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Phaeton • Allegro Bus • Zephyr

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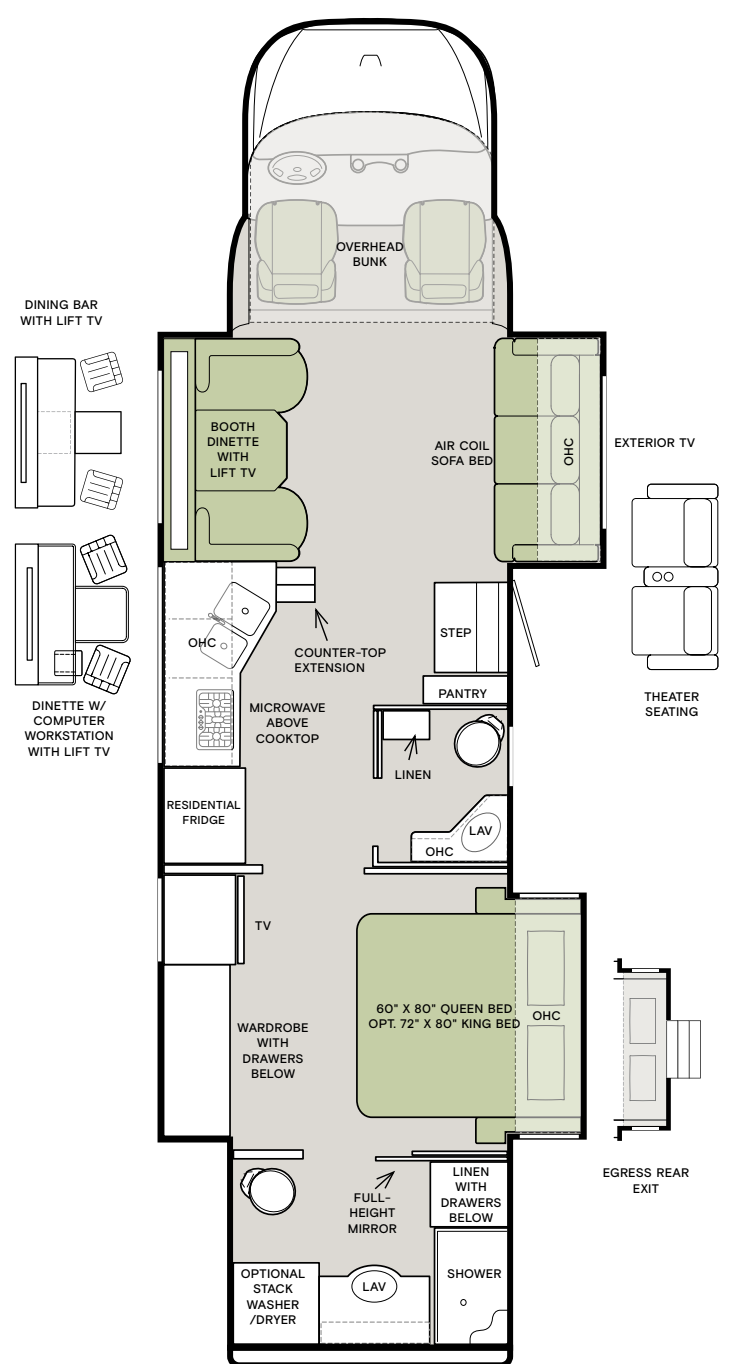
Allegro Bay Super-C

The Allegro Bay Super-C

38 AB



38 BB



Editor's note: We want to express our appreciation to Marvin Carlton, who is always willing to sacrifice his weekends to find and assemble the motorhomes we need for cover shots and feature stories.

Roughing It Smoothly[®]



TIFFIN'S CLASS B AND B+

The Cahaba and the Midas

TIFFIN'S CLASS C

The Wayfarer—25JW, 25RW, 25TW, 25LW

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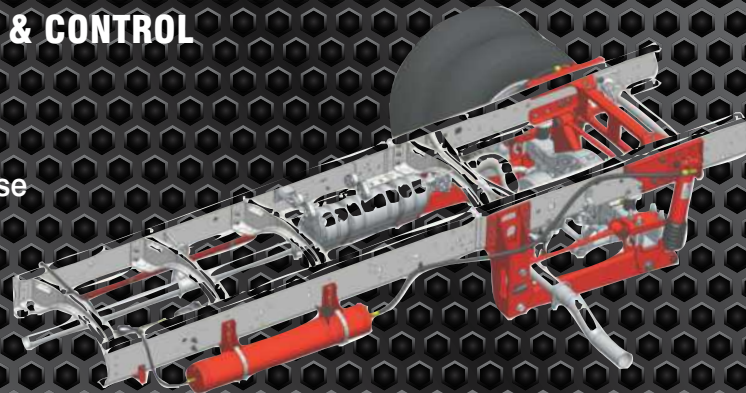
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The Next 50 Years

by Leigh Tiffin

WITH THE PARTICIPATION of our supportive owners, Tiffin Motorhomes in 2022 is celebrating the company's 50th Anniversary, a truly momentous occasion! According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, we *should* be celebrating. For many reasons, American companies face an uphill battle to survive. The BLS shows that 20 percent of new businesses fail during the first two years of being open. The survival rate for the first five years is less than 50 percent. Only 36 percent of them make it to their 10th birthday, and about 21 percent make it to their 20th anniversary. No official tracking exists for 50-year business survival rates, but our assumption is it's well below 10 percent. Furthermore, only a third of family-owned businesses survive into the second generation and only 12 percent make it to the third.

There are several reasons why so few companies stand the test of time. Of course, the number one reason for business closure is a **lack of demand for their product** or service. The launching of Tiffin Motorhomes in the Fall of 1972 by my grandfather, Bob Tiffin, coincided with the family camping movement. Few RVers called them "motorhomes" at that time. They wanted to buy a "camper." Our entry price in 1973 began at less than \$10,000. The demand for a Tiffin camper surged because we offered a full aluminum-framed shell that extended all the way to the skirts. Competitors were building wood frames that deteriorated quickly, especially around the skirts. We had radius-cornered windows, designed for the marine industry, that did not leak. Some businesses encounter problems **attracting the right talent**, or perhaps they don't have **adequate cash flow to support the business**.

Tiffin Motorhomes was fortunate to be in the middle of a good labor market in the 1970s and later. Hundreds of our employees have a farm background with work ethics and skills that fit what was needed to build motorhomes. They were routinely up before the sun and didn't mind at all starting the shift at 6 a.m. They finished at 2:30 and headed to their farms to complete chores, pick up supplies, or feed cattle. Our parking lots were filled with pickup trucks. Engineering talent came from nearby Mississippi State.

We hit the market with a 27-ft. floorplan with split bath that was so successful we started building 15 units per day. We had to go to a 10-hour day, six days a week to meet the demand! Those successes allowed us to build capital to run a debt-free business.

Other reasons for businesses closing include expanding too quickly, losing focus, or failing to **anticipate changes in markets and technology**. Bob Tiffin kept his finger on the pulse of our customers' requests for features and improvements by surveying every




owner who returned to Red Bay for service. He visited and supported hundreds of the annual sales by Tiffin dealers to write down their dealer's and RVer's suggestions. Innovations in the design of our interiors, plus the quality of cabinets, solid surface countertops, and lighting spurred sales over the last two decades. Partnering with Spyder Controls led the industry in improving multiplex wiring and touch panels that operate everything in a coach and keep it connected with the internet.

For any business to survive and thrive into its golden anniversary is an impressive feat, and it's something of which we're very proud and honored to celebrate.

Here's a quick recap of 50 years' worth of milestones: to date Tiffin has produced over 93,000 Class A motorhomes. December 1972, we built our first two motorhomes in a barn

not far from our present assembly lines. There were some financial milestones that we marked quietly—sales hit \$100,000 a week, then \$1 million a month, and then \$1 million a week. And there were some production milestones: in 1977 annual production first exceeded 1,000 motorhomes, and in 1984 we built 2,306 units. In 2007, we reached our greatest number built in one year: 3,198. There have been design milestones, too: TMH was the first to manufacture basement motorhomes using a high-rail chassis which permitted larger tanks for water, sewage, fuel, and storage. We were the second RV company to offer slide-outs. In 1992, we introduced an entry-level diesel pusher for \$80,000. On February 4, 2005, we built our 50,000th motorhome, and in the summer of 2006, we surpassed the 1,000-employee mark. In 2007, we introduced the PowerGlide chassis. Around the same time, we introduced one-piece fiberglass slides and vacuum infused fiberglass construction. In 2015, we produced our first VanLeigh towable products, and in 2017 the Wayfarer was born. To this day we continue to introduce new product categories with our Cahaba B van, Midas B+, and the all-new Allegro Bay Super C.

We've been through a lot over the years, not the least of which is Covid-19 and its relentless variants. Inflationary cycles come and go with nearly every decade, but I believe Tiffin Motorhomes with a sound financial foundation and a solid commitment to the best customer service in our industry will continue to be the leader in motorized and fifth-wheel RVs. Technology and innovation will very likely lead us to produce an all-electric RV before the end of this decade. This anniversary is so significant. One can only imagine what the next 50 years might hold, but we believe in our enduring core purpose of "Many Adventures. One Dream." We look forward to the challenges and successes of the next 50 years. 



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**RECALLS
issued by June 2022**

This information is provided to make owners aware of safety recalls that may need to be completed on their motorhomes. For second owners, update your contact information or for questions about what recalls may apply to your motorhome, please email recalls@tiffinmotorhomes.com

NHTSA Recall # 20V-433, Tiffin Recall # TIF-113, VIP Wiper Module Power Source Recall

Tiffin Motorhomes has decided that a defect, which relates to motor vehicle safety, exists on the following models of motorhomes: **2018, 2019 & 2020 Zephyrs and 2019 & 2020 Allegro Buses.** Tiffin Motorhomes has become aware that there is the possibility that the windshield wipers may not work on some 2018, 2019 & 2020 Zephyrs and 2019 & 2020 Allegro Buses. Tiffin Motorhomes found that some of these motorhomes have windshield wipers that are not wired to their power source correctly. If the wiring is not corrected, there is the possibility that the windshield wipers will not work when the switch is turned on, which can reduce the driver's visibility and increase the risk of a crash.

NHTSA Recall # 21V-265, Tiffin Recall # TIF-115, Fairing Wind Deflectors

Tiffin Motorhomes has decided that a defect, which relates to motor vehicle safety, exists on the following models of motorhomes: **2021 Phaeton Motorhomes equipped with the Roof Mounted Power Awning Option, built between May 8, 2020 and March 1, 2021.** On these specific motorhomes there is the possibility that the fairing wind deflectors mounted in front of the roof mounted power awning on the passenger side and the match-

ing driver's side fairing may not be properly secured and that either of the fairings may become detached while in transit which could cause an injury or property damage to other vehicles.

NHTSA Recall # 21V-306, Cummins Campaign # C2423, Cummins L9 engine, fuel rail assembly may leak

Tiffin Motorhomes has decided that a defect, which relates to motor vehicle safety, exists on the following models of motorhomes: **2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 Allegro Buses and 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 Phaetons built between March 1, 2017 and February 28, 2021.** Tiffin Motorhomes was notified by Cummins, Inc of a defect that exists on specific L9 engines manufactured by Cummins between January 2, 2017 and October 16, 2020. The fuel rail assembly on these engines may develop leaks, which may result in an undetected prolonged diesel fuel spray. The owner/operator may see or smell diesel fuel and, in some cases, the check engine lamp may illuminate. A leak involving spraying/misting fuel in the presence of an ignition source may increase the risk of fire. Owners should contact Cummins Care at 1-800- CUMMINS (1-800-286-6467) or visit their website at care.cummins.com.

NHTSA Recall # 21V-545, Cummins Campaign # C2465, Cummins L9 engine, fuel hose leaks

Tiffin Motorhomes has decided that a defect, which relates to motor vehicle safety, exists on the following models of motorhomes: **2021 - 2022 Allegro Bus motorhomes and 2021 - 2022 Phaeton motorhomes that were built between October, 2020 and July, 2021.** Tiffin Motorhomes was notified by Cummins, Inc of a defect that exists on specific L9 engines manufactured by Cummins between March 27, 2019 and June 15, 2021. Cummins has determined that a fuel leak may occur in the fuel hoses between the fuel pump and

remote filter head. A fuel leak in the presence of an ignition source may increase the risk of a fire. Persons operating in or around the vehicle may see smoke before sufficient heat creates a fire. Owners should contact Cummins Care at 1-800-CUMMINS (1-800-286-6467) or visit their website at care.cummins.com.

NHTSA Recall # 21V-680, Tiffin Recall # TIF-118, Sofa Seat Belt Mounting Points

Tiffin Motorhomes has decided that a defect, which relates to motor vehicle safety, exists on the following models of motorhomes: **2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 & 2022 Allegro Open Roads; 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 & 2022 Allegro RED's; 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 & 2022 Allegro Breezes; 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 & 2022 Allegro Buses; 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 & 2022 Phaetons; and 2018, 2019, 2020, & 2021 Zephyrs that were built between January 3, 2017 and April 13, 2021.** Tiffin Motorhomes has become aware of the possibility the sofa seat belts were not mounted correctly. In the event of an accident, passengers that are sitting in the sofa may not be properly secured in place with the current seat belt anchoring method, which may cause them injury. Until the repairs have been completed, do not use the sofa seating positions and seat belts during travel.

NHTSA Recall # 21V-783, Tiffin Recall # TIF-119 Open 110-Volt Romex Wire in Dinette Wall

Tiffin Motorhomes has decided that a defect, which relates to motor vehicle safety, exists on the following models of motorhomes: **2020, 2021 & 2022 40IH Phaetons equipped with a dinette booth or a U-shaped booth and built between May 26, 2020 and September 28, 2021.** Tiffin Motorhomes has become aware of the possibility that an open 110-volt Romex wire has been left in the dinette wall. If this wire is not connected to a 110-volt

receptacle outlet, there is the possibility that a fire may occur.

NHTSA Recall # 22V-068, Tiffin Recall # TIF-120, DCD Panel Torque & Information Label for 1200W inverters & DCD Panel, Buss Bar, Torque & Information Label for 2000W inverters

Tiffin Motorhomes has decided that a defect, which relates to motor vehicle safety, exists on the following models of motorhomes: **2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 Allegro Open Roads and Allegro Breezes built between February 23, 2017 and February 14, 2022 equipped with a standard 1200W inverter or the optional 2000W inverter.** Tiffin Motorhomes has become aware of the possibility that the nuts on each side of the buss bar may not have the correct torque applied. If the torque is not correct, this could create elevated temperatures on the buss bar which could lead to melting components on the DCD panel and in some cases, the overheating of the DCD panel could increase the risk of a fire.

NHTSA Recall # 22V-055, Tiffin Recall # TIF-121 Sidewall Mounted Patio Awning Tiffin Motorhomes has decided that a defect, which relates to motor vehicle safety, exists on the following models of motorhomes: **2020, 2021 & 2022 Allegro RED 360 37PA built between May 2, 2019 and January 4, 2022 that are equipped with a certain brand of sidewall mounted patio awnings.** Tiffin Motorhomes has become aware of the possibility that certain sidewall mounted patio awnings may not be securely fastened to the motorhome. If the awning is not securely attached, there is the possibility that it may detach from the sidewall of the motorhome and this could lead to an accident or a personal injury.

NHTSA Recall # 21V-514, Tiffin Recall # WAY-100 Wayfarer Valve Stem or Valve Stem Extenders may be damaged

Tiffin Motorhomes has decided that a defect, which relates to motor vehicle safety, exists in certain models of Wayfarer motorhomes: **2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 Wayfarers, all floorplans.** Specific Wayfarer motorhomes are equipped with a decorative wheel liner that may come into contact with the valve stem or the valve stem extender used on the tires of the motorhome. Repeated contact of a valve stem extender with a wheel liner may cause damage to the valve stem or the valve stem extender. If a valve stem or a valve stem extender is damaged, it can result in a loss of air pressure in the tire which may increase the risk of a crash.

NHTSA Recall # 21V-610, Tiffin Recall # WAY-101 Wayfarer Frame Rail Extension Failure

Tiffin Motorhomes has decided that a defect, which relates to motor vehicle safety, exists on the following models of Wayfarer motorhomes: **2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 & 2022 Wayfarer Motorhomes, all floorplans.** OWNERS MUST NOT TOW OR USE THE HITCH UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCE UNTIL THE RECALL REPAIR HAS BEEN COMPLETED. The hitch on the Wayfarer Motorhomes may

become loose from the frame of the motorhome. The area of the hitch attachment to the frame on the Wayfarer brand of motorhomes needs to be reinforced. If the hitch were to become loose or break away, this could cause a crash which could lead to an injury.

NHTSA Recall # 21V-753, Tiffin Recall # WAY-102 Wayfarer Rear Center Water Pan Failure

Tiffin Motorhomes has decided that a defect, which relates to motor vehicle safety, exists on the following models of Wayfarer motorhomes: **2018 24FW Wayfarers, 2019 24BW, 24FW, 24TW, 25QW & 25RW Wayfarers, 2020 24TW, 25QW & 25RW Wayfarers, 2021 25RW, 25SW & 25TW Wayfarers, and 2022 25RW, 25SW & 25TW Wayfarer Motorhomes.** It has come to our attention that on these certain Wayfarer Motorhomes, the area of attachment for the rear center water pan, which holds the rear center water holding tank in place, needs to be reinforced. If the area of attachment is not reinforced, the rear center water pan may become loose from the frame of the motorhome which could cause the water holding tank to become loose or drop from the motorhome.

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In January 2022, Tiffin's owner-acclaimed quarterly magazine began its 19th year of publication. In November 2017, we launched and tested the digital magazine our readers can enjoy a week before each quarterly edition arrives on the 15th of January, April, July, and October. You can read all 18 years of the back issues and learn about RV travel in 49 of our 50 states.

How to Use the Digital Magazine

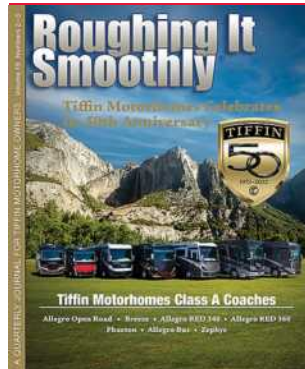
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GENERATIONS

A History of the Early Years

When you drive your Tiffin-built motorhome along the interstates of this country, you undoubtedly have seen one just like yours and probably waved at the driver. Or you've stopped in a campground for the night and found another "Allegro" parked nearby which gave you an easy conversation opener.

In the seventies and eighties, you saw the brown and cream, aluminum-sided coaches with the distinctive orange Allegro logo. And you still see them today. In the nineties the exterior changed to the white, laminated-fiberglass bodies with colorful graphics and names such as Allegro Bay, Allegro Pusher, and Allegro Bus. The turn of the millennium brought two new models: the Phaeton and the Zephyr.

