

### Why Claude Allouez?

According to the De Pere Historical Society, the current bridge, built in 1932, was so named because the eastern approach sits at the site of a mission Father Claude Allouez played a key role in establishing in 1671. Allouez, a missionary, celebrated the first Mass in the area near Oconto in 1669.

De Pere resident. "It was to honor the memory of a French priest who first settled here. None of the original reasons have changed. He is still a pioneer; he is still the first. Where is our gratitude for De Pere's history? What's next? Are we now going to go throughout the city and rename all of our public buildings and roads?"

"If someone wants to change the name, then we need to have a good reason to change it ... This is a deal-breaker issue for me. I will vote against any city official who favors a name change."

Lawrence Nielsen has another reason for hanging on to the current moniker.

"Discover the history of the city and you will see that to relinquish the name of Claude Allouez is a mistake," he said. "... but Allouez would like it, then they could name (the Wisconsin 172 crossing) the Claude Allouez Bridge."

### Some prefer a new direction

Chris Hagerstrom of De Pere, who'd like a new name, is keeping his options open.

"Oh, the legend of Claude Allouez lives on, but should we keep his name on a bridge in neighboring De Pere (doesn't he already get credit for the village)?" Hagerstrom said.

Among his suggestions: Dad Braisher, after the former De Pere coach and Packers' equipment manager, Gerald "Dad" Braisher; Rapides Bridge, to reveal the silent first part of De Pere's traditional French tag; Brown County G Bridge, keep it simple; Jean Nicolet Bridge; St. Norbert Bridge; or Abbot Bernard Pennings Bridge, after the founder of St. Norbert College.

Mary Kay Milquet of De Pere also likes the name Jean Nicolet.

"That name seems to fit the historic atmosphere of De Pere and complement the past and present businesses, organizations, and parks in the area such as Nicolet Paper, Nicolet Restaurant, Nicolet Apartments, Jean Nicolet Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Nicolet Square, among others," she said. "Jean Nicolet and his companions were the first voyageurs to journey into this area in 1634 — over three decades before Allouez. Their excursion from Quebec, down the St. Lawrence, across the Great Lakes, down the bay of Green Bay, and their landing on the eastern shore of the Fox River has been documented by many historians.

"Naming the new bridge the Jean Nicolet Bridge also highlights the theme of Voyageur Park, which commemorates the first explorers and missionaries to this area."

Scott Hansen seems to think Green Bay Packers legend Ray Nitschke needs some company in the honorary bridge name department.

"My idea ... is the Reggie White bridge," Hansen said. "Reggie meant a lot to the community. Also, for short, we can call it the White bridge, which seems to fit since I think it's being painted white." (It is.)



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A Lunda Construction Co. worker uses a grinder Thursday to finish concrete on a bridge cap during construction of the new bridge in De Pere. H. Marc Larson/Press-Gazette

One reader prefers a historical name closer to home.

Armin Kuehl of Green Bay notes De Pere has a native son, Howard Kuehl, who was born and raised in the city and went on to receive a diploma from the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md. He served the country for 40 years, and had a distinguished war record during World War II, retiring an admiral.

"Green Bay has a Flatley Park, and I think De Pere should have an Admiral Kuehl Bridge," Kuehl said.

### **Not necessarily a person's name**

Others think the city should emphasize the idea of the bridge as a connector.

"I grew up in De Pere and graduated high school there. I always feel the urge to preface De Pere with 'east' or 'west,'" she said. "When I was in high school then, (graduated in 1982) there was such a huge divide between east and west. I think it's time to 'put that to rest,' and unify the cities ... and the districts. I feel that it would be great if the bridge were called the Unified Bridge of De Pere ... no more east and west."

Another reader prefers a more geographical feel.

Barbara Valentine of Green Bay proposes: "Upper River Crossing," "Upper Fox Bridge" or "Upper Fox Crossing."

"I'm looking forward to its construction," she said. "Each side of the river will benefit."

In a similar vein, Mark McLeod suggests a natural name.

"It was always a joy to see the hundreds of walleye boats two feet apart," said McLeod, who worked in De Pere for 10 years. "De Pere is known throughout the country as the walleye hot spot for record walleye ... I have traveled all over the United States in my job. If De Pere is mentioned, I get walleye talk. How about capitalizing on a natural resource that lays below the tournament bridge?"

Carma-Jean Hansen, who has lived in De Pere for about 40 years, prefers the idea of a historical name, but wouldn't necessarily single out one historical figure.

She suggested the names Heritage, Settlers, Voyageur or Missionaries bridge.

"The people in De Pere have roots that go way back," said Hansen, who wasn't born in De Pere but appreciates its history. "And you have a heritage that goes way back. I think it would be good to have a name that reflects that heritage."

### **Decision will be made soon**

To let the public have its say, Mayor Mike Walsh solicited ideas and formed a review committee to make recommendations. He plans to bring the committee's suggestions to the City Council on Sept. 4.

Walsh said Friday that 100 different names have been submitted, from all over, including De Pere, Green Bay, and places farther away like Ohio and Alabama. Walsh declined to share his preference.

"Names really ran the gamut," he said. "Some are serious, some are humorous, some are local-people references, some are place references," he said. "They are all over the board."

And one reader suggested the actual name is important to only a few, anyway.

"Leave the name the way it is. Reasoning: It just doesn't matter," Mike Ehlen said. "All the named bridges are still referred to by the name they've had for years ... Main Street bridge is still that, not a football player ... Mason Street bridge is still that, not an ex-city official ... If you are observant in your daily endeavors, you will notice that the only time you hear these other names is in the media."