



By Mike Ward

Adventures in Roadschooing

FIRST GLANCE

When business slowed because of the recession, Michael and Wendi Ezgur had what they say is turning out to be a great idea—get a motorhome, take their children out of school and hit the road for five months.

They left their home on the north shore of Chicago April 3 and headed south and west, hoping for the family trip of a lifetime. And it has turned out to be just that.

"It's one of the best decisions we ever made," said Wendi.

The Ezgurs are part of what seems to be a growing number of families educating children on the road, putting homeschooling on wheels. There is even a name for it—roadschooling—and a website, www.familiesontheroad.com, where families share their experiences.

Some families with school-age children are full-time RVers, but the Ezgurs haven't gone that route. They will be back in Chicago in late August so their children can return to public school, after missing the last two and a half months of classes.

Michael Ezgur is a lawyer and real estate developer, and Wendi helps companies create innovative products and services. They have three children, Aidan, 11, Charlie, 8, and Rosie, 6.

Both Michael and Wendi grew up in Chicago and, Wendi said, they probably spent more time traveling in Europe as young adults than they spent sightseeing in their own country. So they decided this recent lull in business was the perfect time—and their children were just the right age—to explore the U.S.

Their first thought was to rent an RV, but they found that renting the type of big Class A motorhome they wanted would be very expensive—\$2,500 to \$3,000 a week. So they bought a 35-foot Forest River Georgetown, and are towing a Toyota Prius.

Hosted Events

Wendi set up a website to record the trip in stories, photos and video clips and lined up sponsors to pay a small portion of the cost. One sponsor, Geico, chipped in with funds for the Ezgurs to host a few lunches and ice cream socials at RV parks. Through these events, the Ezgurs have amassed good will for Geico's RV insurance business and met a lot of RVers.

Before pulling their children out of school, the Ezgurs consulted teachers to find out what would be covered in the remainder of the school term. They have made keeping up in math a priority and have turned the whole trip into a learning experience that goes beyond what the children could have learned in the classroom.

Wendi said she asks the children to pick out something that especially interests them at each stop and then learn and write about it. The key to education, she believes, is to find what you are passionate about and learn all you can. "If you don't instill the love of learning," she said, "what do you have?"

The first stop on the trip was the Lincoln Museum at Springfield, Illinois, after which 11-year-old Aidan wrote a letter to President Obama expressing his thoughts on the visit: "One



Aidan Ezgur finds time to read on the road.



A visit to NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston was one of the highlights of the Ezgur family's cross-country trip.

exhibit that really caught my eye was the Hall of Whispers. It had voices of people criticizing him (Abraham Lincoln) and showed the political cartoons of the day. I wasn't aware of the harsh criticism bestowed upon Lincoln. Things like that probably happened to all the presidents and I bet it is happening to you too."

Eight-year-old Charlie wrote about the museum visit, too, and was particularly struck by the defense of slavery by Lincoln's political opponent, Stephen Douglas. "Douglas was 100 percent in favor of slavery," Charlie wrote. "He thought that if you bought slaves you could do whatever you wanted with them because they were your property. He never felt bad because I think he thought slaves were pets."

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NEWS BRIEFS

Fleetwood RV Back in Business

A private equity firm has completed its purchase of the motorhome assets of Fleetwood Enterprises and will resume production of motorhomes under the Fleetwood RV name.

American Industrial Partners Capital Fund bought the motorhome assets for \$33.2 million. The assets included two motorhome manufacturing plants, two service facilities and Fleetwood's Gold Shield fiberglass fabrication business, all in Decatur, Indiana. Fleetwood Enterprises retained motorhome plants in Pennsylvania and California. The sale includes all of Fleetwood's existing motorhome brands as well as certain machinery and equipment in Riverside, California, and gives the new company license to operate the Riverside plant temporarily.