Bob Tiffin, his family, and 615 employees manufacture the Allegro family of Class A motorhomes in Red Bay, Alabama. His wife, Judy, and their three sons—Tim, Van, and Lex—each have key management roles in the company's operation.

Tiffin is recognized throughout the industry as a champion for customer service and satisfaction. "Motorhomes are complex pieces of equipment," Bob said. "Every system operating in your home for your comfort and enjoyment is built into our motorhomes. But your home is on a foundation where each system sits solidly in place. In the motorhome, the roads constantly shake everything loose. We build them solid, but things have to be fixed from time to time."

Allegro owners are probably the most loyal in the business. It is not unusual to find an RVer who has owned five Tiffin coaches over the past 25 years, and a few who have owned 10 or more. That is not only because Tiffin Motorhomes builds a product that far exceeds the quality offered by every competitor. They are loyal because of the way Bob Tiffin himself treats his customers. No company has a better reputation for customer service and care.

"We don't shield ourselves from the customer. I will talk to every customer I've got," he said when I visited the plant last fall. "I listen to everyone. I give my company extension to any customer who asks for it. When a customer has a problem on a week-end trip, he can call me at home to get help. I wouldn't want to be

**Tiffin Motorhomes
built its business by
building its reputation.
by Fred Thompson**

Reprinted from *RIS*, Volume 1, Number 1
January 2004

stranded on Saturday somewhere and have to wait until Monday to get help."

Because of Bob's philosophy of serving his customers, and putting their needs first, Tiffin Motorhomes owns the hallmark for the best customer service in the motorhome industry. "Our name is on the product," he told *RV News* a few years ago. "That's enough for us to fix whatever is wrong."

While he has every reason to be proud of his and the family's accomplishments, the president and CEO of this multi-million dollar corporation is a humble man who looks you straight in the eye. The day I visited the plant he dressed casually in khaki pants and a sport shirt. Bob greeted every customer who came by his office with the respectful demeanor of a 1950s schoolboy addressing his principal. His cordial, Southern manners were extended to a wealthy equipment dealer who had just purchased one of Tiffin's most expensive motorcoaches as well as an aging truck driver with his wife who owned an entry-level motorhome.

On August 5, 1999, after 27 years in the business, it came as no surprise to his customers when Bob was inducted into the RV-MH Heritage Foundation's Hall of Fame, the highest honor and recognition which a person in the motorhome industry can receive. And it was no surprise to his family and employees that a customer nominated him for the honor. In part, the text on the plaque reads, "Bob is recognized as a champion for customer satisfaction and service. He is recognized nationally by his customers, dealers, and fellow manufacturers as a leader in the areas of excellence in employee, customer, and dealer relationships."

"We just try to do what's right, and give the customer the benefit of the doubt. If something wears out in the course of long use and it is out of warranty, then the customer should expect to pay for the replacement or repair. That's what you would expect with your car. But one fellow had an air conditioner that had been giving him trouble while it was under the manufacturer's warranty, and I knew about it. Then the unit went out completely about the time the warranty was up. The AC manufacturer wouldn't replace it. So we did. To do a good job in customer service, sometimes you have to back up your suppliers even when it's legally not your responsibility."

Judy and Bob's oldest son, Tim, 41, graduated from the University of Alabama, and joined the company immediately after graduation. In discussing his dad's leadership, Tim said, "The

Editor's Note: This story was written in 2000 for a college alumni magazine I was publishing at that time. "Generations" was published again in the first edition of *Roughing It Smoothly* to inform our readers about the interesting history of the Tiffin family and Tiffin Motorhomes, Inc.

way dad handles the customer is really special. He practices the Golden Rule every day. That philosophy carried us through when the motorhome industry nearly went under during two energy crises and volatile market conditions.”

The company offers a campground with full hook-ups at no charge for warranty work. It is near the plant so that customers can stay with their coaches while they are being serviced. For out-of-warranty work or just a visit to see the plant by those who own other brands, the campground fee is only \$10 per night.

Employees with many years of service are hand-picked to work on the service teams who take care of the owners, and they consider it an honor and a choice position. It is not unusual for 250 coaches per month to go through the company’s service department.

The stories about the quality and level of service provided by Tiffin Motorhomes have become almost legendary in the campgrounds of America. Although customers are treated well because it is the “right thing to do,” customer service and care has become the company’s best advertising.

While the motorhome company was founded in 1972, the Tiffins’ customer service policy really goes back to 1941 when Bob’s father, Alex Tiffin, opened a lumber yard and general merchandise company to sell supplies to farmers and contractors. Alex Tiffin, now 91, and Katie Tiffin have three children: Bob, David, and Beulah.

“The service end of the business is real easy for me. When I started working at the lumber yard in the 1950s, we also sold appliances, water pumps, freezers, washers and dryers—everything it took to build and furnish a house. We knew that it took good service to keep our customers happy. Retail merchandising teaches you service. That’s where I learned how to deal

with customers. It would not be unusual to deal with 75 customers a day at the lumber yard. Retail was my background and service goes hand-in-hand with that. Our customers were also our neighbors and we would see them in church or the grocery store. You’d have to treat them right so you would be able to look them in the eye,” Bob reflected.

“I’ll never forget when chain saws first came on the market. A salesman came around and these chain saws caught my daddy’s eye. He knew how long it took to cut down a tree with a crosscut saw. After the salesman demonstrated the saw on some trees out back, daddy bought six. He sold three of them on a time payment plan, and the other three for cash. Soon, every one of those chain saws came back to the store all to pieces in tow sacks. We couldn’t fix them, and had to take every chain saw back and make good on them. Needless to say, we didn’t sell anymore chain saws. That taught me that you have to stand behind what you sell. From that time on we didn’t sell anything in the store that we could not service.”

Alex Tiffin made sure his children learned the lumber business from the ground up, and then gave them responsibility and authority to help manage the operations. Bob became well-known in the Red Bay community as a first-string tackle on the high school football team. While a senior in 1959–60, the team won the state championship. His winsome personality and desire to serve his customers

built strong customer relationships, a quality which later became the cornerstone for a new company.

In 1961 Bob married his high school sweetheart, Judy Nix. The following year they started what was to become their future management team when Tim was born. Three years later they increased the team to four with Van. But they waited 10 years to finish out the squad with Lex who was born in 1975.

In 1965 Alex Tiffin with six shareholders purchased a state-of-the-art cotton gin to serve farmers in two states. One of the owners served as the operator-manager of the new venture, but soon opted not to continue in that role. Alex then turned the management of the gin over to 23-year-old Bob, who had to learn the business from scratch. Bob soon had the gin operating at 10 bales per hour. He operated the gin in the fall and continued to work at the lumber yard for the rest of the year. By this time, his brother David and sister Beulah had joined the company and rounded out the management of a business that had become a family affair. Unknowingly, Alex had built a business model for his oldest son.

In the 1960s both mobile home and recreational vehicle manufacturers built plants in Franklin County, Alabama. In the northwest corner of the state, Red Bay was not strategically located near component suppliers for the RV industry, most of whom could be found in northern Indiana or southern California. It was the closing

Van, Bob and Judy, Lex, and Tim (from left to right). The Tiffins married in 1961 and began building their management team when Tim was born in 1962. Three years later they increased the team to four with Van and finished out the squad in 1975 with Lex.



LEWIS COMMUNICATIONS

of the Commodore RV plant that led Bob Tiffin into a new business opportunity.

When the plant closed, the local Chevrolet dealer was left with 12 motorhome chassis and no customers. Tiffin Supply Company carried most of the materials which would be needed to build the motorhome design which Bob had in mind.

In 1972 the motorhome industry was still in its infancy. The design and construction 30 years ago appear almost primitive compared to the sleek models rolling out of today's assembly plants.

The competition was Winnebago, Champion, and Open Road. The concept of a dealer network was not in Tiffin's first business plan. He just figured if he built motorhomes, somebody would buy them.

Alex Tiffin provided his son with funding and good advice. He was the financial backbone of the company and came to its rescue several times in the early years. "Put a little extra in to take care of your customers when they have problems," he counseled. Customer service was in the business plan from Day One.

Many line employees from the defunct Commodore plant found work in similar plants in Tremont and Iuka, Miss., and were glad to come back to Red Bay when Tiffin opened his company. Bob counts himself especially blessed when he hired Commodore's sales manager, Johnny Hargett, who knew the dealers throughout the country who sold RVs. "That was one of the keys to our success," he said. Today Tiffin has just under 100 dealers in 38 of the 48 contiguous states, five in Canada, and one in England. He notes wryly that the top 20 deal-

ers sell 80 percent of his production.

During their first year, the plant only produced one unit per day. Then the new operation was broadsided by the oil embargo during the winter of 1973-74. "We couldn't give motorhomes away," Tiffin said with a smile that still showed the pain. "We laid almost everybody off but kept a few people and most of those employees are still here today. Then, in April 1974, we started receiving orders and things started getting better."

The remainder of the seventies were good growth years for the industry. Tiffin began building a dealer network. Then the gas crisis hit in 1979 and the cycle repeated itself. Production fell from 1,742 units in '78 to 572 units in '80. There were well over 100 RV builders going in, but only 20 coming out of the recession. The net effect was less competition and the survivors began to prosper.

Five years later in 1984 the company had its best year to that date, producing 2,306 units. "By then, we figured we had the stability to stay in business and serve our customers," Tiffin said. A conversation about the company's success doesn't get very far before Bob and his family give the credit to the Lord. It took a lot of hard work, but each avers his faith and God's providence are the real reasons for this success story.

But hard work in this story must not be overlooked. Bob and Judy now live in Florence, about 40 miles northeast of Red Bay. Interest in historic homes, they bought a stately three-story Victorian in 1996 and restored it to its 1888 elegance. Bob rises just after four each morning and gets to the plant at 5:15 to look over the previous day's reports. At six, Tim, Van, and Lex join him for a one-hour management meeting before the phones began to ring.



Judy and Bob Tiffin took great pleasure in the restoration of one of the fine Victorian homes on Wood Avenue in Florence. A crew spent months removing the dark lacquer that covered the oak wainscot throughout the home. The Tiffins are shown here in their kitchen. Behind them is an original mural of Forks of Cypress, an antebellum plantation near Florence which burned many years ago.

"It's a great time for the four of us," Van said. "We all respect each other's boundaries, but we make suggestions and help solve problems together. We really enjoy one another's company."

The production line runs from 7 a.m. until 3:30 p.m., but Bob, Tim, Van, and Lex routinely extend their workday until the late afternoon. By the time he gets home, Bob has put in a 14-hour day. His work ethic does not go unnoticed by his family and his employees. At 61, he still sets the pace. However, as Tim puts it, "Daddy recognized the necessity for a good plan of management succession, and pretty much turned us loose about five years ago to run the company."

Good business management and an astute awareness of the features the RV customer wants in his motorhome continue to make Tiffin Motorhomes a profitable company. Revenues generated by large-scale manufacturers can be substantial. The CEOs of many privately held corporations have spent heavily on business jets and expensive yachts, ostensibly for business entertainment. The Tiffins steered a different course and set aside substantial reserves to protect the jobs of their employees, to assure the continuing level of customer service for which the company is known, and to weather the RV market's occasional vagaries.

Tiffin's fairness in business is not limited to his customers. He is equally concerned about treating his dealers right. Don Wallace, the CEO of Lazy Days RV Supercenter near Tampa, told *RV News* that "the company in this industry that every other manufacturer should model themselves after is Allegro. I've called Bob many times and said, 'I've got a customer's coach in here for service and it needs to be painted.'

"Bob asks, 'What's it going to cost?'

"\$600."

"Go ahead and do it."

"And he sends me a check that arrives the next morning. I want to do business with companies that operate like that."

Tiffin smiles responsively. "That's another thing I learned in the lumber business from my daddy. He taught me



This 1972 Allegro was one of the first units built by Tiffin Motorhomes. The plant was a converted barn and the workers used tools found in any hardware store. The plant now covers 350,000 sq. ft. and is situated on 26 acres.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB TIFFIN

can make changes in its regular models in six months—two if really necessary.”

The Zephyr created the need for an in-plant hardwood cabinet shop. Van Tiffin planned the hardwood shop facility from the ground up. In its high-end coaches, TMH offers fine cabinetry in oak, walnut, and hardrock maple. He selects the hardwoods straight from the kiln, and then mills the rough lumber to get the select pieces for the quality interiors.

“We taught ourselves,” he laughs. “We probably could have done it cheaper if we had hired consultants. But now our people really have the skills to do it right. We grind our own molding knives to form unique pieces for the interiors.” And this writer notes that the results are spectacular.

TMH’s design and engineering introduced the Phaeton in the 2001 model year. It offers the younger market several innovative features, not the least of which is a computer-designed front cap which is created on a 5-axis CNC router.

Van played football for the Alabama Crimson Tide, and today still holds the school’s field goal record for a 57-yarder against Texas A&M. His most exciting game was a 25–23 squeaker against Auburn, which he won by nailing a 52-yarder in the last six seconds. He scored 12 of the Tide’s 25 points that day.

Lex implemented in-line inspection and correction. “Quality exceptions are corrected as soon after they occur as possible. This means that the people most familiar with a problem are those who correct it,” Lex explains as he takes me on a detailed tour of the manufacturing stations.

“Quality cannot be inspected into a product. It must be built into each step of the assembly process. When the coach gets to the end of the assembly line, it is generally ‘good to go.’”

Bob summed it up. “You can’t operate a business like this unless you have a good family. I’ve had a lot of family support.

no matter what you owe, it’s due the day you get the bill. We gather our service bills up and pay them every Thursday. When I go to bed Thursday night, I don’t owe our dealers a dime.

“As long as I have ever been in business, we have never, ever, not discounted a bill from one of our suppliers. When a bill comes due, it’s paid. As far as I’m concerned, it’s not just one way to do business—it’s the only way.”

Tiffin correctly assessed the demand in 1972 for a stoutly built, competitively priced motorhome. “I decided to build a motorhome that was real competitive. Since we were in the building business, I decided to build RVs similar to a house. We built a good steel frame on the chassis and used a steel skirt. Others at that time were using exterior plywood below the floor and would attach fiberglass or aluminum skin on top. I didn’t like that. I thought there should be a little more support down there so we used 16-gauge steel. I considered running the studs on 16-inch centers, but I thought they needed to be a little closer, so we used 12-inch centers.

The structural soundness of the Allegro was verified in 1992 when he found the second unit he built in December 1972. “As far as being structurally sound, it was as good as it was when we built it,” he related. His innovation with the steel skirting was one of the factors named in his nomination to the Heritage Foundation’s Hall of Fame.

Tiffin Motorhomes’ sensitivity to customer demand surfaced in the eighties.

The company was the first manufacturer to build basement motorhomes in 1980. This innovation permitted larger tanks for water, sewage, fuel, and storage. Tiffin was the second RV company to offer slide-outs. And in 1992 they introduced a low-end diesel pusher for \$80,000.

Buyers are getting younger as the baby boomers exercise their financial strength. Twenty-five years ago RVs were used primarily for week-end trips, and buyers wanted units that would sleep six to eight people. Today owners plan their retirement around RV travel, and many live in their coaches full-time. Most floor plans are now designed for two people.

Tim pointed out that in the 1980s one model with several interior floor plans met customer demands. TMH now offers five distinct product brands, each addressing a particular segment of the market. Each brand offers several floor plans. In 2003 the company built approximately 2,050 coaches, half of which were diesel pushers.

“Freightliner came to us in 1998 with a prototype chassis for a luxury motorhome. We built a frame and a hull for it, and they road tested it for 100,000 miles,” Tim related. “Our management liked the results and in January 1999 we came out with the Zephyr which sold then in the mid-200s. It took only 8 to 10 months to design and produce the prototype Zephyr, with approximately \$250,000 invested in design and engineering. We built it on the same lines as our other units,” he continued. “To meet customer buying preferences, TMH

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When you get put through the sausage grinder every day, you need a good home to get you through it. So I think that's part of the reason for our success. My wife, Judy, and sons, Tim, Van, and Lex, all work hand-in-hand in this business. I think that's real important."

Bob singles out Judy for the tremendous support she has given him and the company over the last 31 years. "She handles all of our decorating and does a fantastic job. If any one person deserves credit, she does."

Judy came up with the company's brand name—Allegro. "Bob wanted a name that began with an 'A' so that his company would be listed at the beginning of the trade directories," she recalled. "The musical term, allegro, which means brisk, sprightly, and cheerful, came to mind and Bob liked it."

The name was expanded later as models were named the Allegro Wide Body, the Allegro Star, the Allegro Bay, and the Allegro Bus. The latest models, Zephyr and Phaeton, have added a new synergy to TMH's brand names.

Bob Tiffin was born in Red Bay, Alabama, in 1942. But in a way his story really begins in Scotland in 1790. That's the year that Edward and Henry Tiffin left Carlisle, Scotland, and came to Virginia. The ink was barely dry on the U.S. Constitution, and thirteen states had just banded together to form a democracy.

Edward was a physician and Henry was a farmer. They quickly established themselves in Virginia's economic and political fabric. Edward Tiffin formed important political liaisons during this period with George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Monroe.

Concerned about more open land for farming, the Tiffin brothers moved to Chillicothe, Ohio, in 1798, just three years after the Indian wars had ended. Edward carried with him a recommendation for public office signed by George Washington and addressed to the territorial governor. Opposed to slavery, they freed their slaves and addressed the new economics of farming. When Ohio became the 17th state in 1802, Edward Tiffin was elected governor as a Democratic-Republican. He served two terms and then was elected to the U.S. Senate. After the death of his wife in 1808, he resigned his seat the following March and returned home. He subsequently was elected to the Ohio House of Representatives where he served two terms as speaker.

President Madison appointed Tiffin as commissioner of the general land office to record the land grants made to homesteaders in the Northwest Territory of which Ohio was a part. The records were kept in Washington. When the British burned Washington in 1814, Tiffin preserved the land records by taking them to the woods outside the city. He continued to serve in the administrations of James Monroe and John Quincy Adams.

Henry's son, Edward, who was born in 1802, moved to northwest Alabama and farmed property just south of Red Bay. He was the great-great-grandfather of Bob Tiffin. There are approximately 3,500 descendants of Edward and Henry now living in the U.S.

The maternal side of Bob's lineage is just as interesting. Lem-

uel Nelson Sparks was born in 1852 and was a contemporary of Edward Tiffin, as well as his son Edward. Sparks married Nancy Elizabeth Vinson and their union produced 11 children, who in turn rewarded them with 50 grandchildren, of whom Katie Sparks, Bob's mother, was one.

This family represents what a thorough teaching of the gospel at home will produce. All 11 of Lemuel and Nancy's children were Christians, and all 50 of their grandchildren were faithful believers, too.

