

History of the GMC Great Lakers Motorhome Club, Inc.

Written by William Helmore, a Charter member (minor revisions January 2018 by Steve Johnson to bring it up to date)

The initial organizational meeting of the Club was held at Ted's Restaurant in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan during a snowstorm in mid-January, 1976. The meeting was the result of a great deal of work and effort by the GMC Truck and Coach Division of General Motors, The Family Motor Coach Association (FMCA) and a group of approximately fifteen very devoted GMC motorhome owner families and GMC executives.

This new club was chartered on January 24, 1976 as the "GMC Michigan Wolverines" with a scope of the states of Michigan, Ohio and Indiana. As it worked out, this would be the first GMC Motorhome chapter chartered under the auspices of the FMCA. At the Club's first rally in May, 1976, the Club's name was changed to "The GMC Great Lakers" and its scope changed to incorporate all US states and provinces of Canada that touch the Great Lakes. The name change was made to calm the Buckeye and Spartan fans who were not happy with the name "Wolverines". The scope was changed to cover a larger geographical area and to encompass a larger group of prospective members.

In 1979 the Club dropped its affiliation with FMCA in favor of the "GMC-MOA" (GMC Motorhome Owners Association), also the name was changed to "The GMC Great Lakers Motorhome Club". The Club was re-chartered with the FMCA on March 10, 1981. In 1988, FMCA was petitioned and the original 1976 date of charter was reinstated. In 1990 the Board felt that the Club should incorporate and the membership agreed. On December 7, 1990 the Club became "The GMC Great Lakers Motorhome Club, Inc."



The Great Lakers were a chapter of the National GMC Motorhome Owners Association as well as the FMCA during the years of 1976-1980. This organization was sponsored by the GMC Truck and Coach Division and held rallies in May, July and October. The name of the owner's organization was changed on July 23, 1977, to the "GMC Motorhome Owners Association, Inc." (GMC-MOA). At its (The GMC-MOA) peak there were some two-dozen GMC clubs around the country.

Over the years since January 1976, the Club has had the good fortune to find and elect a long list of talented officers, the first of which were: Virgil Barbe, President; Bob Beyer, Vice President; Ann Schipper, Secretary; L. L. "Mac" McKenzie, Treasurer; and Mac McDonnel, National Director.

Sixteen individuals have served as President of the organization:

Virgil Barbe 1976-78, 1980-82, 1987

Edward Kurtz 1979

Tom Tryon 1983-85

Alex Birch 1986

Dan Ryan 1987 (filled out Virgil's term after he resigned)

Ivan Johnson 1988-90

Bill Howard 1991-93
Don Bolles 1994-96
Dick Olmsted 1997-99
George McLeod 2000-2002
John Harvey 2003-2005
Franklin Griffin 2006-2008
William Helmore 2009-2010
Richard Balsey 2011 to 2013
Dale Frahm 2014-2017
Becky Johnson 2018

As stated in volume 1, edition 1 of the "GMC Motor home Traveler" newsletter, which was published by the GMC Truck and Coach Division, "The club was formed to promote friendship among GMC motorhome owners and to provide them with a direct link with the GMC Truck and Coach management executives and, because the GMC club members are also members of the FMCA, they will share in the benefits of that organization as well." By the Club's second rally the infant motorhome club had grown to 65 member coach families. At the end of each ensuing year, the Club's membership has ranged from approximately 70 to nearly 275 members. At the end of the 2017 camping season, the membership stood at about 137 members.



The Club holds rallies each month, May through October. A birthday party has been held in January at a hotel with a dinner and varied activities. As of the end of 2006 the Club has had 196 rallies, 27 GLASS rallies, 26 special rallies, 29 GMC International rallies, 8 FMCA conventions and 20 birthday parties for a total of 306 rallies. Some of the special rallies have been joint rallies with other GMC Clubs. The rallies have been held at locations all over Michigan, some in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Wisconsin and eight in Canada. Branson, Missouri was the farthest away summer rally. Several winter rallies have been held in Florida and Arizona for those wintering in the southland.

The Great Lakers are one of the largest regional product orientated GMC Clubs in the FMCA. The club presently includes members from California, Florida, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Wisconsin and Canada.