Fleetwood Enterprises terminated 700 employees concurrent with the sale, thereby requiring those wishing to keep their jobs to reapply with the new owners, who were expected to hire 650 employees. The new Fleetwood RV is headquartered in Decatur, and will be jointly run by Chuck Wilkinson as CEO and John Draheim as president. Both had been vice presidents with Fleetwood Enterprises' RV Group.

Draheim said, "We are confident the new company can capitalize on the strength of the Fleetwood RV brand and strong relationships with the distribution channel that have been developed over the past 60 years." He also noted that retail sales have increased in recent months, reducing dealer inventories and brightening the outlook.

Fleetwood Enterprises, which quit the trailer business and filed for bankruptcy in March, is continuing in the manufactured housing business, with 1,100 employees in 11 plants. It began the year with more than 3,000 employees.

RV Rentals Show Strength

A survey of RV Rental Association members indicates that RV rental companies expect business to be up 12 percent this year, despite the slow economy.

Bert Alanko, the association's chairman, said this shows that people are still vacationing, and that they are finding that renting an RV is an economical way to travel. Only about 10 percent of renters are booking shorter rental times than in previous years. Most are taking their usual vacations. The RV Rental Association is

a division of the Recreation Vehicle Dealers Association. Its website is www.rvra.org.

Robin Williams Wins RV Poll

Comedian Robin Williams received the most votes when the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association posed this question in a survey of RV owners: "What living famous person would you like to take with you on an RV trip?"

Williams starred in the movie *RV*. Survey respondent James Hennington, an RV owner from Wesson, Mississippi, said, "I saw the movie and thought he would be the ultimate travel partner. He was extremely funny."

President Barack Obama, who took an RV trip with his family after speaking at the Democratic convention in Boston in 2004, was runner-up in the poll. Other vote-getters included George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Oprah Winfrey, Warren Buffet and Rachel Ray.

Museum Spotlights Car Design

The Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles has opened an exhibit showcasing California-designed cars ranging from the Packard Darrin to the Mazda Miata.

The exhibit, entitled, "California Car Design: Local Style, Global Influence," shows how progressive local designers such as Harley Earl and Dutch Darrin brought a fresh approach to auto design. That influence continues today with a large number of corporate design studios located in Southern California. Vehicles on display include a 1919 Pierce Arrow, 1947 Kurtis Omohundro, 1950 Oldsmobile Polynesian and the 2009 Honda FC Sport concept car. The exhibit runs through Feb. 7 of next year. For information, visit www.petersen.org or call (323) 930-CARS.

New Park Designed for Birding

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission has dedicated a new park—Bottle Beach State Park—that has 6,000 feet of shoreline on Grays Harbor, which is considered the most important shorebird feeding area on the Pacific Coast. The area attracts more than one million birds in the spring.

Open tide flats are the most significant feature of the 75-acre park. The Bottle Beach Interpretive Trail Project, which was completed last spring, created a trailhead and parking lot and built

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Adventures Online

Wendi said the lessons about slavery and the Civil War continued as the family traveled along the Natchez Trace Parkway through Tennessee and Mississippi. And as the family traveled westward to the great national parks of the West, to Grand Canyon, Las Vegas, Southern California and up the Pacific Coast to Oregon, the trip has continued to be a learning experience for everyone.

You can follow the family's Odyssey on their website, www.familyofftrack.com. By posting accounts of their travels, they hope to inspire other families to undertake extended family vacations. And, Wendi noted, the website also has been a great way to share the experience with family and friends.

This has been the family's first RVing experience, but it won't be their last. "We're definitely going to be traveling in an RV again," Wendi said. She said the family appreciates the comfortable beds and the freedom to go wherever their impulse takes them. Perhaps as good a sign as any of the success of the trip is the fact, Wendi said, that at no time has anyone uttered the words: "I want to go home." ■

Write to Mike Ward, editor at RV Life magazine, 18717 76th Avenue West, Suite B, Lynnwood, WA 98037 or e-mail editor@rvlife.com. Find First Glance online at rvlife.com.

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