When 48 of the grandchildren had obeyed the gospel, and there were but two out of the fold, Grandfather Lemuel wrote each grandchild a long, compassionate letter appealing for their obedience. They responded soon after, and the cousins' circle of faith was complete. Alex and Katie have done likewise in teaching their children. Bob, David, and Beulah are faithful Christians, as are their spouses and children. Lemuel and Nancy Sparks began a journey of faith over 100 years ago that still bears fruit today. ^{RIS}



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Daddy

Recollections of a Life Well-Lived

by Bob Tiffin



Robert Alexander Tiffin, Sr.
1911–2004

Alex Tiffin was my father. But in the South, grown men still call their fathers “Daddy.” Daddy was a remarkable man. Born on Turner Bolton’s farm near Red Bay, Alabama, when we had an agriculturally based economy, he developed a business philosophy at an early age and implemented ideas that preceded the successful techniques of today’s retailing titans.

In 1911 Red Bay was a very small town — no paved streets, three or four churches, a school, and a few stores. Farmers came to town on Saturday in their horse- or mule-drawn wagons to get supplies.

His parents, William V. (Bud) Tiffin and Samantha Modenia (Modie) Patterson, lived in Red Bay until Alex was five when they bought a 360-acre farm north of Belmont, Mississippi. With seven children to raise, my grandparents, Bud and Modie Tiffin, lived on the farm until all of the children were grown. Daddy finished high school at Belmont in 1929 and worked for the next four years while he sorted out what he wanted to do with his life.

In 1933 in the midst of the Depression, he moved to Jackson, Tennessee, to enroll in a six-month business course at Middle Tennessee Business College.

Daddy came home in 1934 full of ideas to try. He first went to work in the grocery business for Uncle John McKinney.

Daddy lived across the street from Nancy and L.N. Sparks. He took notice of their pretty 19-year-old granddaughter, Katie, and they began dating in 1935. About a year later they were married on April 28, 1936. No big wedding ceremony. He just borrowed Uncle Johnny’s car and went to Russellville, the county seat, to get the probate judge to marry them. When they got there, the judge was at a school function and they had to sit outside his office and wait for him to return.

Daddy learned how to get along with Uncle Johnny and continued to work for him until 1941 when he went into business for himself. He rented a 25-foot wide building and began to sell a full line of groceries along with seed, feed, and fertilizer.

Daddy had a good personality and just genuinely enjoyed meeting people. He made people feel comfortable and welcome whenever they came to his store. When I began to work in his store many years later as a teenager, he would tell me, “You learn your customers’ names and call them by their names when they come in the door.” We always referred to a customer as “Mister” and “Mrs.” and rarely took the liberty of calling someone by their first

name unless we really knew them personally. “That shows respect,” he always said.

About a year after he started the business, I was born at home on March 5, 1942. Like so many rural towns in the South, there was no hospital in Red Bay. Doctors practiced medicine out of small clinics.

Customers put their confidence in Daddy. He taught me from the beginning to make your dealings honest with everyone and pay your bills. He went through his accounts payable file every week and paid his suppliers. He always took discounts on accounts payable and I still do that today. We pay our dealers every week for the warranty work they do.

Daddy had the philosophy of putting some money back on a regular basis, keeping it in reserve for a rainy day. That philosophy has gotten Tiffin Motorhomes through some critical slow periods over the years.

By 1947 Alex Tiffin General Merchandise had outgrown its rented quarters and Daddy built a new store. He expanded his business to include hardware and building supplies, and bought property along the railroad tracks to unload fertilizer, mortar mix, cement, roofing, and other commodities. The railroad siding gave him the flexibility to buy carload lots. His suppliers would sell the larger quantities at lower prices, making it possible for him to sell to his customers at more competitive prices. In a few short years he had become a very successful entrepreneur.

In 1950 Mother and Daddy began planning a new home. They bought five acres about a mile from town and started construction in March 1952 and completed it in August. Whenever he would get in items they had ordered for the new house, such as sheetrock, lumber, and plumbing supplies, his customers would want to buy the same good quality supplies for their houses. It didn’t take him long to realize there was a market demand for quality building supplies. He bought two more buildings and began to stock bath fixtures, appliances, windows, doors, sheetrock, finished lumber, fencing, and water pumps. Tiffin Supply is the oldest Whirlpool dealer in the state of Alabama.

By 1955 the company had changed its name. That was the year I began working at the store. Tiffin Supply Company had everything for a man to build his house and run his farm. Daddy sold everything except ready-mix concrete. Red Bay was strategically located in the middle of a four-county area: Tishomingo and Itawamba, Mississippi, and Marion and Franklin, Alabama.

“Always stock what people want,” he would tell me. We kept expanding our product base. Local people would say, “If you can’t find it at Alex’s store, you can’t find it nowhere else.”

In the 1950s the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) began to offer a 100 percent loan program to build a house if you owned the land. Because so many families owned farms, they could give their children a piece of land to get started. Most children learned to build on the farm. So it was easy for them to use the FHA loan program, buy their supplies at Tiffin, and build their homes. A group of contractors sprang up to build houses for those who lived in the small towns in the quad-county area. The success of the program spread and we were soon getting business from Colbert and Lauderdale counties north of us because we stocked such a broad base of products for building and supply. Daddy’s business philosophy was working: “Buy in large quantities and sell everything at a fair price.”

Being able to service what we sold be-

Bob Tiffin with his father during the winter of 1943-44 in Red Bay.



ALL PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE TIFFIN FAMILY

came a key part of Daddy’s business philosophy. I’ll never forget when chain saws first came out. A salesman came around and these chain saws caught my Daddy’s eye because he knew how long it took to cut down a tree with a crosscut saw. After the salesman demonstrated the saw on some trees out back, Daddy bought six. He sold three on a time payment plan and the other three for cash. Soon, every one of those chain saws came back to us all in pieces in tow sacks. We couldn’t fix them, so Daddy took back every chain saw and made good on them. Needless to say, we didn’t sell any more chain saws. But he taught me a principle that we use today: you always stand behind what you sell and you provide repair service.

Working with a local contractor, Daddy built several houses to sell. He financed them himself. Marlin Saint, who used to head up our warranty recovery program at Tiffin Motorhomes, bought one of those houses many years ago and told me a fun-

Alex and Katie Tiffin on their honeymoon at Rock City in 1936.



ny story about the transaction. When Daddy came to collect the first payment, Marlin paid him in cash. As Daddy walked back to his truck, Marlin said, “Mr. Alex, don’t I get a receipt?” Daddy reached across the front seat, tore off one side of a brown paper bag, scribbled out a receipt, and handed it to him. He noticed that Marlin looked a little surprised, and said, “That’s just as good as one of those receipts that’s printed on a pad!” Marlin accepted it and still enjoys telling the story.

In the late forties and early fifties, Daddy partnered with Purina to try a new marketing idea for chicken feed. In the spring he offered “free baby chick” days. The farmer would get a dozen baby chicks if he bought 25 pounds of chick starter. Anticipating the rush, Daddy ordered 10,000 baby chicks from the Cullman hatchery that were shipped by rail to Red Bay. I’ll never forget the depot agent, Mr. McDowell, calling the store. With the loud chirping of 10,000 baby chicks in the background, he hollered into the phone, “Tell Alex his baby chicks are here!!”

Daddy took his business out on the rural country roads in 1948 with a locally designed and built peddling truck. He bought a Ford school bus chassis and

Alex Tiffin took great satisfaction in the success of Tiffin Motorhomes. Shown here with him in 1985 are Lex, Tim, and Bob.



had Curt Griffus, the local blacksmith, and Robert Sparks (his father-in-law), build a floor frame using 4 × 6 oak runners. Mr. Griffus made tie bolts to attach it to the chassis and used oak 4 × 4 floor joists on 24-inch centers. They used ¾-inch tongue-and-groove oak flooring to complete the base and tied off the edges with 1½ × ¾-inch steel. They built the walls with 2 × 4s on 16-inch centers. The roof joists were beveled and topped with ¾-inch tongue-and-groove. The sides and roof were skinned with 18-gauge galvanized sheets. The back bumper was extended to strap on chicken coops. It was a sturdy craft. I watched my granddaddy build it and picked up ideas that I would use later in motorhome construction. When I asked him what he was going to do for a windshield, he just said, "I'll make one." It was a flat windshield that pushed out from the bottom edge for ventilation.

The Purina Feed Company thought so much of Daddy's idea that they offered to paint it with their standard red and white checkerboard advertising if we would bring it to Birmingham.

Daddy drove the peddling truck to Birmingham and I rode along in a cane bottom, ladder-back chair. Every time he started off, I'd flip over in that chair. Daddy and I rode the Illinois Central Seminole back to Red Bay from Birmingham. Purina kept it two weeks and we went down on the train to pick it up.

During the summers of 1953 and '54,

I rode the peddling truck just about every day and helped out. We had regular routes for every weekday. We would sell groceries, kerosene, and fertilizer, and we bought eggs, chickens, and butter from our customers. Many times we traded by bartering. The peddling truck drivers I remember were Marvin Umphres, Jim Harden, Junior Ledbetter, and Mr. Thrasher. Daddy's peddling truck was a big convenience to people out in the country. Life seems to have been a lot simpler then.

When my children became old enough to learn about business, they started out at Tiffin Supply under Daddy's watchful eye. Daddy gave Van an assignment and explained what the pay would be. As he concluded his instructions, Daddy warned Van, "Now don't tell people how much I'm paying you." Van quickly replied, "Don't worry, Grandpa, I'd be ashamed for anyone to know." Standing nearby, his older brother Tim was shocked. Nevertheless, he was always a good mentor to anyone who wanted to learn from him.

During the late sixties, there were three RV companies in nearby Mississippi: Commodore, Sunliner, and Safari. It was my job to collect from them. Commodore moved back north and the other two went out of business in late 1971. Having had the opportunity to visit their plants, I was intrigued with the idea of starting a motorhome plant in Red Bay.

Daddy and I discussed the plan in September 1972 and he agreed to underwrite

it as necessary. "Necessary" came much sooner than we expected when the country was socked with the oil embargo in September 1973. We laid off everyone but our management team.

Daddy stood by us and kept us going. "If we go down, we'll all go down together," he said staunchly. We recovered in early 1975 but had a similar experience again in 1979. He paid for the chassis and engine, the largest component we had to buy. He visited the plant every afternoon to see what we were using and whether his large quantity purchasing could help us.

When we started the company, I wanted to use Onan gensets. Since I only wanted to buy a few at a time, we had to buy through Atchinson Equipment Company in Birmingham. Mr. Atchinson was not favorable. "I'm not selling anything to anybody in North Alabama. I've been burned by all the companies in North Alabama," he complained.

I called Tom Bowen at Onan about our predicament. "Mr. Atchinson won't sell to us—not even for cash!"

He called back a short time later. "Are you affiliated with Tiffin Supply?" he asked. I explained. "OK, no problem. We'll bill Tiffin Supply." We continued to use his credit on gensets until 1985.

Daddy retired in 1995 at the age of 84 and enjoyed several years of good health. His last three years were difficult.

Daddy believed in all three of his children: David, Beulah, and me. He taught us well the principles of dealing fairly with everyone—your employees, your customers, and your suppliers, making everyone feel welcome and comfortable, managing carefully your payables and receivables, understanding market demands, and purchasing in quantities that give you a selling advantage.

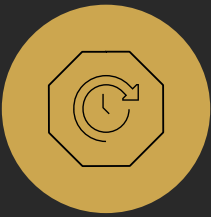
Daddy was not a Christian when Mother married him in 1936. But she was patient with him and always a good example. He resisted for many years but finally obeyed the Gospel after Judy and I married. He had always followed Christian principles in his business. After he was baptized into Christ, he followed those principles in his service to God throughout the rest of his life. RIS



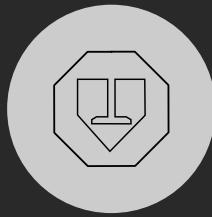
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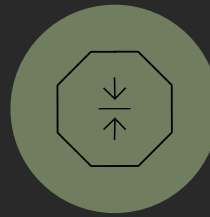
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David B., Tiffin Open Road Owner



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The First 15 Years at TMH

There are several current and former Tiffin employees in the Red Bay area who were here during the first 15 years, and a few who were here during the first three years! You will find their recollections interesting—the way it was when decisions were made in minutes and

success depended on “main strength and awkwardness.” That’s an expression my mother used when she talked about how her family got through the Depression. The narrative is written in first person, eliminating quote marks except where an individual relates remarks.



Horace & Janice Stepp

I began part-time in 1972, drawing the first floorplans. I was working full-time drafting plans for mobile homes in a nearby manufacturing plant. Bob asked me if I would draw plans for motorhomes. I warned him, “Bob, I don’t know anything about motorhomes.” He answered, “I don’t either, Horace, but we’ll learn together.”

His response stuck with me through the years. I continued over the next three years drawing plans fulltime for Franklin Homes while doing motorhome plans for Bob. I started fulltime at TMH in 1975.

I was the only draftsman at Tiffin for the next 23 years. Our son, Stacy, helped me during the summers, actually began helping when he was just 12. Our daughter, Deanna, as a senior in high school learned drafting and assisted me. She went on to other positions using DataCad.

We had only one brand, the Allegro. We soon had six or seven floorplans and that eventually increased to 10. We started doing slide-outs in the mid-nineties. When Deanna left for college, Janice (Horace’s wife) took her job. She taught Janice how to put our drawings on the computer. When I asked Bob about Janice coming on board full time, he said, “I enjoy working with Judy, so I see no reason why you can’t work here with Janice.”

Stacy continued working with me and produced the electrical schematics for wiring the coaches. There was a time for several weeks when we were all working in the drafting department at the same time.

After I began managing the assembly plant, I asked Bob about hiring women to work in the plant. Soon after that, we started two women in final finish.

Phyllis Williams

When I began work on January 5, 1976, there were three people in the business office doing payroll, accounts receivable, accounts payable, and invoicing. Sylvia Massey left in May and Candace Petree took on invoicing. I did AP and AR. As we grew, my job was narrowed to AP which

I have been doing for 40 years. All of this was done with pegboard bookkeeping. There were no computers involved. In 1976 there were 36 people on the payroll.

From 1976 and into the nineties, our delivery drivers flew back to Nashville, Memphis, or Birmingham after delivering a coach. Judy Tiffin and I went to Delta’s Atlanta training center to learn how to become an in-house agent. Once we got the computer and software here, we could write tickets with any airline. We did in-house ticketing for five years.

In the late seventies, we got IBM Selectric typewriters and typed all of the registration documents as well as the foil labels with the VINs that go inside the entry door. Of course, they had to be perfect.

We used Chevrolet chassis when we first started and purchased them from the local dealer. I paid for the chassis on a daily basis and walked the check over to Page Chevrolet. Not long after I started, we



had a Saturday afternoon fish fry in the middle of the plant for the whole staff.

Bob was 30 when we started. He has an exceptional work ethic that set the standard for every employee.

Bill Brown

I lacked just one month getting in 38 years delivering Tiffin coaches. For the most part of my career, I did the long runs. On Sunday morning to Tuesday morning, it was California. Thursday to Saturday night was a round trip to Wisconsin. I would leave early Sunday and deliver a coach by 10 a.m. Tuesday, usually back by Thursday noon; then leave for Wisconsin and be back home by Saturday night

I loved seeing the country. On the way back to Red Bay, I occasionally stopped to visit car shows, buying and selling parts. I visited Hoover Dam, the Grand Canyon, Mt. Rushmore, Yellowstone, Little Big Horn, and Glacier National Park. Kathy often rode with me until our son Michael was born in 1986.

While I worked for Tiffin, I didn't have to worry about having a job. I am 72 now. One year I kept a log of total miles driven during the year, and got 252,000. I really enjoyed my work. One thing is for sure, it was much easier delivering the Class A diesels.

Bill and Kathy live less than three miles from the Tiffin plant, just over the state line in Mississippi. He now has more time for his hobby in the garage next to their home—taking cars from the 60s and 70s and putting them back in good running condition.



Jack Elliott

Brenda and I had just moved back to Red Bay from the Chicago area where I was a pipefitter. I joined the company on July 1, 1974, when Tiffin Motorhomes was a very small factory producing one motorhome a day. In 1975 we built an addition to our little plant and soon went to two a day.

We got our first big challenge that Fall when the country struggled with an oil embargo and interest rates jumped to 16.5%. The second week I was there, Bob took me and Johnny Hargett aside and said, "Here's what we are gonna do. If we build a good quality product, sell it at a competitive price, and stand behind what we build, our customers will keep coming back to buy from us." Over the years I have seen that happen over and over again. One person I know is now on his sixth Tiffin. "We have to do whatever it takes to make sure our customers are happy," Bob said.

I worked in purchasing for the next seven years, and bought everything it took to build a motorhome. I had to have in our inventory whatever was needed to keep the assembly line running. If a trucking company said it would take two days to get certain parts to us and we needed them the next day on the assembly line, I would drive to Memphis and pick them up that night. Bob hired an assistant to check inventory daily to prevent shortages. Purchasing was not just a desk job—I got involved in unloading with a forklift and stocking the assembly line after the office closed. Today, purchasing is a much different job with nearly complete computer control of all processes.



DIAMOND SHIELD
Advanced Paint Protection System



3 STEP EASY CARE PLAN

STEP 1 // WIPE REGULARLY

Wiping bugs and road grime off your vehicle, with a wet soft cloth, as soon as you get a chance is essential to keeping your film looking great. This will also reduce the risk of staining and discoloration from bug acids, runoff stains, and road grime left on for an extended period. When done apply 303 Aerospace Protectant!

STEP 2 // WASH MONTHLY

Washing monthly will give your film the deep clean it deserves and will ensure the film remains crystal clear. We recommend using Advanced RV & Auto Wash and a soft cotton or lambswool mitt to apply. Do not use any abrasive brushes, rags, cloths, or compounds. When you're done don't forget to apply 303 Aerospace Protectant!

DO NOT: Use Rain-Ex products or Bug & Tar Removers

STEP 3 // WAX QUARTERLY

Waxing your film on a quarterly basis, or more, will add that extra layer of protection to your film. Keeping it waxed will prevent damage from bug acids and road grime, and allow the film to effortlessly be wiped clean. We recommend using Advanced RV & Auto Wax, a synthetic polymer cream wax designed specifically for Diamond Shield.

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In the mid-seventies, automotive air conditioning was an *option*. In the late seventies, the oil embargo really hurt the economy. We soon had 123 motorhomes sitting here that had not been sold to dealers. But we kept going with a foreman and a few workers. Bob called me, Kelly Hester, and Jack Bostick and said, “Fellows, you need to go on the road and get these motorhomes sold. All of our operating capital is tied up in this inventory.” It took us a year to get them all sold. After six months, Bob started calling people back to work as orders finally started coming in.

In 1984 Tim Tiffin took over purchasing. Kelly Hester and Jack Bostick moved into warehouse management and I got my first experience in customer service.

