

News Advocate



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Life on the road

By LOGAN T. HANSEN
Staff Writer

Couple originally from Northern Michigan tours the U.S.

In and around Benzie and Manistee counties, mention Cousin Curtiss and more than likely people will know, or at least have heard, of what could appropriately be described as the energetic, one-man band that's been making the rounds in Northern Michigan this summer.

The music, described by the band's only member, Curtiss O'Rourke Stedman, as a melange of Americana, Blues, Quasi-Electronics and Root-stomp sounds, is only half of the story, however.

For the past few months, O'Rourke Stedman, who is originally from Onkama,

and his girlfriend, Kelly Tousley, of Frankfort, have been on a summer tour that began with a couple of weeks in the interior of Alaska. But they don't travel in a decked-out motor home or RV. They don't have a crew that sets up and tears down the musical equipment at every venue they are fortunate enough to book.

What they have is a dream that has now blossomed into a full-fledged life on the road.

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Courtesy Photo

Curtiss O'Rourke Stedman and Kelly Tousley have traveled from Alaska to Michigan, spanning 3,800 miles, with their tiny house in tow as part of a summer tour for O'Rourke Stedman's one-man band, Cousin Curtiss.



Photo by Jeanne Barber
Brigadier General Michael A. Stone stood front and center at the Manistee Armory Friday evening to answer questions from the community regarding Bravo Troop being moved to the Grand Rapids' area.

Done Deal

Bravo Troop leaving Manistee will happen; status of armory not yet made

By DAVID L. BARBER
Special to the News Advocate

MANISTEE — Bravo Troop's permanent move from Manistee to an armory near Grand Rapids is a "done deal."

Brigadier General Michael A. Stone, assistant adjutant general of installations for the Michigan Army National Guard, pulled no punches Friday evening when he told about 100 area residents that the move is going to take place in the coming months.

A career soldier, Stone stood front and

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Donations sought for First Street beach flag pole project

By SEAN BRADLEY
Staff Writer

MANISTEE — Although Rudy Linke is not a veteran he wants to give back to those who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Linke and his sister, Linda Soller, are heading up an effort began in April to install a 70-foot flagpole with a 15-by-25-foot U.S. flag that will eventually be surrounded by flags for each of the U.S. Armed Forces and the POW/MIA flag at the First Street Beach roundabout in the City of Manistee.

"We wanted something very spectacular for Manistee for many years," Soller said. "With (Manistee) being one of the local

ports for the ships coming in, it would be so impressive. Different places I've gone and seen these large flags have just touched my heart so much."

Many of the items needed for the project, such as cement and the American and POW/MIA flags, have been donated.

Linke said the total budget for the project is about \$10,000 and about \$3,500 is left to raise.

Although the funds are being collected, the location of the flagpole installation may have to move to comply with Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations but would still be at First Street beach if moved.

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Health and Wellness Summit slated for Thursday

By DYLAN SARELA
Staff Writer

MANISTEE — Obesity is a growing concern nationwide, and at the local level Manistee County has certainly stepped up its fight against the epidemic in recent years.

In hopes to focus those efforts even further, a Manistee County Health and Wellness Summit will be held from 8 a.m. to noon on Thursday at Stronach Township Hall, located at 2471 Main St. of Manistee.

Keynote speaker Dr. Dean Sienko, of Michigan State University's College of Human Medicine, will join Kevin Hughes, health officer for District Health Department #10, and a panel of local experts to discuss the concern and what measures are being taken to help make community

"We're very fortunate to have such a diverse group of folks for the panel. There's somebody from a little bit of everything."

— HOLLY JOSEPH
DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT #10

healthier.

"The goal is to update the community on the current statistics on obesity rates in our county and also what's going on for obesity prevention in our county," said Holly Joseph of District Health Department #10. "We want to see what we can do to get everyone together for somewhat of a call to action, if you will, to make those efforts stronger and push them forward."

