Lucky you
To the editor:
...and the people who are lucky to be living where you are. I spent two weeks at "home" in July. It was hot and humid. Everything was green and beautiful. The mosquitoes were big enough to throw a saddle on and the flies were as voracious as I remembered
It really is nice to know that some things do not change and one of the wonderful surprises was seeing you all still have "Deb" as a paramedic. A few years ago I had occasion to need her services and now seeing that she was still caring for people and patients in the Iron River, Crystal Falls area was a comfort and a special surprise.

Also, I had occasion to visit a cousin who was a patient in your hospital and was very impressed with the level of care she received. And her room looked out on Ice Lake. Her room became a gathering place for relatives and friends, like the Bensons whom I had not seen in years. How healing is that!
I then had a wonderful ride around Ice Lake on a pontoon boat from another great cousin. That lake you all have is much better than any medicine and should be cared for and treasured for generations to come.
There was a crowd of young boys enjoying antics on and off the raft and I said a silent prayer they would grow up to help keep that lake a wonderful, healing place to be.
-s- Lee Harsh
Flagstaff, Ariz.

Small-town hospitality
To the editor:
Going through Iron River, we were low on fuel and it was about 11:30 p.m. CST. We came upon a small family hotel called “The Iron Inn.”
When we came to the door they were closed, but a phone number in the window led us to a wonderful person named Connie. She came to our rescue at that hour of the night and was so friendly and warm that we gave her the biggest hug ever.
When on the phone, she asked if we needed anything, because everything in the city was closed. She brought us water and chips and a sandwich.
If ever we get into this area again we will stop. This is really the meaning of small town U.S. America.
-s- John and Patty Stone
Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada

Regarding reductions
To the editor:

Recently The Dickinson Iron Community Services Agency held a public hearing to receive input on proposed reductions to the senior nutrition program. These proposed reductions have been prompted by a loss of funding of almost $17,000 for FY 2011, and $12,000 for FY 2012.

It should be noted that the losses in funding are directly related to declining numbers in the nutrition program. Many seniors, for various reasons are not utilizing the services that are available. In addition, the Older Americans Act, which is federal legislation, prohibits senior meal providers from charging seniors a fee.

We are able to suggest a donation of $4 per meal, however we cannot require payment. Our average donation is less than $2.50 per meal. The legislative intent behind the Older Americans Act was to ensure that seniors who could not pay the suggested donation were not turned away and could receive a nutritious meal.

Certainly, those who have the means should pay as much as they are able up to the $4, but we are prohibited from monitoring this.

Many individuals appeared at the hearing to provide input. Following the public hearing, a special board meeting was held. The board took no action on the recommendations put forth by program staff but instead directed agency staff to contact each of the centers individually to determine if they are able to provide any direct assistance to the program. We are currently in the process of implementing this directive from the board.

During the hearing (and over the past several months), some misconceptions emerged that need to be addressed.

First, DICSA is not a unit of county or state government. We are a private non-profit corporation. Due to our makeup and sources of funding, we do comply with the Freedom of Information Act and the Open Meetings Act.

Second, it was suggested that the agency has been and is currently mismanaged. Living within the resources that are available is not mismanagement and it is not “adult abuse” as one individual has incorrectly stated. Rather, it is responsible stewardship of the dollars that we are entrusted with.

Presently, there is considerable debate at all levels of government about debt, deficit and discretionary spending which have, and will continue to affect the array of services that we are able to provide.

I believe that it is irresponsible to spend money we do not have in the face of declining participation. If a private business were to follow this practice, they would not last long. Private businesses adjust their hours and staffing regularly to minimize losses during slow times. They also have the option of raising prices to generate additional revenue.

This option is not available to DICSA. Cutting from the top, as was suggested will not provide the relief that is necessary to sustain the senior nutrition program. The administrative staff that manage the nutrition program are also involved in other programs.

Cutting wages in this area will not result in a corresponding increase in available nutrition dollars. We have implemented numerous cost containment measures and continue to look at all available ways of saving money both internally and externally.

There are also individuals who seem to believe that the agency functions without oversight. All of our programs experience regular monitoring from our funding sources. In addition, we also undergo a comprehensive annual agency audit.

These audits address both fiscal and programmatic issues and also evaluate the way that we guard against fraud, waste and abuse. We welcome this oversight as it allows us to identify better and more efficient ways to serve our clients.

Since my arrival as executive director, we have also gone through a state-mandated board reorganization from six to fifteen members. We also instituted a three person finance committee which has taken an active role in the financial affairs of the agency. We have increased our oversight and internal controls since my arrival.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind people that DICSA is more than just a provider of senior meals. We are one of 30 community action agencies statewide that also provides weatherization, homeless housing, homeowner rehab, adult day care, outreach, transportation, tax preparation assistance, home heating assistance, senior volunteer services, in home services and food commodities.

I would like to stress that individuals who have received these services are eligible for board membership in the consumer sector of our board. Board membership in this sector is not restricted to senior citizens as some individuals believe.

I appreciate the advocacy and passion demonstrated by those who attended the meeting. Many opinions were expressed which were taken very seriously. At the end of the day, however we must weigh opinions against the facts that we have in front of us.

Through June of FY2011, we have served 6,500 fewer congregate meals than we did at this time last year. It is a fact that declining participation affects funding and revenue.

It is not enough to come to a hearing and speak your mind. This also needs to be accompanied by increased participation and support by our area seniors. If you are not going to support your own program, who else will?

-s- Jeffrey Heino
Executive Director
DICSA, Iron Mountain