Wade Humphres

I started in 1974 on the clean-up crew. Over the next few years, I worked as a utility man or floater to take care of different positions when someone was absent. There was not an assembly line in the beginning. The chassis sat in one place and we worked on it until it was finished.

Parts from warehouse and wood-working were brought in as we needed them. We put the bumper on first and just painted the raw steel, but later went to chrome bumpers. The floor and walls were brought in from the welding shop that was run by Norris and Mickey Colum. As we put them together in the assembly building, I did some of the welding. We did all-aluminum construction which was a big selling point because our competitors were using a lot of wood. At that time our shift was 7 to 3:30.



During the early 80s when there were layoffs because of the embargo, I stayed on and helped build a separate welding shop. The assembly line building was built in the late 80s. We continued to build the metal-gas units in the old building and started building the gas-fiberglass units and the diesel-fiberglass units on the assembly line in the new building.

By that time, we were developing some management structure and had several supervisors, with each one covering four or five work stations on the assembly line. I served in several supervisory positions on the assembly line and became the production supervisor when we terminated the aluminum-sided units and went completely to fiberglass.

Don Boyd

I started my career at Tiffin Motorhomes as an electrician on August 10, 1977. I was 21. We built a motorhome in segments as it sat in one place: flooring, sidewalls, and sub-roof.

The plumbers got it first; the cabinets were set in next; and then a sub-roof was put on.

Then the electricians took over. When it was time for us, we went inside and started drilling. Wiring was run over the sub-roof for the ceiling lights. Where we put receptacles, switches, and lights was up to us—wherever we thought they were needed. We used air-powered drills and screw guns. We cut holes in the backs of the cabinets with razor knives to get the wiring where it needed to go. Camp-ground power was run to a fuse box with 110v lines going to the TV, appliances,



and receptacles. With another fuse panel, we set up the 12v power coming off the batteries. The electricians were their own engineers. With five of us working, we had it wired in about an hour. Owners rarely had problems with the electrical systems.

We were all buddies and Bob came around to talk with us just about every day to see how we were doing. He was always more like a friend than a boss. I did wiring until 2002 when I moved to service. During those years, many of the owners became friends and we still keep in touch on holidays. It has been a pleasure having good working relationships with our older owners.

B.D. Stacy

I grew up in Belmont and went to Northeast Mississippi Jr. College to earn a two-year degree in electrical engineering. When I came to Tiffin Motorhomes in March 1981, there were no electrician’s jobs open and I took a position in Final Finish. When the finished units came off of the assembly line, they didn’t go to the paint plant like they do now because the aluminum siding was bought pre-painted.

Before shipment, each motorhome went through Final Finish. We checked the functionality of everything in the dash, all of the lights and the electrical outlets, cleaned the coaches inside and out, and detailed them. Then we brought people in from the line to fix the problems we had discovered before the units were shipped. We checked all of the units being shipped with six employees.

We had very basic motorhomes in 1981. They were much easier to build. The



cabinets were framed with 2×2s and 1×2s. The sides were paneling and the standard doors were bought from suppliers. The cabinets were screwed directly to the walls. I moved to quality control and inspections for three years.

Finally, I got to use my college training when I was asked to serve as the foreman of the wiring shop in 1999. During my tenure as foreman, we began using harnesses in the wire shop. TMH then hired electrical engineers to design the wire harnesses to create more effective and efficient wiring for our motorhomes.

Norris Lewey

I began my career here in June 1974 and I believe I have been working here longer than any employee, except Bob, of course. At that time we sprayed insulation into the sidewall and roof cap. I then moved the chassis to a rack and sprayed on the undercoating.

I served in all phases of construction and then went to utility to do all jobs in all departments as the substitute for absentees, serving in this position for 20 years. With broad experience, I went to repair to work on customer units returning for service.

I had gone into the National Guard in April 1970 when I was 17, where I served under John Blackwell, battalion commander. Our summer service could run for two to six weeks. Employers worked with the military to hold employee positions for this type of service. We went to South Korea, Panama Canal, and Yakima, Washington for desert training. I was in vehicle maintenance. We went to Iraq De-

ember 2003 to March 2005. We brought everyone back alive in our 500-member 15th Signal Battalion. During that time, I took a leave of absence.

When I returned in 2005, I began the best part of my career: customer relations manager at the new Tiffin Service Center. After owners arrived at the Tiffin campground to get service and repairs, I interviewed each owner the morning after arrival to determine why they were there and how much service they would need. I am a people person and thoroughly enjoyed this job.

Brent Bullard

I actually started working part-time in the welding shop after school in 1974 in a co-op program. I worked on the Dodge chassis, adding a brace where they were having a vibration.

When I finished high school in 1977, I went fulltime. When the recession hit in 1980, I built water wagons. We put 500-gallon tanks on an open cab chassis and mounted a big pump. These units were sold to orange grove owners in Florida. When business picked up again, I built the front steel frames and served as the lead man in the shop.

I continued to work in the welding shop and also took care of repairs whenever needed. I worked on customer-owned coaches coming back to Red Bay for repairs to the outriggers, jacks, and generators. In the 80s, the welding shop was especially good at building the new framework for basements.

Bob would come up with new ideas for a coach and I would figure out the steel

framing to make it happen. It was Bob's idea to put an entrance door in front of the right front tire on the diesel pusher coaches. I redesigned all of the steel framework for the dash, firewall, and stepwell during the 1995-96 model year.

Tim came to me that year and wanted to redesign the framework to make the gas-powered chassis lighter. "Daddy is planning to be gone for a week. See if you can do it. If it doesn't turn out right, we'll cut it off the chassis and he won't know about it," Tim said.

I used a laminated floor over the welded frame and bolted them together. You could have loaded a dozer on it.

Tim approved of the results. "Leave it right there," Tim said. "I want Daddy to see this." Bob approved. I later built the framing for the first slide-out on a small gas unit.

Danny Inman

When I started in March 1974, we were trying to run one unit a day. We had one sales person—Bob Tiffin, one foreman for production, and one foreman for welding. We also had one part-time person for drafting. Bob would explain what we would be doing each week and how the business was doing as a whole. Bob was active in the daily operations and we were all very involved.

The Fall and Winter of 1974-75 was slow. When campers began traveling in the Spring, then we would see a direct result and we would get busy. We were, after all, building campers back then. When fuel went up, business went down.

Continued on page 144



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Congratulations on



50 YEARS
FROM



Our First Dealership: Bankston Motorhomes

by Bob Tiffin

When I first began thinking about starting the motorhome company in 1972, I knew my competition would be Winnebago, Open Road, and Champion. So I looked around North Alabama and nearby states to see who was selling what brands. A Nashville dealer was selling Winnebago. Another Nashville dealer had Champion and a Memphis dealer was selling Open Road.

On my search, I stopped to see Harrison Bankston in Huntsville, Alabama. His main line was Champion. I spent time with him and asked pointed questions about how motorhomes should be built. The first thing out of his mouth was, "It needs to have an aluminum frame."

Harrison's main Class A motorhome was Champion and they had steel frames. "Weight has always been an issue with the Champion motorhome," he assured me. "I like the aluminum frame much better. If you will build an aluminum-framed motorhome at an attractive price, I can sell all that you build." That got my attention. We had that conversation in July 1972.

We incorporated in September and started production soon after. I visited Harrison several times to discuss how we should design the motorhomes to get the best price points and floorplans.

Harrison has been a friend and business adviser for all these years. We have had a great relationship and he has been one of our top 10 dealers for 50 years.

Bankston's dealership in the early days was like most dealerships. They had one service manager, a couple of good service techs, and four or five on their sales staff. But Harrison did it all as far as general management, F&I, and closing every deal.

I soon discovered if I wanted to meet with him, I had to get there early on a Saturday morning. As time went on, we did most of our communicating by phone. Conversations rarely lasted more than two to three minutes. We know each other so well we can anticipate how to get things accomplished on either end—manufacturing or dealership.

As his company grew in sales, his service organization grew as well. That does not always happen. He has one of the finest service facilities in our dealer network. In recent years, he acquired a manufactured housing plant that had closed in Ardmore, Tennessee.

The facility has three buildings that gave him about 125,000 square feet to work with. He uses the buildings for the PDIs on the motorhomes we build for him, for new service bays, and for a collision center with full body paint capability. Most RV dealerships have difficulty disposing of older units taken in on trades. Bankston is using some of the newly acquired space as a

rehab center to put older RVs back in good shape, allowing young families to start RVing for a modest price.

Harrison has also expanded his sales operation to include the Nashville, Tennessee territory by leasing several acres on Music Valley Drive, in order to expand their presence in the Nashville area. His company has just opened a brand new location in Attalla, Alabama, on the northwest side of Gadsden. Harrison has another big asset. His two daughters gave him 17 grandchildren—11 boys and six girls. Two fine grandsons are now working with him in his business.

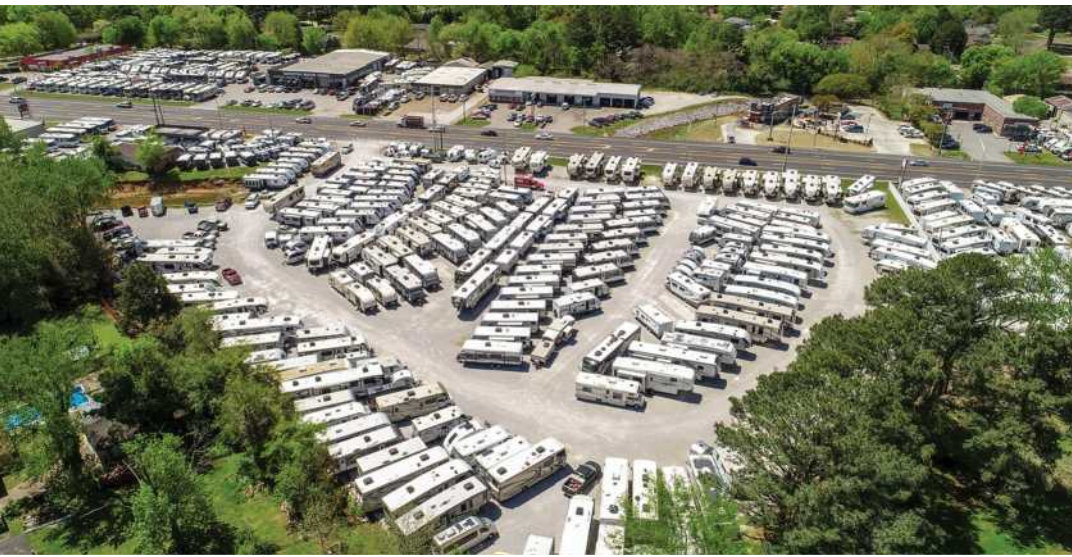
Harrison also has a vivid recollection of their solid relationship. Following is his part of the story in his own words.

"In the late seventies, maybe early eighties, I found a 27-foot split bath floor plan that I really liked and I knew it would sell," Harrison related. "Bob promised to build just one unit for me. When it was finished, he liked it too, and wanted to take it to a dealer show before he sent it to me. We agreed and he returned it after the show where he got dozens of orders for it. I sold the prototype to my customer and Bob manufactured hundreds more of that floor plan. I continued to send him ideas, many of which he implemented.

"As the years went by, we both got very busy. But I always knew if I needed Bob Tiffin, he was just a phone call away," Harrison continued. "He is a problem solver who can cut through red tape and get things accomplished faster than any executive I have ever known. He gives us a comfort zone that no other manufacturer has ever offered.

"When selling motorhomes that range in price from \$200,000 to a half million,

Bankston Motorhomes' first address on Jordan Lane in Huntsville has become their smallest location. ♦ The dealership has been in Tiffin's Top 10 Dealers almost every year. Here, C.H. Bankston, Harrison's father, who worked with his company for several years, accepts the 2003 Top 10 award. ♦ Harrison is blessed with two grandsons who are now filling leadership roles at Bankston Motorhomes. Colin serves as the company's vice president and Chase was named president last year.



problems that become major issues with other manufacturers are reduced to minor situations at Tiffin Motorhomes. Bob really does put the dealer and the owner first with any issue,” Harrison said. “Other manufacturers are still trying to come up to the service benchmarks that Tiffin established years ago.”

Bankston related that the dealership had a very difficult time during the severe recession that began in 2008. He and the family also suffered the loss of Carol, his wife, to cancer. Two years later Harrison married Kim Dobbs, a woman who had worshiped in the congregation where he had served as an elder. An astute businesswoman, she has taken an active role in the company. His two oldest grandsons, Chase Baerlin, 31, and Colin Baerlin, 27, joined the company eight years ago. Chase serves as president of the five locations, and Colin is vice president and manages the IT operations. Several of the younger grandsons work during the summer washing and cleaning RVs and two granddaughters have worked in various capacities over the years.

“We have dealerships currently in five locations offering service and RV sales in motorized and towables. All of the locations sell Class A, B, and C motorhomes as well as trailers and fifth wheels,” Harrison said.

Chase noted that Bankston carries 75 different brands produced by 15 manufacturers. “We also service everything that we sell,” he added. “When owners arrive with units we did not sell, we are always pleased to service them. Not long ago, an owner with a truck camper came to our Florence location with an electrical problem. Our service manager located parts and diagrams to help him make the repair and did not charge him.”


“We are very blessed,” Harrison continued. “Our combined sales in all stores are doing well in spite of the effects of Covid and the economy. We now operate in Huntsville, Florence, and Warrior, Alabama; plus Nashville and Ardmore, Tennessee.

“We want our customers to know we are a family-owned business,” Kim said. “RVing promotes strong families through

the togetherness of the camping experience. We are seeing younger couples buying campers and trailers to create the experiences for their families that their parents afforded them when they were children. It is really an experience that families pass on from generation to generation. Our sales people are campers who build relationships with their customers by helping them select the right equipment for the type of camping they want to do.”

“The big news next Spring for the Bankston organization will be the opening of our new location in Attalla,” Harrison added. “With 1600 feet of frontage on I-59, the 26-acre property will give us all the room we need for a large inventory of both motorized and towable. The two-story building with an elevator will house an indoor showroom, administrative and sales offices, conference rooms, and meeting rooms for customer organizations like Allegro Club and FMCA.”

“We are working closely with Attalla’s mayor and the industrial development board to assure our success and bring jobs and secondary spending to promote the local economy,” Kim said. “Based on the attendance at an RV show we did in this area as well as the service work originating in a 50-mile radius from the Albertville store, we decided that Attalla was a good location for a new Bankston store. When the opportunity came up to acquire the property, we felt it would be a win-win situation.”

“By building a viable service facility in every store, we are extending our service area from the western side of mid-Georgia to the Mississippi line and from Nashville to Birmingham. Of course, sales follow excellent service which has been the company’s business philosophy for nearly 50 years,” Harrison added. 

Bankston’s new Attalla, Alabama facility features 16 service bays, each wide enough to handle motorhomes with slideouts extended on both sides. Four of the bays will be used for receiving and shipping, and PDIs. Twelve of the bays will be used for service. ♦ The entrance and welcoming center to the dealership has a large area for displays, literature, and seating for arriving RVers. ♦ The entrance to the dealership has ample parking for shoppers as well as arriving RVers with motorhomes and towables. RVers with service appointments enter through the covered side entrance to allow service writers to review the work to be accomplished, protected from the weather.



Bankston’s new Attalla dealership will open on June 1.



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The Allegro Open Road 32SA

Tiffin's 32SA reminds us of our roots. Although it is the shortest gas coach we build today, this Allegro is feature-rich with standards & options. The Open Road series represents one-third of the Class A coaches built by Tiffin Motorhomes each year.

TEN YEARS AGO RV BUYERS WITH spartan budgets expected far fewer features and comforts when they decided to look for a gas-powered motorhome for their RVing adventures. Over the last decade, Tiffin has upgraded the Allegro Open Road series—its entry-level gas coaches—with features buyers dreamed about after visiting more expensive Class A diesels at RV shows.

How did they do it?

Trickle-down technology. Features developed for the more expensive diesels were adapted for the Allegro Open Road.

TMH combines the efficiency and solid structures of assembly-line manufacturing with the quality of interior modules and slide-outs built offline by talented craftspeople. Each module is installed on the line during the progressive building process.

Vertical integration. Dedicated plants build radius-corner sliding windows with screens; fiberglass shower stalls, one-piece roofs, extruded fiberglass panels; holding tanks; textiles; and driver & passenger chairs.

Innovation. Solid surface countertop technology matches major brand names. Residential-style ducts for distribution and return air to roof HVAC units. Multiplexing to reduce the amount of wiring in harnesses. Exclusive use of LEDs for lighting. Research for materials with the highest R-values to insulate floors, walls, and ceilings.

Interior decorators with decades of experience offer three décors for every brand, blending new textiles, wall coverings, floors, stains, and finishes each model year.

Cabinet design and storage capacity at all price points is unmatched in the RV industry.

ALTHOUGH THE 32SA is the shortest in length of the floorplans in the Allegro Open Road brand, it carries all of the Tiffin benchmarks for thoughtful design: large windows to bring the outdoors into your coach; plenty of carefully planned storage; functionally located LED lighting; Ultraleather furniture combined with well-chosen fabrics; and craftsmanship apparent in cabinetry with hand-crafted doors and facings, slide-out fascias, wall coverings, wainscot, and chair rails. Standard features in the Open Road series include the LG Entertainment system with four TVs and the Dish/Wally satellite receiver, the LG microwave/convection oven, the upgraded Sand Castle floor tile, and residential memory foam king mattress.

The 32SA is versatile! It can be the introductory coach for a couple who are making weekend and one- or two-week trips as their vacation schedules permit. With one or two children in the picture, add the drop-down bunk and pull out the sofa bed. Sleeps four or five, even six.

The Living Area

Featuring Shadow cabinetry (MSRP \$784) and the standard Portico Linen II interior throughout the coach, the interior designer selected a luxurious L-shaped

couch (MSRP \$4,314) for the living room in the coach's mid-section. Covered in Ultraleather with seating for four, the couch faces a 43-inch LG television with sound bar. It is the focal point of the living area. The television is part of a vertical ensemble, above which is a 29-inch wide, two shelf cabinet with louvered doors. Under the countertop, a 5-inch-deep recessed shelf offers convenient storage for TV controls and other electronic paraphernalia. At floor level, an optional 30-inch Furrion electric fireplace with glowing glass coals in selectable colors is rated to produce enough heat to warm 500 square feet (MSRP \$784).

The shorter "leg" in the L-shaped sofa retracts when the slide-out is brought in for travel. The seat cushion folds down and the back cushion is removed for storage in the bedroom closet. The extension makes a nice divider, creating a living room boundary. The system houses a fold-out bed, an Air Dream sofa sleeper system with air over coil technology (48" × 72"). Due to furniture shortages, the L-shaped sofa may not be offered in 2023 models. An optional 92" Ultraleather Sleeper Air Coil sofa (MSRP \$2,039) will continue to be offered along with the standard Ultraleather Flip & Fold sofa.