Joseph said there are a num-

ber of campaigns and initiatives that have increased awareness of obesity and in turn healthier ways to live, which will be discussed at Thursday's summit.

"The list goes on and on, really," she said. "Of course people know about the Live Well campaign, but I always like to point out there are plenty other things helping the cause."

"We've got wonderful people

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Portage Lake Garden Club celebrates 80 years.
LIFESTYLES



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OBITUARIES

None Reported

LOTTERY

Midday Daily 3: 7-6-3
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Daily 4: 9-0-1-4
Fantasy 5: 1-9-16-20-31
Keno: 1-3-4-5-8-9-11-12-13-14-17-24-27-30-34-38-41-42-52-62-68-72

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ON THE ROAD: FROM PAGE 1A

OUT THE STARTING GATE

What began as two recent college graduates — O'Rourke Stedman from Northern Michigan University and Tousley from Grand Valley State University — transplanting from the Great Lakes state to the Last Frontier, has four years later transformed into the nomadic, on-the-go lifestyle that the couple now find themselves living.

O'Rourke Stedman and Tousley split their four years living in Alaska in two cities, Tok and Juneau, with he working as a high school English teacher and she as a case manager for a non-profit. But, it would seem, they both wanted something more out of life.

"I always said if I could pay bills playing music, then I would quit my day job and play full time," O'Rourke Stedman recalled.

"Because I was teaching and had the summer months off, I'd go on tour in the lower 48 and play music. And then last summer, the tour was really successful and I broke even after covering 15,000 miles in just 11 weeks. It was a really good feeling."

The success on the road that summer was enough to convince O'Rourke Stedman that his dream of playing music full time could be more than that — it could be a reality.

This May, the ending of the school year for O'Rourke Stedman coincided with Tousley's finishing her master's degree in early childhood special education, and the couple decided they could give something new a try.

"It was the perfect time to transition to a new lifestyle on the road, playing music full time as a sole source of income," O'Rourke Stedman said.

Before they could do that, though, they had to find a way to make life on the road affordable and sustainable.

BUILDING A TINY HOUSE

And so in came the storage trailer.

The 98-square-foot storage-trailer-turned-tiny-house, that is, that they share with two traveling companions in their dogs, Doug and Sawyer.

"We didn't have any building experience prior to the trailer so that was kind of an adventure, a huge learning curve," Tousley said.

They were confronted with conundrum after conundrum, with the questions springing up: "How do we cut in and install a window? How do we wire electrical? Do we need a water pump for the sink? If we're going to have a shower, are we able to cut in a drain?"

"We watched a lot of YouTube and looked at Instagram and Pinterest and a bunch of other social media avenues to find out what other people had done with their similar projects," O'Rourke Stedman said.

When all was said and done, the project lasted from November of last year up until near the time the couple hit the road at the end of May this year, costing to date around \$9,000 with recent renovations.

When asked why they didn't resort to something more traditional, such as an RV or a van, O'Rourke Stedman responded, "We didn't want to do that, it was too easy."

"And it creates a story,"



Cousin Curtiss performing in Portland, Ore., in 2014.

he added. "I think people are more apt to follow a couple who created something with very little experience creating things like this, versus two people who quit their jobs and have been living in a motor home."

PAY GAS, NOT RENT

Frugality has been the name of the game from the start, and as such, O'Rourke Stedman and Tousley's goal while traveling is to spend less money on gas per month than they did on rent for an apartment.

This mission spawned the title of the blog that Tousley uses to record the couple's, and their dogs', adventure — Pay Gas, Not Rent — where those interested can get insight into the challenges of living in 98-square-foot space on the road full time.

"I think from the start of it, just downsizing was a really big hurdle for us because we had good jobs and we had a lot of stuff," O'Rourke Stedman said. "Getting rid of all of that was really difficult because you get attached to the things you have. Realizing it was all just stuff was a challenge."

