New passport policy takes effect June 1

By JESSICA SIBLEY
jsibley@dailyjm.com

Tuesday, April 7, 2009

SENECA — Don't bother packing that birth certificate on your way to a relaxing cruise this summer.

Following back-and-forth legislation on passport policies since 2006, a deadline for a permanent change is fast approaching.

As of June 1, U.S. travelers will be required to have a passport booklet or a less expensive passport card to journey by land or sea to and from Canada, Mexico, Bermuda and all Caribbean nations.

Until then, it is acceptable to present both proof of identification and proof of citizenship in the forms of a driver's license and birth certificate.

This change comes on the heels of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, a set of travel rule modifications deemed necessary by the Department of Homeland Security.

In addition, all air travel outside the United States will require a passport book, which can run upwards of $125, while the recently produced passport card will not stand as proper documentation.

"I think there will be a huge outcry as South Carolina residents without a passport book attempt to board flights from Greenville, Charlotte and/or Atlanta on or after June 1," said Joe Hewes, a Seneca resident. "Worse, if they go to another location and plan to fly back after June 1, they are in for a rude awakening."

Many states began issuing "high-tech" drivers licenses that included a reader chip that could be scanned for land and sea travel. South Carolina, however, did not adopt the new policy.

A passport card costs about $45.

Passports are required for entry into the United States from any international nation if traveling by air. Citizens are now allowed to cross Canadian and Mexican borders by presenting government-issued identification like a driver's license and birth certificate.