Noted for building light and airy living spaces, Tiffin architects designed the 3' × 14' DS* slide-out with four screened windows. Each sidewall of the slide has a 26" × 24" sliding window. The 14' wall has a 20" × 59" sliding window above the sofa and a 20" × 47" sliding window over the credenza of the computer/dinette workstation. All of the windows have handsome valances that conceal opaque and solar shades. Art deco sconces are positioned on both sides of the valance framing the 59" window above the sofa. Directional LEDs embedded in the cabinets above the sofa provide reading lights.

The Galley & Dining Areas

Tiffin's strong suit for over two decades is the manufacture of carefully designed and very functional galleys. Galley modules and cabinetry are built in specialty shops by skilled craftspeople. Small parts are cut and finished following engineering drawings for the many floorplans of each brand, then spray painted or stained prior to moving each part through an air-filtered drying oven.

Allow me to digress for a moment to describe how these beautiful galleys, entertainment centers, dinettes, beds, and bathrooms are built and installed—some as interior modules on the base floor above the chassis, and others in the slide-outs that are built offline in another part of the plant.

The finished parts are assembled into cabinets, vanities, drawers, dinette/computer workstations, drawers, doors, paneling, louvered doors and covers, fascia, chests, wardrobes, and more. It is an amazing process to see the parts come together and be assembled into handsome pieces of furniture and modules in an order that is guided by computers to appear at the correct assembly line station—the right module, at the correct station, just in time for the floorplan for which it was intended. Large modules, such as walls for a bathroom to which a vanity and cabinet may be attached, are built in an adjacent plant and transported to platforms along

* PS = passenger side. DS = driver side. SSCT = solid surface countertop. OH = overhead.





the assembly line. They are lifted onto the floor of the motorhome under construction at the assigned work station.

In another section of the assembly plant, the exterior walls of slide-outs are built on gurneys. Teams then construct the interior panels, floor, windows, and ceiling along with lighting and wiring. The cabinets for the galley with solid surface countertops complete with sinks and cooktops rendezvous with the overhead cabinets to be installed in a just-finished slide-out. Even refrigerators are installed in the slide-outs. Two, three, or four slide-outs moving along on gurneys in unison, on a timed schedule, are positioned at station nine to be lifted and installed in the gaping holes of the receiving coach.

In the Allegro Open Road 32SA under review, the galley is not part of a slide-out. As shown on the floorplan, it is located on the PS wall immediately north of the entrance. The solid surface countertop is over six feet wide and 22 inches deep, enhanced with a full-height designer backsplash. The three-burner cooktop with an upgraded grill is recessed with SSCT retractable covers. The double stainless-steel sink has removable SSCT covers which may be stored in one of the large drawers under the cooktop. It is served with a chrome single-lever, gooseneck faucet with an extendable spray head. With covers in place, the chef has over 11 square feet of countertop space. Tiffin's signature galley feature is its elongated horizontal window (16.5" ×

68" in this coach) providing the chef with a view into the patio while preparing meals. The galley is lighted with four LEDs and served with three 110v outlets located conveniently in the base of the overhead cabinets. Two 110v outlets are mated with two USB charging ports which are flush-mounted in the countertop in a stainless steel pop-up encasement.

Overhead cabinets include a 38" wide double-door cabinet above the sink with 4.7 cubic feet of storage and three shelves. Two small cabinets are located above the microwave/ convection oven. The OH cabinetry is completed with a three-shelf slide-out pantry. This coach also has an upgrade for solid surface countertops and backsplashes (MSRP \$1,882).

The cabinets under the countertop rival the spaciousness of those found in a Phaeton or an Allegro Bus (see picture). From left-to-right, in the stack of three drawers: two are (20 × 5.37 × 3.5)*; the third drawer is 6 inches deep. Under the sink, there's a trash can compartment and over a cubic foot of storage for cleaning supplies. Under the cooktop, three huge drawers will take care of just about anything you want to include in your galley: one drawer (20 × 20.75 × 2.5) and two drawers (20 × 20.75 ×

* Directionally in the text descriptions, the front of the coach is "south," the rear is "north," the driver's side is "east" and the passenger's side is "west." To simplify showing the measurements (in inches) of cabinets and drawers, the first number is depth, the second is width, and the last is height. Remember d/w/h. In a drawer, "depth" is the length of the drawer extending back into the cabinet; "height" refers to how deep the drawer is.



5.5). Then, moving to the right, another stack of three drawers: one (20 × 6.75 × 3.5), and two more (20 × 6.75 × 5.5). The drawers are made with 9-ply cabinet-grade hardwood.

The galley and 20 cu. ft. refrigerator are separated with a wall that forms part of the encasement for the optional residential refrigerator with ice maker (MSRP \$1,254). The top half is a 5.3 cu. ft. freezer with icemaker. The 14.8 cu. ft. fridge has three shelves, two large humidity-controlled drawers for fruits and vegetables, plus two large shelves in the door (both wide enough for gallon jug containers), and an enclosed butter keeper. Under the refrigerator is a louvered compartment for the propane furnace.



The dinette/computer workstation is a popular option (MSRP \$1,019) introduced over 10 years ago. Like several other Tiffin innovations, it has been copied by competitors. As a dining area, the credenza (18.75 × 73) serves as a sideboard to the dining table (41 × 25) with four chairs. Two standard chairs remain at the table during regular use and travel. Two folding guest chairs with matching fabrics are usually stored in the basement until needed.

The dinette quickly converts to a computer workstation. On the north side of the dining table, the top drawer conceals a slide-out tray for a laptop or a keyboard. A display monitor may be positioned on the credenza. If you are taking a desk computer to place in your office, the center cabinet under the table will

house it with room to spare (110v outlets adjacent). Under the keyboard tray, you will find another slide-out tray which is designed for a small travel printer. A larger printer can be placed on the credenza (110v outlets and USB ports are nearby).

The double-door cabinet under the dining table, mentioned as the location for a desk computer, is the site for the sound system's bass speaker. South of the dining table, three drawers complete the workstation. The two top drawers (14 × 16 ×

3.5) can store office supplies. The bottom drawer is a file cabinet with Pentaflex rails.

The major storage area in the living-dining area are the cabinets above the windows in the DS slide-out. The strut-supported doors conceal 13.6 cu. ft. of storage.

The Walkthrough Bath Area

The 32SA's floorplan leads to considering these two areas together. In Tiffin floorplans from 40+ years ago, the walk-

isolate the hallway as the connecting segment of the bath. The hinged door of the lav-toilet room turns south to completely connect that space to the shower.

head to be adjusted to the height of the bather. The shower head is connected to a 56-inch flexible hose to let you put the water just where you want it. A deep recessed shelf keeps shampoo and toiletries stored conveniently.



On sunny days with the skylight open, you may be inspired to sing, "Oh, what a beautiful morning!" As you close the skylight with a sliding door, an LED light in the door automatically illuminates. How's that for innovation?

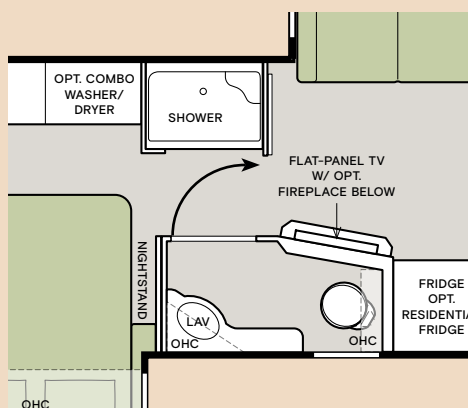
Across the converted hall space, now part of the bathroom, you'll find an elliptical

through bath was an oft-used and practical option. When the efficient use of every square inch is important, the hall becomes part of the floor space for the bath, with the shower on one side and the lavatory-toilet on the other. Two sliding doors

The fiberglass shower with a molded seat has a 24 × 38 footprint with a 3-panel sliding glass door. A stout 14-inch grab bar provides a steadying point for safe entry/exit. A vertical chrome pole permits the mounting bracket for the shower

ceramic lavatory mounted to a SSCT with a backsplash. The mirrored medicine cabinet (16 × 31 × 5) faces a shaving mirror (10 × 18). The vanity offers over two cubic feet of storage. To the left of the vanity is a 22-inch-wide open cabinet with retaining slats, the perfect place for extra rolls of TP, newspapers, and magazines.

The toilet is located at the south end of the rather spacious toilet-lav compartment, which is nearly six feet in length. The floorplan will explain that it is located behind the entertainment center. Above the toilet is yet another cabinet with over a cubic foot of storage (20 × 16 × 6.5). There are four towel bars, a towel ring, and a 3-speed overhead fan with lid and fan switches on the Spyder panel.



The section of the floorplan at left depicts how the walkthrough bath functions with the bedroom. The half bath door swings forward and clips into place while a sliding door on the left isolates the hall, making it a part of the bathroom.

The Bedroom

In evaluating the bedroom for this story, I remembered reading that the extreme shortage of land in Japan produced postage stamp lots and correspondingly small homes. Japanese architects became amazingly creative in maximizing the use of every cubic inch of space. Nevertheless, the owners of the 32SA will not suffer with a “short queen,” a description used by the owner of another brand when he told me his queen-size bed was 60 × 74. This 32SA has a full-size queen (60 × 80). The bedside tables are 12 × 36, narrowing to 6.75 inches wide as they extend under the side windows of the slide-out. The front of each table has an enclosed cabinet and is serviced with two USB charging ports and a 110v outlet. A cavity under the bedside countertop offers extra space for stashing your night-time reading material. A full-size king is available at no extra charge in the 32SA.

The 32SA takes advantage of pleasant evenings with ventilation on three sides. Each side of the slide-out has a screened 13 × 22 window. The screened back window (20 × 40) extends across the head of the bed. All three windows are covered with handsome, fabric-covered valances that conceal opaque and solar shades. An optional ceiling fan (MSRP \$276) increases the cooling choices.

The bedroom has ample lighting with five large-diameter LEDs in the ceiling. Each side of the bed has a swivel-mounted sconce light plus a directional LED built into the base of the cabinets above the bed.

The surprise for the 2022 Open Road model year was the optional combo washer/dryer in the bedroom (MSRP \$1,882). There is additional space above the unit for storing cleaning products as well as the hoses and parts for the optional central vacuum system (MSRP \$509).

Now let's talk about storage. Above the head of the bed, four strut-supported doors enclose nearly 14 cubic feet of storage. The bed's platform gingerly lifts on air-struts to conceal 20.6 cubic feet of storage for items you don't need to access every day. The east wall of the bedroom houses the wardrobe and the combo



washer-dryer. Measuring 20 × 60 × 50, the lighted wardrobe has two mirrored sliding doors.

Note the four large drawers (14 × 27 × 8) under the wardrobe in the picture on the previous page. The clothes hamper

(10 × 14.5 × 18) is under the washer/dryer.

Recessed into the bedroom's back wall (which is also the rear wall of the coach), the entertainment center features a 32-inch LG television and a louvered cabinet for the LG entertainment system and the

Wally/DISH receiver, all standard equipment. The TV is mounted on an extendable arm for comfortable viewing in bed. Not to miss a chance for more storage, TMH tucked four more cubby-hole-size drawers under the louvered cabinet.

The Entertainment Center

The LG Smart+ TVs in this coach will allow you to select programming from Netflix, Hulu Plus, Amazon, Facebook, YouTube, DirecTV, or Dish, as well as over-the-air reception from your antenna. Remember there are four televisions in the coach: one above the dash, one in the living room over the fireplace, one in the bedroom, and the outdoor TV mounted in the exterior wall under the awning—all standard equipment.

Input choices for the LG entertainment system include data discs, USB devices, MKV playback, external HDD playback, and Blu-Ray 3D discs. The sound experience in the living area is created with two speakers in the ceiling, the sound bar, and two speakers in the television. The LG system offers an option to facilitate recording current programming and playing it back at your convenience. The television itself, an LG 4K ULTRA HDTV, displays 8.3 million pixels, making the resolution four times that of full HD.

In addition to the LG technology, Tiffin includes as standard equipment the Dish/Wally receiver (subscription required) that is designed to operate with the optional In-Motion satellite receiver (MSRP \$1,569) which was included in the review coach. Optional pre-wiring for the Winegard Trav'ler satellite receiver (MSRP \$276) was also included on this coach.

The Kenwood radio in the dash plays a large role in the coach's entertainment offering. You can listen to your CD/DVD music collection in the CD player located behind the flip-out operations screen. It can also process music collections from an MP3 or a USB flash drive. The radio is programmed for SiriusXM (subscription required).

Since wireless communication is a major factor of our daily living, TMH is offering a device to improve the WiFi sig-

nal you receive in your motorhome: the Open Road WiFi Booster (MSRP \$934). Of course, WiFi stands for Wireless Fidelity and is the same thing as WLAN which stands for "Wireless Local Area Network." WiFi works on the same principal as other wireless devices: it uses radio frequencies to send signals between devices. Walky-talkies, car radios, cell phones, and weather radios all use different radio frequencies. Your car stereo receives frequencies in kilohertz and megahertz range (AM and FM stations), while WiFi transmits and receives data in the gigahertz (Ghz) range. For WiFi, this frequency is 2.4 Ghz and 5Ghz. The greater the distance between the point of transmission and the receiving device, the weaker the signal becomes. The Open Road WiFi Booster picks up the signal, boosts it, and produces greater clarity in your reception.

The Open Road WiFi Booster also provides your own encrypted secure WiFi hotspot. In addition to its internet connection, it provides streaming TV services from Netflix, YouTube, Amazon Prime, Hulu, and Disney+. AT&T offers an unlimited data plan based on 4G LTE. It can be activated with no contracts. The 8" tall canister-shaped receiver mounts on the roof.

The Spyder Control System

Tiffin depends on intensive engineering to create heating and cooling systems that evenly distribute and circulate heated and cooled air efficiently and effectively. All of its brands use concealed ductwork enclosed in the ceiling to distribute and return cooled and heated air to the AC units with heat pumps located on the roof. Sensors in each room control the operation to maintain the temperature settings selected at Spyder's control panel mounted on the wall adjacent to the refrigerator.

The settings for controlling the coach's environment are found in six folders labeled Home, Lights, Climate, Mechanical, Slides, and Settings (at right).

The **HOME** folder is divided into four sections for an overview of the coach's environment and systems: lights; water pump and tank readings; inside temps; solar voltages generated, generator status, and voltages for chassis and house systems. The tabs at bottom open each of the respective folders.

LIGHTS: eight switches control all of the lights in the galley and living area; one switch each for the bath and bedroom; plus the light master. The light master switch turns off all the lights currently on. When you turn it on again, it remembers and restores all the same lights that were turned off.

CLIMATE: the front and rear sections for heating and cooling are addressed separately with switches for AC, heat pump, furnace, auto, and fan speeds.

MECHANICAL: separate controls for the exhaust fans in the galley and bath and the bedroom ceiling fan.

SLIDES: extend/retract controls for both the front DS slide-outs and the rear PS slide-outs. The DS front slide-out is also controlled by a switch mounted on the cabinet above the driver's chair. The PS rear slide-out is also controlled by a Spyder switch next to the washer/dryer.

SETTINGS: Several choices include Fahrenheit and Centigrade display choice; screen brightness; and settings for power savings, defaults, and the color scheme displayed in the control panel. The description of the control panel may sound complicated initially, but it is very simple and quite a time-saver when you are setting up the overall environment or checking on any item later.

Five Spyder control panels without



the above requires an upgrade to the 7.0 Onan generator (MSRP \$1,177). The two optional solar panels (MSRP \$1,254) considerably extend your dry camping capability by reducing the number of times necessary for the Magnum inverter to start the generator to recharge the four house batteries.

Heating & Cooling

The Allegro Open Road coaches are cooled with two 13,500 BTU air conditioners as standard equipment. TMH strongly recommends replacing the front AC with a 15,000 AC with heat pump (MSRP \$628). This upgrade requires moving up to the 7.0 Onan generator (MSRP \$1,177). The extra BTUs will assure more cooling capacity when you get into higher summer temperatures. But just as important, the addition of the heat pump will make a significant difference when the spring and fall temperatures dip into the low 40s or high 30s. You can avoid using your propane for heating and warm the coach nicely with the heat pump. When you choose the electric fireplace, you will assure a cozy coach even when the temp hits 38. When the temps dip into the low-30s and lower, you will need to use your propane furnace to be sure your wet tanks are warmed enough to prevent freezing.

Tiffin and Spyder Controls brought the lighting technology of the Class A diesels to the Allegro Open Road series. *Above top left:* The 12v and step controls along with entry lighting are conveniently positioned on the wall framing the stepwell. *Top right:* This panel in the midsection controls the bed slide-out, exhaust fan, hall, and light master. *Bottom left:* Located at bedside, this panel controls the overhead lighting, the ceiling fan, porch light, and light master. *Bottom right:* These two panels offer controls for the bath and the dining area.

displays are placed throughout the coach: in the step well at the entrance, the galley, the bedroom next to the washer/dryer, the bath, and bedside.

The Electrical System

The Allegro Open Road brand offers the optional Magnum 2000-watt pure sine inverter (MSRP \$1,882) with automatic starting that delivers power from the house batteries to the entertainment system, the residential refrigerator-freezer, three 110v outlets in the galley, outlets in both of the forward slide-outs, an outlet in the bath, and one at bedside. The system requires four house batteries. All of

Based on a residential model, Tiffin's cooling technology distributes cold air through the ceiling vents on the west side of the coach and sends return air through the vents and duct on the east side of the coach. The coach has two propane furnaces to distribute warm air through vents at floor level throughout the coach.

Water in the Open Road is heated with a standard electric/gas 10-gallon water



heater. The Spyder Control panel gives you the choice of using electric or propane. For endless hot water, many owners select the optional Truma water heater which uses propane (MSRP \$1,177). The Truma brings a new level of comfort to a gas-powered coach. It was included on this coach.

The Allegro's Cockpit

Probably the most important feature in a cockpit is instrumentation that is easy to read. Redesigned by Ford, you will not have to squint to see small numbers or unclear digital displays. The primary display directly in front of the steering column presents two large dials for RPM and MPH. Left to right across the top of the display are temp gauges for the fluids in the transmission, radiator, and engine, plus the fuel gauge. Between the MPH and the RPM dial, a digital display with select arrows on the steering wheel presents the odometer and outside temp, two trip meters, average MPG, # miles to empty, and trip timer. Four toggles for the cruise control are located on the steering wheel, next to the controls for displaying information on the dash's digital display.

On the dashboard to the left of the steering column are toggles for generator start, auxiliary start, and the map light; a panel for the parking and headlights; a dial for genset hours; and a brightness control for the instrumentation. The mirror controls and the mirror heat switch are in a side console that also has a large receptacle for maps and papers.