Before leaving Alaska earlier this year, the couple tried to purge most of their belongings. At first, they hoped to make money by selling things. But nothing was going fast enough, and so they ended up giving a lot of things away for free.

The storage space for clothes in their tiny house is all of four drawers underneath the couch that folds down and doubles as a bed.

While relinquishing all of those items and living this on-the-go lifestyle has been a challenge, it's also changed the way O'Rourke Stedman and Tousley view themselves and their everyday lives.

"It's definitely shifted our perspective on kind of the materialistic world we tend to live in," Tousley said. "It's kind of helped us to shift our focus onto the things that are important instead of consuming."

It's the kind of sacrificing that comes with the fulfillment of a dream, and both O'Rourke Stedman and Tousley hope that through the cataloging of their adventures they will be able to inspire others to pursue their dreams, that they can show other gypsy-minded friends traveling is possible.

AT THE HEART OF IT

O'Rourke Stedman and Tousley would not be on the road if not for the former's penchant for music.

His band, Cousin Curtiss, saw its beginnings while he was still an undergraduate student at NMU, hosting open mic nights for free in his dormitory's lounge.

After graduating, he kept on playing music as a "glorified hobby" and would pick up shows now and

then when he was home in Michigan, but also, eventually, in Alaska, as well. "It started off just acoustic guitar player, singer/songwriter — a dime a dozen," O'Rourke Stedman said. "From there it kept going and I've added different elements, like the stomp-box and tambourine."

"Things really elevated when I got a looping pedal and I was able to start creating live loops, live phrases and then dubbing those over."

Nowadays, his perfor-



Courtesy Photos
The 98-square-foot storage trailer that Curtiss O'Rourke Stedman and Kelly Tousley have transformed into a tiny house has very limited storage space, the reason the couple sold or gave away most of their belongings before hitting the road.

mances are a spectacle to behold and cannot be done justice by reading a description on a page.

"It's always fun talking to people who are watching Curtiss for the first time and helping them recognize everything he's doing up there with his feet and with his hands," Tousley said. "It's all live, nothing is

pre-recorded and it's amazing."

Though he's played in many different places, O'Rourke Stedman said it is awesome to return to Frankfort and Onokama and play for family and friends.

"If there is one crowd I try to impress it is the people from the hometown area, to show them how I've



Kelly Tousley and Curtiss O'Rourke Stedman are living their dream of traveling the United States while O'Rourke Stedman's band plays shows around the country. Seen here are Tousley and one of the couple's traveling companions, their dog Doug.

grown (as a musician) over the years," he said.

A summertime tour in Michigan is something O'Rourke Stedman and Tousley hope to keep up in the years to come.

And as for living on the road, they'll see what kind of a hand fate deals them.

"There's going to be a lot of moments that we couldn't have predicted, what ifs and stuff like that, but we really want to do it for as long as we can," O'Rourke Stedman said.

Tousley said that one of the most important things to sustaining life on the road is meeting new people and networking.

"(When we're) cold calling places in, say, Colorado for booking music and they don't know who Curtiss is, they've never heard of him, it's a challenge," she said.

"All it takes is somebody to walk in there and be like, 'Hey, I know this guy who plays great music,' and that connection right there might get us a foot in the door. Those networking opportunities make or break it."

O'Rourke Stedman and Tousley realize that living in a tiny house on the road with their two dogs may not last for two and years and years.

But for the time being, with the support of family and friends, they sure are giving it a shot.

Check in and follow along with their adventure at paygasnotrent.com.

To learn more about O'Rourke Stedman's band, Cousin Curtiss, check out cousincurtiss.com.

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A SHORE THING

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West Shore Healthcare Foundation gratefully acknowledges the sponsors, supporting hosts, volunteers, and attendees who made this year's **A Shore Thing** a success. Thanks to the community's support, net proceeds are \$64,000, funds raised support the purchase of new anastomosis machines for West Shore Medical Center's surgical suites. This equipment plays a vital role in the care of our surgical patients.

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