

Mitch St. Pierre
Farrier, St. Pierre Hoof Care
Interviewed by Mountain Lake PBS on July 18, 2011

"I've lived here [Crown Point, NY] for approximately oh 55 years. I moved here when I was four or five years old and this has been my home ever since I was a little kid.

I use the bridge almost constantly; I used to use the bridge almost constantly. We go to work in Vermont. All our work is in Vermont so five days a week were traveling to go to work and on the weekends sometimes we like to go out to dinner or even just go by gas at the gas station that's just across the way. So for us it's a lifeline. It's been very important to us for many years.

Well when they closed the bridge I was in Vermont, at work, and the thought that went through my mind was ok well how are we going to deal with this, this sounds pretty serious. It's got to be just temporary but as I found out later that wasn't the case so it was it was kind of a shock to find that out.

Getting to customers

Now we were still getting across thanks to the temporary ferry but for the beginning it wasn't very easy. We had to travel oh probably an hour and a half one way to get to work so we lost two three hours a day for a long time. One of my customers is a mile away on the other side of the lake and it would take an hour and a half to get there so obviously it wasn't fun for having to do that. For a while we traveled to Essex to get on the ferry when that became available. Most of the times though we would have to go to Whitehall and way down to Whitehall and come all the way back. So it's definitely wasn't a good thing for us.

All of our customers are in Vermont. What we do for a living is we go to the farms and we take the cows and trim their toes so that there shaped back to normal cause sometimes they over grow and we treat the cows that have injuries. So it's almost like a veterinary practice but not quite and that's why we make a living. We go to individual farms every day and we might do 100 cows where their feet need to be fixed up. My son works with me so they're two of us so we both depend on this job for a living so that's what we do. We trimmed the cow's feet. They sometimes refer to us as Bovine podiatrists

Well we didn't lose any business but it made it so much more difficult to get to work and added expense that we weren't planning on. And a fair amount of expense. Our truck maybe gets 8/9 miles to the gallon; it's a big heavy truck and we have a lot of equipment on it so in that respect it wasn't good. And the other thing that was a problem is we have a second business here at home that I oversee and we make products for hoof trimming for other hoof trimmers. And so the time I lost traveling

meant time that I couldn't spend here taking care of business so we kind of lost in more than one way so it was pretty serious for us.

Family connections

When it comes to family connections the bridge was kind of important 'cause I have relatives that live on the other side of the lake and I have relatives that travel to work over the bridge so in these last few years my wife's parents have been ill so it's been an issue how to get from here to there to bring them to the doctors and all those kinds of things for the family to come and travel here to spend some time with them while they when they were ill. So it was not just our jobs that suffered, it was family relationships. Obviously were managing but it's just been no fun at all.

The problem with the bridge closing is I was okay for a while if we can use the [Ticonderoga] ferry but then all of a sudden we had to scramble to get across and do the traveling again because the temporary ferry wasn't ready once they took the bridge down so that became a problem, a major problem.

Response to bridge closing

When the bridge went down, that's all that everybody talked about for, for days. A lot of people were scared and wondering was this the end of the bridge? Would it ever come back? People worry because you never know with politics today and the way things go everybody that we would lose our bridge *permanently* and so yeah it was, it was talked about everywhere. I mean it was just the only thing there was to talk about. So many people lives depended on the bridge. The closer you lived to the bridge of course the worst it is. We're just two miles away so you know it affected us as badly as anybody so it definitely was a major thing to talk about around here.

When they talked about actually taking the bridge out to me it was just a milestone to hurry up and get the process done because I already knew by then that the only fix was a new bridge and they already declared it a disastrous situation. So when they talked about it, it didn't bother me only because I knew it had to be done. I mean that's just the way it is. It was sad to lose the bridge but you know that's progress and I understand that. So it didn't bother me it actually made me feel like okay were getting this done. People need a bridge.

New bridge design

I attended a lot of meetings that had to do with the new construction and the planning because I was so much concerned as to how it would affect me. I went to one meeting and explained to the folks in charge you know in the wintertime there is going to be a bunch of us crazy enough to try to cross the lake in boats, snowmobiles and whatsoever come winter and it wasn't long after that I was one of those crazy people taking a snowmobile to work. We would leave our truck in

Vermont and my son and I would get on the snowmobile and scoot across the lake, and we did that for about two weeks and it got really scary at one point cause we never had a lot of good ice that year so eventually we abandoned that process and luckily the ferry started to run about oh four or five days later. So yeah it was an interesting situation to say the least.

When they brought out the choices [new bridge designs] I definitely went out there and looked at them and I picked the one they're doing now which seemed to be the obvious choice for everybody when everything was said and done. Everybody wanted a bridge that would somewhat look like the old bridge and it wasn't so much about the cost, it was about getting back what we had and I think that's how it all turned out in the long run. Well one of the concerns of course was can this bridge be fixed when it starts to fall apart again as opposed to the other one, the old bridge could not be fixed. And that was one of the major questions that even I asked. You know the design looks nice what about being able to fix it you know for the future generation so and it met both requirements as far as I could tell.

I'm quite anxious for this project to get done and I see it every day because I get on the ferry and I see the progress and I watch the folks working away. It seems to go really slow because I'm checking on it every day and now I've been driving to Port Henry which is a couple miles away to see how they're doing with the other part of the bridge that they're going to build construct and float over to finish the bridge. So I'm keeping an eye on the progress and I don't know why but I guess it makes me feel better when I see people working. It's starting to look like it's going to come together so we're pretty happy about that for sure.

Oh I will definitely be at the opening ceremony just because I live so close and it's so important to me and I wouldn't want to miss something like that. When they blew up the bridge we were there watching that as closely as we could. Of course there was a snowstorm that day so we didn't get to see very well but the folks with the TV cameras did a good job so it was sad to see it go but it just had to get done.

When this first happened the folks around here were quite scared and there were dubious about how quickly government folks would come and take care of things. I'm quite impressed with the fact that how it did turn out. The folks were straight forward. They listened to the folks at the meetings was my first impression because they right off the bat when this went down there were a whole bunch of different ideas that the folks at the state level were willing to attempt and it didn't take long before the conflicting reasons came out and the next thing you know there was dialogue and I'm happy to say that the folks won out so to speak. Their opinions were heard and it's good to see that once in a while. So I think everybody is going to be happy with the final result."