To the right of the steering column, toggles for the driver fan, radio, and the solar and night shades are at your fingertips. Just above the toggle switches, the Kenwood unit combines the dash

stereo, radio, CD & DVD player, and the optional Garmin navigation software (MSRP \$1,254) into one very efficient system. Two cell phones can be connected into the speaker system for hands-free operation including voice activated call placements. A QR code is included to provide a full Quick Start guide.

Immediately to the right of the Kenwood system, the 10-inch color monitor displays vehicle activity on both sides and the rear of your coach. The monitor is useful at night for a security check around your coach.

The control panel for the Lippert computerized leveling system is located in the lower center of the dashboard. Just to the right you will see the Ford HVAC controls for automotive heating and cooling.

The dashboard has four USB ports to keep your phones, tablets, and other digital devices charged as you use them while traveling. A 12v port can support other appliances.

The dash slide-out table in front of the passenger seat was designed for your laptop. There's also plenty of space for a small printer on the deck in front of the dash. With 110v service just under the dash, you can use your computer and printer in transit or at rest. The passenger's console has toggle switches for the fan and overhead map light.

Driving The 2022 Allegro Open Road 32SA

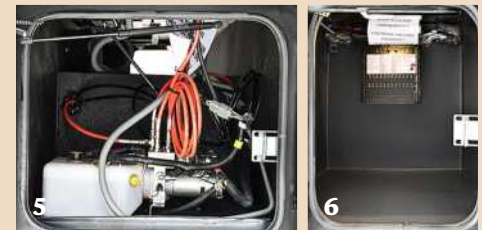
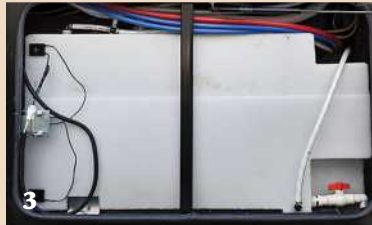
Cruising at 65 mph on a level highway near Red Bay, the cockpit was quiet enough for normal conversation. The wide windows on both the driver and passenger sides, plus the expansive windshield, offer panoramic views of the surrounding countryside.

The torque and acceleration of the V-8 compares very favorably to the Allegro RED, Phaeton, and Allegro Bus. In a timed acceleration on an interstate ramp going into a level roadbed, we went 0-60 in 23 seconds. The coach moved smoothly into passing lanes and easily got around slower traffic moving at 60 mph.

In our test ride through the Franklin County hill country and the 4-lane CR24 coming into Red Bay, the 32SA towing a 3500 lb. car entered a 0.8-mile five percent grade at 65 mph. We covered the 0.8-mile incline in 45.8 seconds as the speed dropped to 61 mph.

TMH does not offer the 32SA with the Liquid Spring option, although it can be installed as an aftermarket item. The Liquid Spring technology provides computerized in-motion adjustments to control and stabilize lateral motion. The results are significant. This system should be considered to improve the long-term enjoyment of your coach. As a comparison, Liquid Spring installed by TMH on the 34PA adds approximately \$15,500 MSRP.

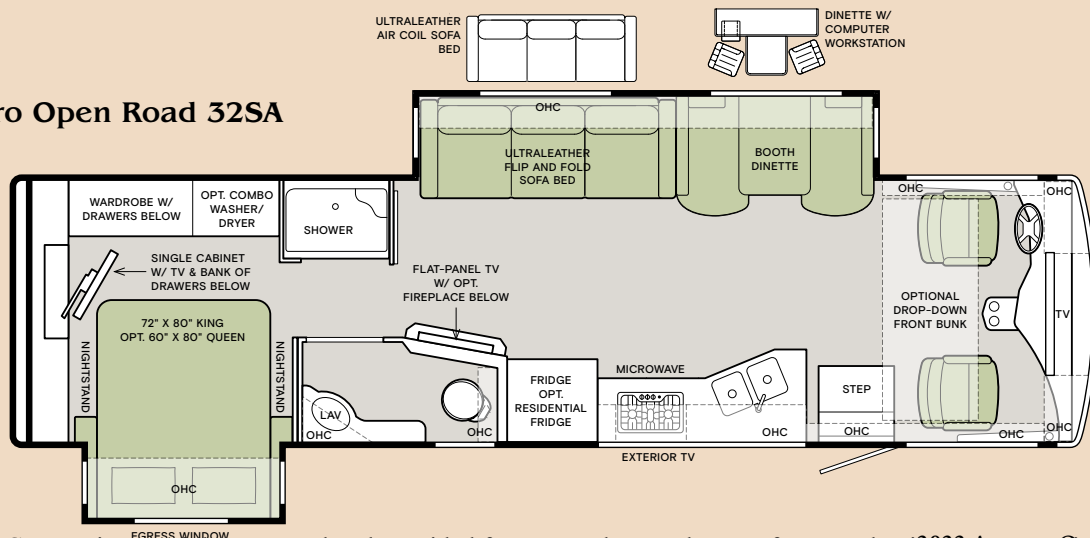
If the 32SA's floor plan fits your needs, if its interiors match your style, you will find its new standard and optional features will make this coach a very good buy in its price point. After you take it for a test drive, I feel sure you will be pleased with its handling and performance. **RIS**



The images in the middle column (top to bottom) are the basement compartments on the passenger side, beginning at the rear and moving right to the front. (1) Battery with pass-through [PT] storage above. (2) Propane tank with PT storage. (3) Wet tanks. (4) A double compartment with PT storage. (5) A smaller compartment with PT storage.

The images in the right column (top to bottom) show the storage compartments on the passenger side. (1) 50-amp input and Magnum inverter with PT storage. (2) Generator with PT storage. (3) Utility bay. (4) Double compartment with PT storage. (5) Hydraulic compressor with PT storage (6) 12v breaker box.

2022 Allegro Open Road 32SA



SPECIFICATIONS: Model tested 2022 Allegro Open Road 32SA, Two Slides

Base MSRP* – \$227,053 MSRP as tested with options – \$250,472

STANDARD FEATURES

Structural

Laminated floor, sidewall, and roof
Steel / aluminum reinforced structure
Full one-piece fiberglass roof cap

Automotive

Ford TorqShift® 6-speed transmission with overdrive and Tow/Haul mode
Ford V8 7.3L engine
Peak HP 350 @ 3,900 RPM
Peak Torque 468 lb-ft @ 3,900 RPM
Cruise control operated from steering wheel
Hydraulic automatic leveling jacks
Four aluminum wheels
Fog lights
Daytime running lights
Emergency start switch

Exterior

Fiberglass front & rear caps
Form-fitted seamless fiberglass roof
Front cap protective film
Gel-coat fiberglass walls
Full body paint
Tinted one-piece windshield
Double electric step
¼-inch thick single pane windows
Horizontal mounted wipers
Chrome heated power mirrors with integrated turn signal cameras
Girard slide-out toppers
Patio side exterior TV
Hydraulic automatic leveling jacks
BASF full-body paint with protective film on front cap
One 12v auxiliary chassis battery
Four 6v house batteries
Lighted basement storage
Side-mounted basement compartment doors with gas shocks
Rigid long-life storage boxes
Single handle lockable storage door latches
Roof-mounted digital TV antenna
Color backup camera mounted in rear cap
Girard power patio awning
LED patio & door lights
Undercoating
Roof ladder

Plumbing and Electrical

50-amp service
Extraordinaire™ AC roof-ducted system
10-gallon gas-electric water heater
Water filtration system
Low-point water drain lines
Lighted utilities compartment
Exterior rinse hose/shower
Water heater bypass system
Black holding tank flush system
Heated water & holding tank compartments
Gravity water fill
110v exterior receptacle
110v-12v converter (integrated with inverter)
Inverter remote switch
External tripod satellite hook-up
Cable RV ready hook-up
Spyder Controls multiplex systems and thermostats
Aquaview Showermiser

General Interior

High gloss hardwood cabinet doors & drawer fronts
Hand-crafted wood cabinet faces
Sound bar
Soft touch vinyl ceiling
Ball bearing drawer slides
Wall-to-wall (Sand Castle) vinyl tile flooring throughout coach
LED lighting

Treated fabrics

Solar shades & blackout night shades
Two powered roof vents
Spyder Controls monitor system for all tank levels
Smoke detector
Chrome hardware
Home theater with sound bar
Carbon monoxide detector
LPG leak detector

Driver's Compartment

Entry step well light
Step switch and 12v disconnect switch
Color monitor for backup & sideview cameras
Ultraleather power passenger & driver seats
Lighted instrument panel
Single CD player & stereo AM/FM radio
Satellite radio prep (requires subscription)
Two cup holders
Passenger slide-out desk
One 12v dash receptacle
USB dash receptacles
Tilt steering wheel with cruise control
Dual dash fans
Power solar & privacy windshield shades
Manual solar & privacy shades for driver & passenger side windows
Fire extinguisher
Front overhead TV

Living Area / Dinette

Mid-section TV in entertainment center w/ sound bar
(digital system located in bedroom)

Kitchen

Chrome single-level sink faucet w/ extension rinser head
Double bowl stainless steel sink with SSCT fitted covers
Storage rack for fitted covers under galley countertop
Solid surface backsplashes
Microwave with exterior venting
Slide-out pantry
Galley window

Bath

Molded fiberglass one-piece shower
Chrome faucet w/ flex hose and adjustable height shower head
Aquaview Showermiser
Skylight in shower w/ insulated sliding cover & LED light
Solid surface countertop & backsplash
Medicine cabinet
LED lights in ceiling
Roof vent fan with wall switch
Toilet w/ foot flush lever
Water pump switch

Bedroom

Double wardrobe with automatic lights and mirror doors
Bed comforter & throw pillows
Innerspring queen mattress (60" x 80")
Storage under bed, lift top w/ gas struts
Wall-to-wall luxury vinyl tile flooring (excludes slide-outs)
Solar/privacy shades
Carbon monoxide detector
LPG leak detector
Flat panel TV w/ entertainment center
110v outlets and USB ports in bedside tables (inverter powered)
Dual sconce and LED reading lights on both sides of bed
110v outlet in OH cabinet for sleep apnea machine

OPTIONAL FEATURES ON THIS COACH

OPTIONAL FEATURES AT NO CHARGE

Sunlit Sand full body paint
Generation 9 exterior paint scheme
Cocoon Ultraleather
Portico Linen II décor
3-burner recessed cooktop with folding solid surface covers
Showermiser
Memory foam bed-queen

OPTIONAL FEATURES AT ADDITIONAL COST

7.0 Onan generator
Upgrade one 13.5K BTU roof AC to 15K BTU AC with heat pump
2000-watt pure sine inverter with automatic gen starter
Two solar panels
Shadow cabinetry
Additional solid surface upgrade
Pre-wire for Trav'ler satellite
Open Road WiFi Booster
In-Dash navigation software
Power DS/PS Ultraleather seats with PS footrest
Central vacuum
Combo Washer/Dryer
Truma water heater
Fireplace
Bedroom ceiling fan
Additional solid surface upgrade
Dinette with computer workstation
Ultraleather L-shaped sofa
Residential refrigerator w/4 batteries & ice maker

OTHER OPTIONAL FEATURES AVAILABLE

OPTIONAL FEATURES AT NO CHARGE

Ford 22K chassis
5.5 Onan generator
Inverter: Operates TVs, surround sound, & standard residential refrigerator
Full body paint choices: Barcelona, NASA, & White Mahogany
Décor: Sandbar III & City Shadow III
Belgian Ultraleather
Ultraleather booth dinette on driver side
Ultraleather flip and fold sofa on driver side
Memory foam bed, king
Two 13,500 BTU high profile roof ACs
Ultraleather power DS/PS seats without footrest
Natural alder cabinetry
Amber glazed cabinetry
2-door refrigerator with pantry
Generation 10 exterior paint scheme

OPTIONAL FEATURES, ADDITIONAL COST

Prep for solar panels
One solar panel
Driver's power window
CB antenna
Oven/convection microwave
Ultraleather sleeper air coil sofa on driver side
Drop down bunk
In-motion satellite

MEASUREMENTS

Wheelbase – 228"
Overall length – 34'3"
Overall height with roof air – 12' 10"
Interior height – 84"
Overall width – 101"
Interior width – 96"

WEIGHTS & CAPACITIES

GVWR – 24,000 lbs.
Front GAWR – 9,000 lbs.
Rear GAWR – 15,500 lbs.
GCWR – 30,000 lbs.
UVW – 21,020 lbs.
CCC – 2,980 lbs.
Trailer hitch capacity – 6,000 lbs.

POWER TRAIN

Engine – Ford V8 7.3L 350-hp @ 3,900 rpm
Torque – 468 lb-ft @ 3,900 rpm
Transmission – TorqShift® 6-speed automatic overdrive with tow/haul mode
Tire size – 235/80 R22.5-GXRV
Alternator – 210 amps

CHASSIS

Frame – Single channel, ladder type
Frame design – 36,000 psi to 50,000 psi E-coated
Steering – 50 degree wheel cut
Anti-locking braking system – Standard 4-wheel anti-lock brakes
Suspension (front and rear) – Tapered multi-leaf springs
Shock absorbers – Custom-tuned sachos on both front and rear; additional front and rear variable-rate jounce bumpers
Rear axle – Dana S17-140
Leveling jacks – Lippert hydraulic automatic

CONSTRUCTION

Body – Laminated floor, sidewalls, roof
Roof – One-piece fiberglass
Support – Steel/aluminum reinforced structure
Front/rear body panels – One-piece fiberglass caps
Exterior side panels – Gel-coat fiberglass walls

ACCOMMODATIONS

Sleeps – Six (four adults, two children)
Fuel tank – 80 gallons
Fresh water – 70 gallons
Black water – 50 gallons
Grey water – 66 gallons
LPG tank – 24 gallons (can be filled to 80% capacity)

MSRP*

MSRP is the manufacturer's suggested retail price and does not include dealer prep or options. Manufacturer reserves the right to change or discontinue models offered, standard features, optional equipment, and prices without prior notice. Dealer prices may vary.

UVW

This is the approximate weight of the vehicle with a full fuel tank, engine oil, and coolants. The UVW does not include cargo, fresh water, LP gas, passengers, or dealer-installed accessories.

DEALERS

To locate the Tiffin dealer nearest you, go to tiffinmotorhomes.com and click on "dealer locator." If internet access is not available, call 256-356-8661 and ask the operator for the Tiffin dealer location nearest to you.

PLEASE NOTE

All options may not be available on all models. Because of progressive improvements made in a model year, specifications and standard and optional equipment are subject to change without notice or obligation.

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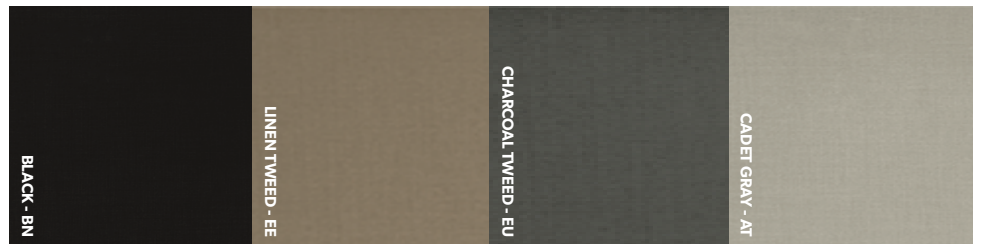
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Carlsbad Caverns National Park

A TENACIOUS COWBOY AND HIS IMAGINARY CAVES

Text and photography by Suzanne Clemenz

Geology isn't my strong suit, but when Mother Earth presents it as a puzzle, my curiosity kicks in. The highest peak in Texas and the lowest point the public can hike to in New Mexico are a mere 32 miles apart.

How can bare-bones Guadalupe Peak, at 8,751 feet elevation in Guadalupe Mountains National Park, and Carlsbad Canyon's King's Palace tour, 835 feet into the earth, be related? The answer was unexpected.



The Big Room

Fringes of stalactites grace the ceiling. A stalagmite about 30 feet tall is near the center, attended by two lighted ones on the left. Knobby popcorn covers small foreground stalagmites.

HEADING NORTHEAST from El Paso, I expected flat land for the 170 miles to Carlsbad, New Mexico. Instead, some substantial rolling hills started at El Paso's eastern city limits and continued for over half an hour. Once over those hills, the highway shot like an arrow below bright blue skies through flat, sparsely vegetated plains that disappeared into a distant haze. The Chihuahuah Desert at its most deserted, I thought. Eventually a high ridge on the west and north took shape through the haze. Hypothesizing that I was driving across a rimmed basin, I wondered if I was crossing an ancient seafloor. The ridge gradually became taller and closer on my left. There was a small sign for Salt Basin Dunes 24 miles off the highway, but I had miles to go before I slept. When I reached Guadalupe Mountains National Park 110 miles from El Paso, I pulled into the Visitor Center to research my hypothesis.

The small Visitor Center is inviting and packed with colorful exhibits. I spotted a map showing that today's Texas/New Mexico border in this area was indeed part of a three-lobed sea that existed in the Permian Era, 43 million years ago. The lobe in this area is the Delaware Basin, once the Delaware Sea, surrounded by the Capitan Reef. Bingo! That high ridge on the horizons of Route 62/180 is the longest visible remnant of that 400-mile Reef. The rest of the Reef is mostly obscured by overlying layers of marine sponge and algae deposits—not the coral reefs we have today. The longest visible portion is the 40-mile-long Frijole Ridge between Carlsbad, New Mexico, and Guadalupe Mountains National Park (GMNP,) Texas. We'll visit GMNP again on my return trip. Geology enthusiasts can enjoy a fuller explanation of the Reef at beg.utexas.edu/texas-through-time/el-capitan.html

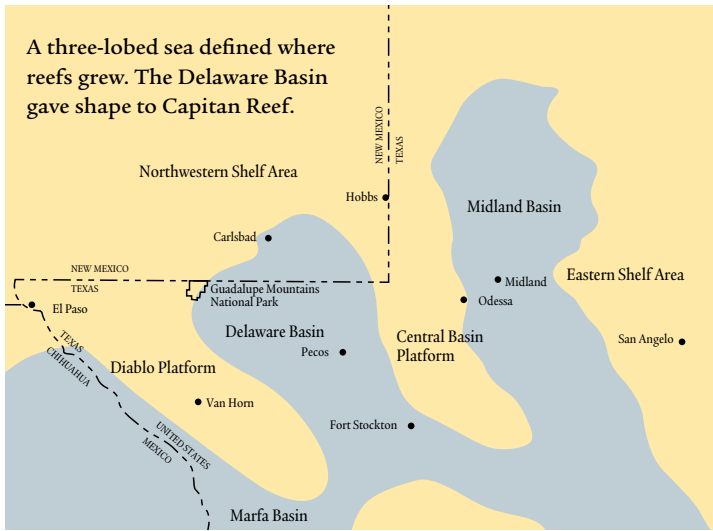
Serendipitously, the brief stop at the Visitor Center prepared me for understanding Carlsbad Caverns, the major focus of my trip. It explained why visitors to the Caverns drive up to a ridgetop to enter a cave system that is 750 feet below surface level.