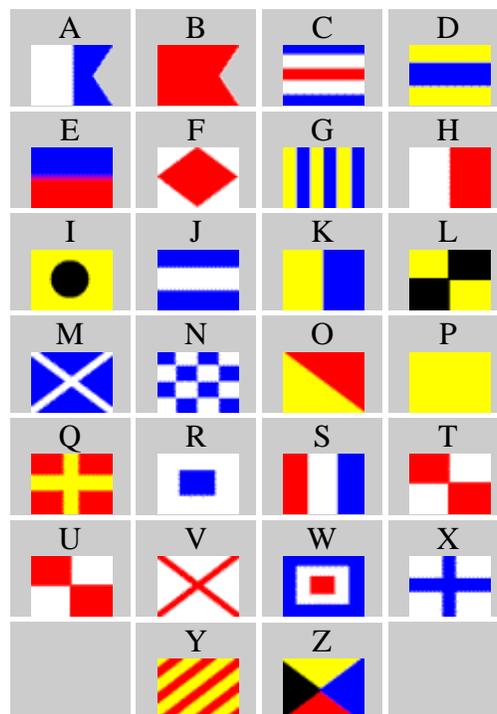
In the spring of 1976 the GMC organization in Pontiac, Michigan began to publish a newsletter for and about the GMC Motorhome Clubs and the motorhome itself. The "GMC Motorhome Traveler" as it was called, contained articles on club doings, service tips, a monthly calendar of club activities and other articles of interest to GMC motorhome owners. It was published from February 1976 through February 1979 by the GMC Truck and Coach Division of General Motors at no charge to the GMC Motorhome owners.

Over the years, nine families have been involved with the Great Lakers Newsletter. They are:
Sally Barbe 1976-1978
Ray Gamble 1979

the Staubs 1980 & 1987
 the Davises 1981-1986
 the Skalskis 1988-1992
 William Helmore 1991-1996
 Dottie Harman 1996-1999
 John Wright 2000-2017
 John Pryzbylek starting in 2018.

The Great Lakers Newsletter has featured tech tips, and news about members (including birthdays and anniversaries) as well as news about the monthly rallies.

INTERNATIONAL CODE OF FLAGS



The first purpose for employing the "International Code of Flags," was to initiate a unique manner of identification for the GMC Motorhome Owners Clubs, totally unique to those now used by any other motorhome club. It was therefore selected as a method that is almost as old as the sailing vessels of the high seas, for which the code of identification has been in use for centuries to identify ships at sea, or relate messages across the distances.

Ultimately, the "International Code of Flags" was adopted both for its special interest and its virtual simplicity for identification on national and international scales.

Each club has their own coat of flags. The flags indicate the first letter in each name of the club. When two names make up the official chapter designation, as in "Great Lakers" a second flag is

assigned to complete the insignia.

In 1976 the GMC Clubs used the "International Code of Flags" to identify each GMC club chapter. The Great Lakers official emblem, as pictured on the cover of the membership directory, is the vertical bars "G" flag and the quarter square "L" flag. These flags were used on the patches that were offered to each member of all the GMC clubs and were originally designed by the folks at GMC Truck and Coach under the direction of the club organizers of Mac & Gloria McDonnell.

These "Coat of Arms," or insignias can readily be recognized by each club member and are easily related to identification by the members as they correspond to the "International Code of Flags".



The MOA issued a license plate to each member indicating their club affiliation and number within that club. The first 50 numbers were reserved for the president of that club with the membership counting off after that. (GL059C) This number was originally assigned to Alex and Bea Birch. When Alex became President of the Club his GL number became GL005. The alpha code "C or H" that appears after some members' GL number stands for: "C" = charter member or "H" = honorary member.

In-as-much as the organization was basically formed for the camaraderie of all fellow GMC motorhome owners, we hope that all members, present and future, never forget, lose sight of, nor neglect that initial goal!!

The club will always be indebted to Maryann Grausam of GMC Truck and Coach for all the work and effort on her part in originally setting up the organization and for the help and assistance in ensuing years!

A discussion took place in January 1979 on getting the Club's equipment to the rallies. In May of that year the membership considered the purchase of a two wheel trailer. It would be built with a 4' by 8' bed and have 13" wheels. The membership was assessed \$15.00 to cover the cost of the trailer which was delivered to the club in late July 1979. This trailer served the club for many years until it became in need of many repairs and the need for a larger trailer became apparent.



In January 1990 a ballot was sent to the membership regarding the purchase of a new and larger trailer. This new trailer would be larger and have twin axles and a concession type awning to provide shelter and servers would be able to stand and work within the trailer. The funding came from an assessment of \$20.00 from each member and the rest from the Club's treasury. This is the trailer that is seen at a club rally. The club eventually sold this trailer in 2015.

During the year 1990 the Club decided to incorporate. President Bill Howard contacted an

attorney to incorporate the Club. As of December 1990 the Club became "The GMC Great Lakers Motorhome Club, Inc." a Michigan corporation.

In the summer of 2004 the Great Lakers moved into the 21st century when they started a website. At that time the site was established and maintained by Club member Walt Halley. In April of 2012 the club moved to have a professional designer update the site's structure, graphics, and navigational aspects under the guidance of the newsletter publisher/editor. In January 2018, the site was rebuilt by club member and current webmaster Steve Johnson. The site contains information for and about the Club and its members. The site is located at www.gmcgreatlakers.org.