The discovery of Carlsbad Caverns is a testament to a place so awe-inspiring and other-worldly, that when one Texas cowboy first discovered it, it immediately became his life's obsession. You can't exaggerate what's down there.

A Cowboy and His Caverns

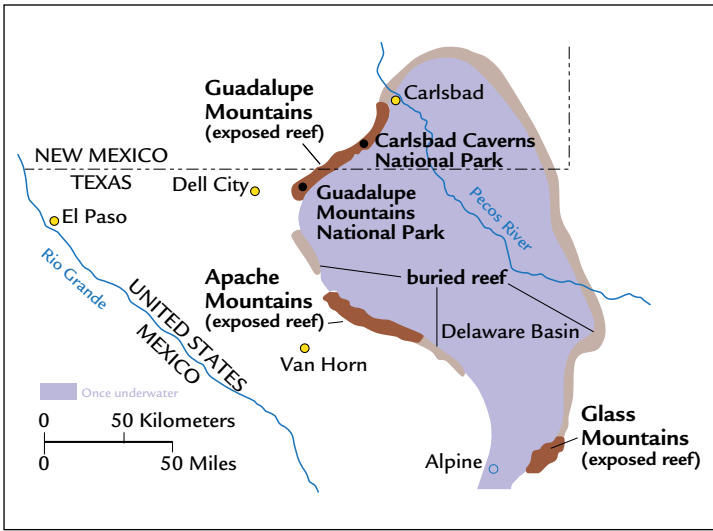
The United States Congress was still wrangling over statehood for the New Mexico Territory in 1892 when a 10-year-old Texas kid named James (Jim) Larkin White convinced his father to let him quit school. "I want to be a cowboy," Jim implored. The boy was already an experienced and enthusiastic helper at his father's and surrounding cattle ranches. Perhaps his father knew the Lucas family, over 300 miles away near the start-up town of Eddy (now Carlsbad,) New Mexico. Maybe he'd visited the Pecos River country with its newly-irrigated farmlands. For whatever reason, Mr. White took his renegade son Jim to John and Dan Lucas's X-X-X Ranch near Eddy, then moved the rest of the family to Eddy three years later when Jim was 13. The lad was pleased when his family arrived but continued to live at his adopted home, the X-X-X.





A three-lobed sea defined where reefs grew. The Delaware Basin gave shape to Capitan Reef.

This graphic of the Guadalupe Mountains National Park Visitor Center shows the park in the northwest part of the prehistoric Delaware Sea—now the Delaware Basin.



Both Guadalupe Mountains and Carlsbad Caverns National Parks are part of a unique Permian-era marine reef that is exposed for 40 miles. The reef's fossils are of global interest.

In 1901, 19-year-old Jim White and the Lucas crew spent a few days mending fences. Riding alone back to the crew's camp one afternoon, Jim noticed a billowing vortex of smoke rising in the distance. Unlike a dust devil, which moves and spirals swiftly, then dissipates, the smoke emanated from a fixed point and grew in volume. Curious, Jim rode toward the boiling cloud, and his confusion grew. Finally, he saw that the apparition wasn't smoke at all—it was bats! Perhaps a million Brazilian free-tail bats were evacuating a low, large, brush-hidden black cave opening on an innocuous ridge of the Guadalupe Mountains. The ranch hands had passed by previously, but not closely enough to see the cave. Maybe they'd never been near it at dusk, between April through October, when the bats surge outside for their evening insect-gulping frenzy. That particular evening Jim was alone, and for an hour he watched cloud after cloud of bats zooming out of the cave. They were countless. It struck White that the cave that was spewing them out must be a gigantic one, to house that many creatures. As he relates in the 36-page booklet, *Jim White's Own Story, The Discovery and History of Carlsbad Cav-*

erns, "I crept between cactus until I lay on the brink of the chasm, and looked down. During all the years I'd known of the place, I'd never taken the trouble to do this. There was no bottom in sight! I shall never forget the feeling of awe it gave me." He foraged for dead cacti, stacked them to make a fire, then threw a flaming stalk down the hole. He estimated that it descended 200 feet. (Note: All quotes in this article are from Jim White's book.)

Back at the cowboys' campfire Jim White said nothing about his discovery. But he returned to the cave a couple of days later equipped with a kerosene lantern, extra kerosene, rope coils, wire, and a hand ax. It was mid-afternoon, and the sun shone into the cave. He could make out a tunnel off to the right, far below. He chopped many sturdy branches from nearby shrubs. The branches became ladder rungs, strung between rope and cinched with wire. When the ladder was long as possible, he secured it and descended with an unlit lantern into the abyss. Lighting his lantern at the bottom of his ladder, he found he was close to a narrow ledge, and the cave bottom could be reached with footholds and handholds in another 20 feet. Down he went again,



This couple is walking down to the bottom right of the Amphitheater, then left into the Natural Entrance Trail's beginning. ♦ Brazilian free-tail bats bolt from their daytime roosts in early evening, April through October, to feast on insects.



not thinking that no one would have any idea of where he was, should he be injured or trapped. The cave floor was fairly level. Tall tunnels opened both left and right. He briefly visited the bat cave on the left, then started down the right tunnel. “I followed on until I found myself in a wilderness of [what he later learned] were mighty stalagmites. It was the first cave I was ever in, and the first stalagmites I had ever seen, but instinctively I knew, for some intuitive reason, that there was no other scene in the world which could justly be compared with my surroundings.” Sometimes he threw rocks or pushed boulders into the abyss, listening as they bounced and echoed. The bottom, if there was one, was far below him.

Stalagmites rose from the floors, five, fifteen, forty feet high, and he would find 60-footers in later explorations. Tapered threads, straws, ropes, or folded draperies of stalactites hung down from the ceiling everywhere in varying lengths and thicknesses. The cavern ceilings were covered as thickly as hair with delicate stone formations. Even some stalagmites had stalactites. Formations created by mineral deposits in Carlsbad’s roof include stalactites, stalagmites, flowstones, cave coral, cave drapery, cave curtains, and cave crystal. Their collective name is speleothems. [nps.gov/subjects/caves/speleothems.htm](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/caves/speleothems.htm) Those magnificent deposits formed the wonders that Jim White beheld on that first day.

Small alcoves like one now called the Doll’s Theater display delicate curtains of stalactites. Sometimes the stalactites (think *lactation*, with down-flowing milk) meet and merge with upward-growing stalagmites and form columns that are smooth, tiered, and/or textured in wild combinations. “The beauty, the weirdness, the grandeur, and the omniscience absolved my mind of all

Having doubts, donning jackets, and taking a few photos are common occurrences when entering the steep and winding Natural Entrance Trail. ♦ The second switchback leads to the Natural Entrance. Imagine descending another 40 feet on a wire-and-branches ladder, as explorer Jim White did. ♦ Part of Jim White’s original ladder still hangs in the Big Room. It was initially about 60 feet long. ♦ The large Fairyland alcove in the Big Room is graced with hundreds of stalactites, from slender soda straws to bigger draperies.

thoughts of the world above—I forgot time, place, and distance,” White later mused. White tapped some speleothems with his fingertips, and they rang like a xylophone. Touching them is forbidden today because finger oils damage the formations irreparably.





The delicate Doll's Theater, about eight feet wide, has hundreds of slim stalactites plus tiny columns where a stalactite and a stalagmite merge.

Then, absorbed as he was in his exploration, White's kerosene lantern flickered out. The dark was so absolute that it panicked White. Trembling, he had to take hold of himself. With an agitated voice he scolded aloud, "Take it easy!" The echoes of his own advice calmed him enough to fumble for the extra kerosene and matches in his pack. With shaking hands he relit the lantern.

White had broken off small stalactites periodically as he explored, always pointing them toward his return route. He found his rope ladder and climbed back to the surface. He was a changed man from the one who had entered a short time earlier. The indescribable wonders that he had seen ignited an obsession to explore anywhere and everywhere that magical, mystical, underground world could lead him.

Back at camp, he told his fellow cowpokes about his experience, hoping to recruit a companion explorer. The cowboys listened to White's story--then laughed and laughed. Not one man believed a word of it. There wasn't a shred of curiosity--just merry laughter. He cajoled them for a couple of days with no luck. Finally a 15-year old Mexican boy called "the Kid," an X-X-X Ranch hand, pulled White aside. He spoke little English, but, like most language learners, understood much more than he could speak. He signaled to Jim White that he would go with him into the cave. With no other options, White accepted the offer, wondering if the boy was up to it.

With packs full of water, food, supplies, crude torches, and kerosene, the Kid and Jim White went to the cave five days after White's first visit and descended his ladder, part of which is

still in the Big Room cave wall where White left it. The torches gave off better light than the lantern had, and although the Kid was scared stiff, he never whimpered or hesitated. Jim White's book continues, "Well, the Kid and I stayed in the cave for three days--exploring. We covered about the same territory the tourist of today sees. I shan't go into detail as to our difficulties, findings, hazards and thrills. There were plenty of each...it would be impossible to even exaggerate our experiences during those three days."

He does mention that they came across the complete skeleton of what looked like a monstrous man. White attempted to pick up a beef-shank sized leg bone and was startled when it crumbled at his touch. A drop of water on White's hand from overhead provided the clue. The skeleton's bones had been softened and swelled from countless drips of the mineral-laden acidic water. With a small touch it collapsed like a house of cards. The skull was perfect and was given to a doctor in Carlsbad to study. Regrettably it was passed on and on until it was lost. In later years, when White was mining bat guano for a company in the acres around the cavern's surface opening, White claims they found another human skeleton in a deposit about 50 feet deep in the guano. Archeology was a fledgling science in those days, so this claim is uncorroborated.

White and the Kid's exploration stopped abruptly on the third day when a leaking kerosene can in White's gunny-sack was accidentally set ablaze by the Kid's torch while they were crawling across a narrow ledge. They were three miles from the cavern entrance. White's clothing started burning, and he rapidly scooted across the ledge, set the flaming kerosene can down, and suffocated its flames with his big cowboy hat. They needed the kerosene to light their way out! The Kid, scampering behind White, quickly tore off his own coat and hugged it around White's back, smothering the flames. White's leather vest confined his burns to raw blisters on his back, and his arms and hands were painfully singed. They made it back to camp where White was cleaned and bandaged. He tried to tell his comrades what he and the Kid had experienced in the cave, but the Kid could only say "Si!" and not elaborate further.

While he was recuperating, White went into Carlsbad and happened to meet a friend who listened to Jim's story about the cave and the accident. The friend had visited Mammoth Cave in Kentucky and extolled its magnificence. They ended up at the library, where the friend showed White pictures of Mammoth Cave. That didn't convince White that Mammoth was bigger and more beautiful than the Carlsbad caverns. Word was getting around: "Jim White's cave was in his head--and so were the bats." They weren't about to jaunt 60 miles round-trip through the wilds because some cowboy was hallucinating.

For many succeeding years Jim White kept exploring the caverns in his spare time from the ranch, or from working as a guano miner for companies who had claims around the cave's opening. He and his wife and son lived in a cabin almost on the cave's rim. One day he realized that when people would inevitably come to the caverns, they would need a safe way to get



down into them. “That day I started moving rocks and leveling passageways through the first chamber. At dangerous ledges and steep ascents, I drove discarded Ford automobile axles into the cracks of rocks, and strung galvanized wire from one to the other, for hand holds.” As he worked, he envisioned crowds of people on the trails he was creating into what he considered the most beautiful underground sight in the world.

Jim White, during his years building the Carlsbad Natural Entrance Trail, bore all expenses himself. At one point he thought about hiring someone to photograph the caves’ formations, but the price quoted for traveling day-long trips from Carlsbad and back, plus developing and printing the photos, was \$100. That wasn’t affordable. Finally, in 1915 two young men crossing America in their Ford heard rumors about the caverns and sought out White as a guide. When he agreed, they drove back to Carlsbad for flash powder for their Kodak camera. They returned that night with a photographer named Ray V. Davis. White recalls, “For twenty years I had anxiously awaited the time when I could gaze upon another man’s face to see if those marvels touched him as they did me.” Davis’s only complaint, ultimately, was that he hadn’t brought more film. Soon all the doubters in town had seen Davis’s photographs, and were forced to forego their disbelief. Davis photographed the caverns more than once, then printed and distributed posters and postcards of them throughout the Southwest, and mailed them even farther. His work was a catalyst.

Forty Carlsbad citizens sought out White as a guide to the caverns. It was a day’s drive across the plains to get to the caverns, and Jim’s wife, Fannie White, fed and bunked the first 13 of them and those who followed. White cleaned out a gas-powered

The elegant Chandelier formation broods a cluster of stalagmites, including the 42-foot tall totem pole on the right. ♦ The judiciously-placed lighting draws your attention to details, such as the splendor and depth of this side-grotto.

winched bucket customarily used to haul filled burlap bags of bat guano up to the cave entrance area. He could winch two people at a time to the point where his hand-constructed trail and staircases began. Of course, they were dumbfounded when they realized how little of the cavern’s magnificence Davis’s photographs could convey. The same is true today since a human’s normal field of view is about 170 degrees, and about 100 degrees of that is peripheral vision. Almost anywhere in Carlsbad Caverns there is something awe-inducing in front of you, to the left, to the right, behind you, and especially on the whole arc of the ceiling. Photography can be frustrating because you’re leaving out so much more than you’re recording with any single shot. After the first group of 13 visitors saw the caverns, they insisted that Jim and his wife accept one dollar per visitor. White was so thrilled just to be validated after all those years that he wanted to refuse. But the visitors mentioned the food, the housing, and the guided tour. So he took the money to use toward the trail he was working on. It wasn’t long before White was spending money on bunk houses, more food, and more equipment faster than it came in. He never charged newspaper reporters nor men with government I.D. cards, as he hoped someone would buy the caverns and let him operate them.

In 1923 the General Land Office in Washington, D.C. sent Robert A. Holley to the caves for a survey, on the scant chance they were beyond a mere curiosity. After nine days of surveying, a chastened Mr. Holley wrote these words in his report: “I enter



Around every bend there's another wonderland. The smooth trails let you gaze around without tripping, and the handrails also help. ♦ Big Room. The heavily draped Giant Dome, the world's largest stalagmite, is 62 feet tall and 16 feet in diameter. Its neighbors, left center, are the Twin Domes.



Following in Jim White's Booted Footsteps

The most popular trails accessed from the Visitor Center or adjacent to it are the Big Room and Natural Entrance Trails, respectively. Nearby parking lots handle RVs easily. Dogs must be kenneled for \$10 daily near the Visitor Center, no reservations needed. A cage and water are provided, and hours are 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. For two-footed visitors a reservation (\$2.00) is required: (877) 444-6777 or recreation.gov. Tickets are \$12.00 for people age 16 and over, free for age 15 and under. Tickets are valid for three days. You'll need reservations for each trail. Once ticketed, visitors listen to a brief talk about cave etiquette—including talking quietly and not touching any formations. The caves are always 56 degrees Fahrenheit. A light jacket and closed-toe shoes with lugged soles are recommended. No edibles or gum—only water—is allowed on trails. The Visitor Center has a cafeteria, book and gift stores, exhibits, restrooms, a movie, and rangers answering questions.

The elevator takes you in one minute through 750 feet of limestone to the rest area, snack counter, and restrooms where the trails begin and end. Most Natural Entrance Trail visitors only go *down* the steep trail. Visitors in wheelchairs can see a generous portion of the Big Room. No strollers are allowed anywhere, so families use baby carriers or carry smaller children when they need a rest. Kids really enjoy the weird, mysterious aspects of what they see and learn.

The Big Room Trail is 1.25 miles and can be done in 1.5 hours. Do it more slowly. Look in every direction including up, and at exquisite side grottos. Relax and let the wonders draw you in until time disappears. Some formations are named, like Rock of Ages, Bottomless Pit, Giant Dome, and Doll's Theater. To me, the profusion of speleothems, their beauty, and the eons it took to form them were, to use that apt modern slang, gob-smacking. And you get smacked anew around every curve. I was carrying my camera on a tripod and was pleased that the trail was almost completely dry and smooth. By holding the tubular non-stop metal railings, I could look around without tripping in the

upon the task of compiling the report with a feeling of temerity as I am wholly conscious of the feebleness of my efforts in convening in words the deep conflicting emotions, the feeling of fear and awe, and a desire for an inspired understanding of the Divine Creator's work which presents to the human eye such a complex aggregate of natural wonders in such a space."

Carlsbad Caverns was declared a National Monument on October 25, 1923. Jim White soon became the Chief Ranger, a salaried position! In 1924 the National Geographic Society sent a journalist who wrote an article that spread the fame of Carlsbad Caverns National Park. "When 1927 rolled around, I began to see my dream of showing Carlsbad Cavern to the world materialize," White later commented.

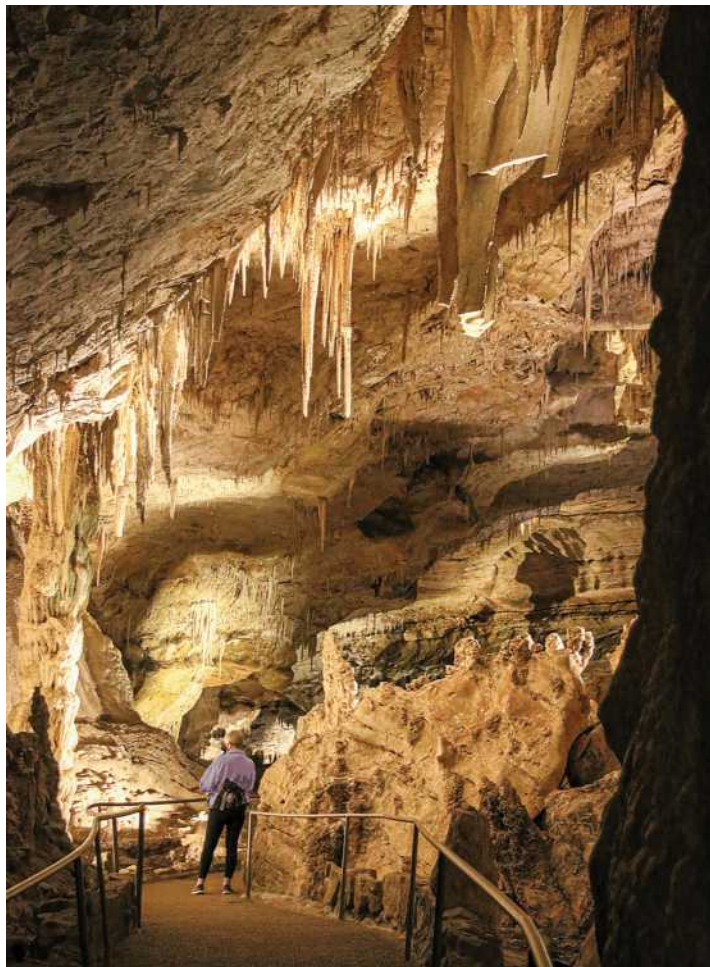
Many improvements began—seven miles of good trails, generators, signage, and soft lighting. A lunchroom 75 stories down was created near the spot where the Kid accidentally set Jim on fire. An elevator shaft through 754 feet of solid limestone (about the height of the Empire State Building) was completed in 1931 and has been rebuilt twice. By 1929 the unschooled Jim White retired as Chief Engineer, realizing that he lacked the knowledge about advancements needed at the park. "You see, even a sixty-million-year-old cave can go too modern, too efficient, and out-grow a common old cowboy," he explained. He died in Carlsbad, New Mexico, in 1946, happy with what he had accomplished. His tombstone credits him as the discoverer of Carlsbad Caverns, and the National Cave and Karst Research Institute in Carlsbad has a laudatory sculpture outside depicting Jim White descending his rope, wire, and branch ladder, lantern in hand. What a well-lived life!

subdued lighting. Some views are panoramic in the 8.2-acre Big Room, and some are close by. At 4,000 feet long, 625 feet wide, and 350 feet high, it isn't claustrophobic any more than 6.2 football fields are. It is the largest cave chamber in North America.

I debated before my trip whether to reserve a spot on the Natural Entrance Trail self-guided tour. It descends 750 feet in 1.25 miles and has about 63 hairpin-turns. But I have no back, leg, or foot problems, and my heart and lungs are healthy, so I reserved a spot. The trailhead leading to the Natural Entrance Trail is just a few feet from the right end of the Visitor Center when looking at the front entrance. The fence there has a small sign directing you to the Bat Amphitheater, ticket-takers, and their safety talk. Go in there. Then walk a short path to the amphitheater, and at the bottom of the amphitheater the Trail's switchbacks begin. (The bats are present late April to October, and exit the caves daily about sunset. Admission is free. See image on page 26.)

I wore hiking shoes with lugged soles, and carried my camera, tripod, water, and a small daypack. All went well. Yes, my calf muscles were mildly sore for two days, but that was a small price to pay for the splendors of the Natural Entrance Trail. The trail has 30-inch-high stone walls for a short distance at the beginning and then those great tubular metal railings begin. I wore thin rubber gloves to keep my hands sanitary. The Natural

The Natural Entrance Trail compares to the Empire State Building's staircase in length, but greatly excels it in beauty. ♦ Big Room. Fairyland is a candyland—popcorn heaped on the floor, a huge cone in the middle, and a cotton-candy ceiling.





Entrance Trail is more intimate than the Big Room. The formations are often close by, the decorated ceilings are quite high, and there's plenty of visual elbow room. From the photographer's perspective, take the Big Room clockwise for different views. I found the Big Room spectacular and the Natural Entrance Trail dazzling. Win-win!

You need to brace yourself for the long drive from El Paso to Carlsbad, but I would do it again tomorrow. There are roadside, no-frills campsites at Whites City, at the intersection of Hwy. 62/180 and Road 418. The RV sites are just parking places, as the adjacent RV campground is filled with long-term rentals. But it's worth the additional half-hour drive to Carlsbad for a comfy Good Sam RV Park.

There is more to explore at Carlsbad Caverns National Park (CCNP) than the Visitor Center, the Big Room, and the Natural Entrance Trail. Outside there are 11 trails crossing the park, from short to lengthy. alltrails.com/parks/us/new-mexico/carlsbad-caverns-national-park. Inside, off the Natural Entrance Trail there is a ranger-guided 1.5-hour tour (closed during Covid) into the four very decorated chambers of the **King's Palace Caverns**. It follows paved trails 830 feet below the surface. You will descend and later climb 80-foot-high hills. Obtain a separate reservation at (877) 444-6777 or at recreation.gov. The cost is \$8.00 for adults. Children over 4, accompanied by an adult, pay \$4.00.

Once Covid restrictions are lifted, if you are very fit and want an "introduction to real caving" experience, take the **Slaughter**

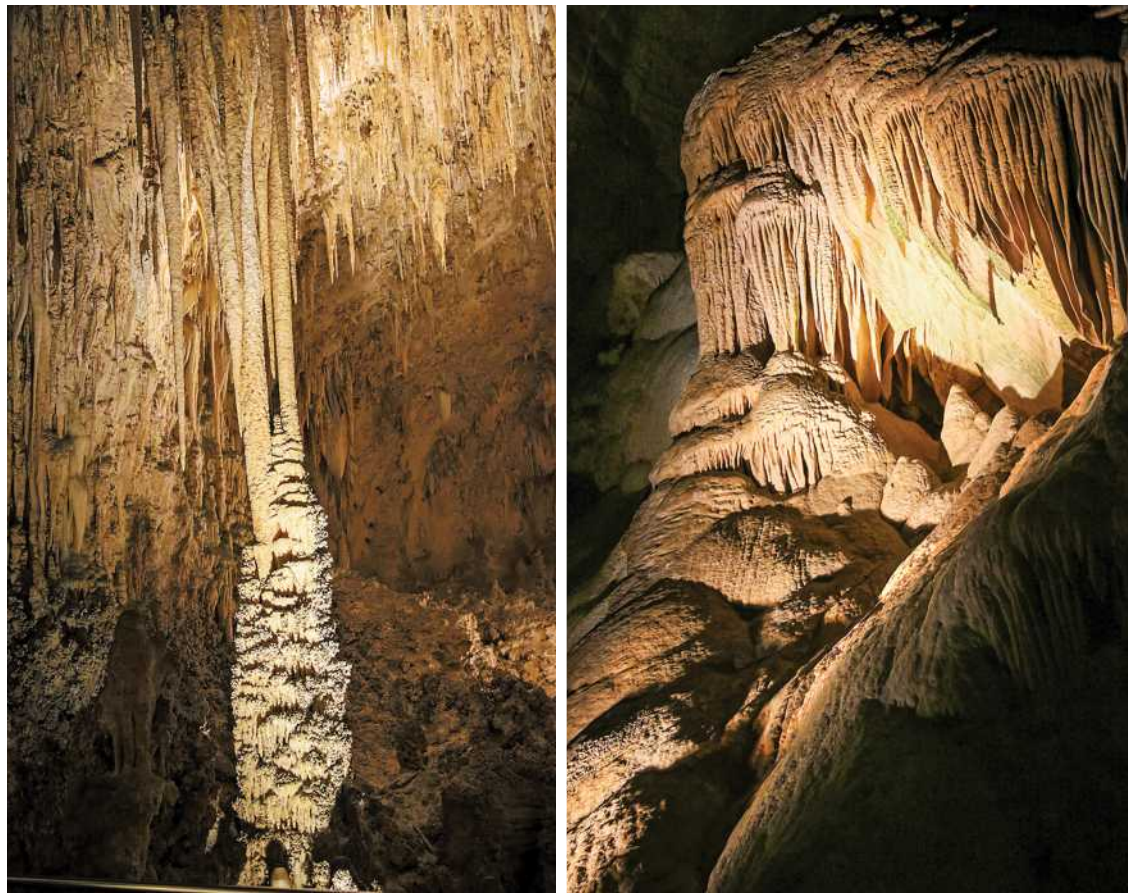
Canyon Tour. nps.gov/cave/planyourvisit/slaughter_canyon_cave_tour.htm The group meets at the Visitor Center and caravans to the trailhead in participants' vehicles. The steep trail to the entrance takes 40 minutes. Inside, the cave has unpaved trails. Lighting is from flashlights and headlamps. Backpacks and hiking sticks are verboten. Footing is slippery, and good boots are required. The sights you see are stunning. Search *NPS Slaughter Canyon Cave Tour* and *Photos of Slaughter Canyon Cave Tour*. Reservations are at **877-444-6777** or recreation.gov. Tickets are \$15.00 for adults and \$7.50 for children and Senior Pass holders.

The longest cave in this National Park is pristine and off-limits. Leguchilla Cave is 149 miles long, currently explored to 1,604 feet deep, and is the second-deepest U.S. cave. This 12-minute video follows the scientists rope-belaying to incredible scenes: youtube.com/watch?v=wSomDvbwJDs

Adventures in Speleology (Exploration of Caves)

Before this trip to Carlsbad Caverns, I'd never heard the term speleologist—and now I am one! Sort of. A speleologist is a person who studies caves or goes into caves as a sport.

All of Carlsbad's caves are so abundant with logic-defying speleothems that you may doubt the evidence of your own eyes. The ceilings in Carlsbad are encrusted with stalactites, soda straws, draperies, curtains, ribbons, and 'cave bacon' of every length and width. Drops falling from these downward-growing stalactites increase the heights of upward-growing stalagmites.



A sense of scale is elusive when visiting Carlsbad Caverns. This totem pole stalagmite is about 35 to 40 feet tall.

- ♦ Stalactites that are thin, long, and have crinkled bands are called Cave Bacon. Crisp bacon, no doubt.
- ♦ The Rock of Ages is a stalagmite. Its face and torso are stalactite draperies, its beard is cave bacon, and its lower torso and legs are flowstone.
- ♦ These stalactites and a stalagmite are fusing into a speleothem called a column.
- ♦ Natural Entrance Trail. Do you see gracefully cascading stalactite draperies or the Whale's Mouth? Kids particularly love this formation.

Sometimes stalactites and stalagmites fuse, creating columns.

Not that cavern's floors aren't up to their own mischief. If drops land on a flat, sloped, or vertically ridged surface, or if they spatter, they create wildly decorative formations. You'll be amazed by stalagmites, totem poles, flowstone, lily pads, many pools, rimstone dams, cave pearls, and more. Easily-identified popcorn is created when water seeps uniformly out of a limestone wall, precipitating calcite, or when it drips or splashes onto cave surfaces.

The randomness of the formations and the subtlety of the lighting add to Carlsbad's enchantment. All the formations are the result of rain and snowmelt soaking through limestone rock, mingling with it, and creating a mildly sulfuric acid fluid. The drops evaporate, leaving residues that become both exquisite and bizarre speleothems over eons. Seeing them takes you back to your youngest years when the world was magical and full of endless possibilities. "I love it. I want to go back," is the usual response to "What did you think of Carlsbad Caverns?"

I concur. For one thing, I haven't experienced the bat flight yet. It is hard to imagine that there are so many moths and other insects that a million bats can feast on them every evening for months. Early October can be perfect for both the bat flights and the fall color along the McKittrick Trail in Guadalupe Mountains National Park.

I hope you are tempted to visit Carlsbad Caverns National Park. Now let's revisit Guadalupe Mountains National Park.

Hiking & History at Guadalupe Mountains National Park

At Guadalupe Mountains National Park you'll experience several types of natural habitats, from white gypsum sand dunes and shrub desert, to semi-arid grasslands, to deciduous and coniferous forests. They mix and mingle, and the compass orientation of the slopes creates dirt and bare rock on one side of a ridge and forests on the other. The park was created to preserve and research the world's most extensive Permian Fossil Reef. Trails lead to the top of Guadalupe Peak and to nearby mountains and canyons. At 8,750 feet, Guadalupe is the highest peak in Texas. Easier trails feature springs, birding areas, and historic sites. There are 13 RV campsites up to 55 feet long in a paved, somewhat sloped parking lot with painted lines and no hookups. Level up for a night, or see *Where to Roost Your Rig* on page 34.

The major historic site in the park is Frijoles Ranch. The original home is a museum, open intermittently 8:30-4:00. I enjoyed walking around all the buildings and grounds and peeking in the museum's door window, even though it wasn't staffed that day. A roadrunner kept me company. Learn the details about other historic sites at nps.gov/gumo/planyourvisit/hours.htm The park has a remnant of a Butterfield Stagecoach stop, texashistory.com/archives/stagecoaching-in-guadalupe-mountains/ The park's Visitor Center is small but has exhibits, a gift and souvenir area, and very helpful rangers. The RV park at Whites City or the nice Good Sam Park in Carlsbad are respectively half an hour or an hour away from GMNP.



Almost half a million visitors make that lonesome trek across the plains of Texas and New Mexico to visit Carlsbad Caverns annually. About 190,000 million visit Guadalupe Mountains National Park. Between them, you'll find an abundance of options! Visitors may complain about the boring drive, but are nevertheless very eager to revisit Carlsbad. My trip for this article was my second visit to Carlsbad and my first hike down the Natural Entrance Trail. The caverns are spell-binding. I hope to discover them anew when the King's Palace Tour operates again. Carlsbad is a great winter destination, as snow is rare in the area and the caverns' trails can be warmer than the outside wind-chill. When is the last time you fell in love with the totally unexpected? Carlsbad Caverns merits a place on your bucket list!


Where to Roost Your Rig

Although there are several RV parks in Carlsbad, New Mexico, you may find motorhome sites are scarce in many of them. Many oil field workers east of town are long-term residents in these parks. The oil companies (and others) buy up sites in RV parks for a season or more because it's cheaper than housing workers in hotels. Some local parks may only take over-nighters on weekends, while other 'residential' parks are tidy but have none of the extras you expect in parks for vacationers. If you have trouble even finding a website for a park, look elsewhere.

The **White City RV Park** (whitecitynm.com, 575-361-3665), at the turnoff from Hwy. 62/180 onto Carlsbad Caverns Road (Rd. 418) is occupied mostly by long-term renters. The ten back-in sites for over-nighters are in a roomy, level gravel area beside Rd. 418, adjacent to a row of businesses. Sites have sewer, water, and electricity. The long-term sites are farther from the road. There's a little grassy park with trees and picnic tables near the overnight sites. Sign up at the adjacent store—the folks are polite and hospitable. If you want to get to the caverns early, this RV park is only 10 minutes away. Their rates are \$42 per night for military, AAA, AARP, and Good Sam members, otherwise it costs \$47.25.



Top: El Capitan is at the end of one of the best marine fossil reefs in the world. It is 43 million years old. ♦ *Above:* This is El Capitan, left, and Guadalupe Peak, right, from Frijoles Ranch. The Guadalupe Mountains and their canyons are laced with trails. The one to Guadalupe Peak's summit is strenuous.

Carlsbad RV Park & Campground, 4301 National Parks Hwy. (62/180) is just south of town. An RV service center is next door. This 150-site park offers terrific brand-new showers and restrooms, laundry room, indoor heated pool, four dog parks, picnic tables at each site, and shade trees. Sites range in depth from under 50 to 100 feet. There are two rental cabins. Most sites have full hookups, although 20 have water and electric only. The park is level, close to town, and the staff is friendly. Reserve well in advance during busy seasons. Water & electric sites are \$47.60 nightly or \$185 weekly, with discounts for Good Sam, AAA, AARP, and military. Full hookup sites are \$61.77 nightly, \$271.76 weekly. Prices include tax. Reservations: carlsbadrvpark.com or (575) 885-6333. 

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Camp Freightliner

A first-hand experience
by Steve Blume, owner of a
2021 Allegro RED 38KA



Camp Freightliner — just the name alone takes us back to fireflies and campfires and stirs our imagination. “I’ll park the coach, honey. You hurry on down to the campfire and save us a spot. Hope they have S’Mores!” Well, that’s not exactly how Camp Freightliner works, unless by chance you catch the in-person course at an RV rally with a rambunctious group of classmates.

Camp Freightliner is a two-day comprehensive course on operating and maintaining your Freightliner Custom Chassis diesel motorhome to get the maximum performance, life, and benefit from your coach. It is taught virtually by Freightliner instructors from the service center in Gaffney, South Carolina, or occasionally live at a rally.

It is jam-packed with information, but presented in a logical sequence with examples and visual aids that make it easy to understand. Every question is welcomed. My class in March 2022 had mostly new owners with limited experience, but the few who were more knowledgeable just asked more informed and detailed questions. Class size is limited to around 15 students to keep it personal. The registration fee is currently \$245.00 for single attendance or \$295.00 for driver and co-pilot for the two-day class.

Years ago when America was covered in small farms, the ability to work on engines and service equipment was a common skill. People had pride in their ability to maintain things themselves. Innovations over time vastly improved the performance of commercial vehicles, but advancements in every operating system have outpaced the skill sets and desires of the common man to do it himself. When it comes to Class A diesel pushers, these modern beasts of technology bring a whole new level of complexity. The transmission shifts based on what it thinks

you are doing, the engine responds to prompts from systems to provide power or slow you down, the air brakes have backups to backups. Electronics and mechanical systems work together to give us power, performance, efficiency, and comfort that 99.99% of the time works flawlessly, as long as we keep it all maintained.

If you are not a mechanical person, how do you know what to do? We have all heard horror stories of ruined engines and other high-dollar repairs because someone didn’t take care of something. How do we make sure that is not us?

All Tiffin Allegro Reds currently come on an XC Freightliner chassis, as do 70% of all Class A motorhomes in the U.S. When I took delivery of my 2021 Tiffin Allegro

Red 38KA, I instantly became a Freightliner chassis owner. In school I may have scored very low on the mechanical aptitude tests, but as a grownup I score very high on everyday “how to protect my large investment” decisions.

Very quickly I realized how little I knew about the mechanical side of a Class A diesel pusher. I was terrified I would do something wrong that would ruin this beautiful and very expensive machine. I cringed when bells and alarms sounded and lights flashed. It seemed overwhelming. I mentioned this when I attended a one-hour “Fireside Chat” seminar by Freightliner at the Tampa RV Supershow and they convinced me Camp Freightliner was the solution to filling in some of the gaps and helping me feel more confident.

I scheduled my two-day class online and received emails with links to a multitude of materials I would be able to save on my computer, plus a link to a short get-acquainted Zoom call the day before. On that call I got to meet the instructor and other owners, make sure my computer was set up correctly for video



and audio, and get a great understanding of how the class would be taught and what we would cover.

Once class started, we began with the basics. Simply said, I learned the chassis is made up of all the things that make your coach go down the road, but not the living space built on top of it. While the engine may be provided by Cummins and the transmission by Allison, they are attached to the chassis in Gaffney and part of the training.

My fear of breaking down and being stranded was quickly addressed in several ways. First, if something happens and you are stranded, what parts specific to your coach would help a mobile tech get you on your way? It is not realistic to stock a warehouse in your bays, so the basic “Emergency Kit” they recommend is a fuel filter, fuel water separator filter and any belts that are on your engine. These are available at any Freightliner service center

as it was designed. We covered start up and shut down. My fear of the dreaded DEF head sensor failures that have spread panic across social media platforms was wiped away after understanding those units are not used on the Freightliner chassis. The DEF regeneration process was explained in a way I could understand, once again eliminating panic if it starts.

Since I had recently weighed my coach, I wanted an excuse to call the 800 number and check out these techs. After providing the last six digits of my VIN, I asked them what my tire pressure should be. Within a few minutes I had my recommended pressure for each tire. Wow, that was easy!

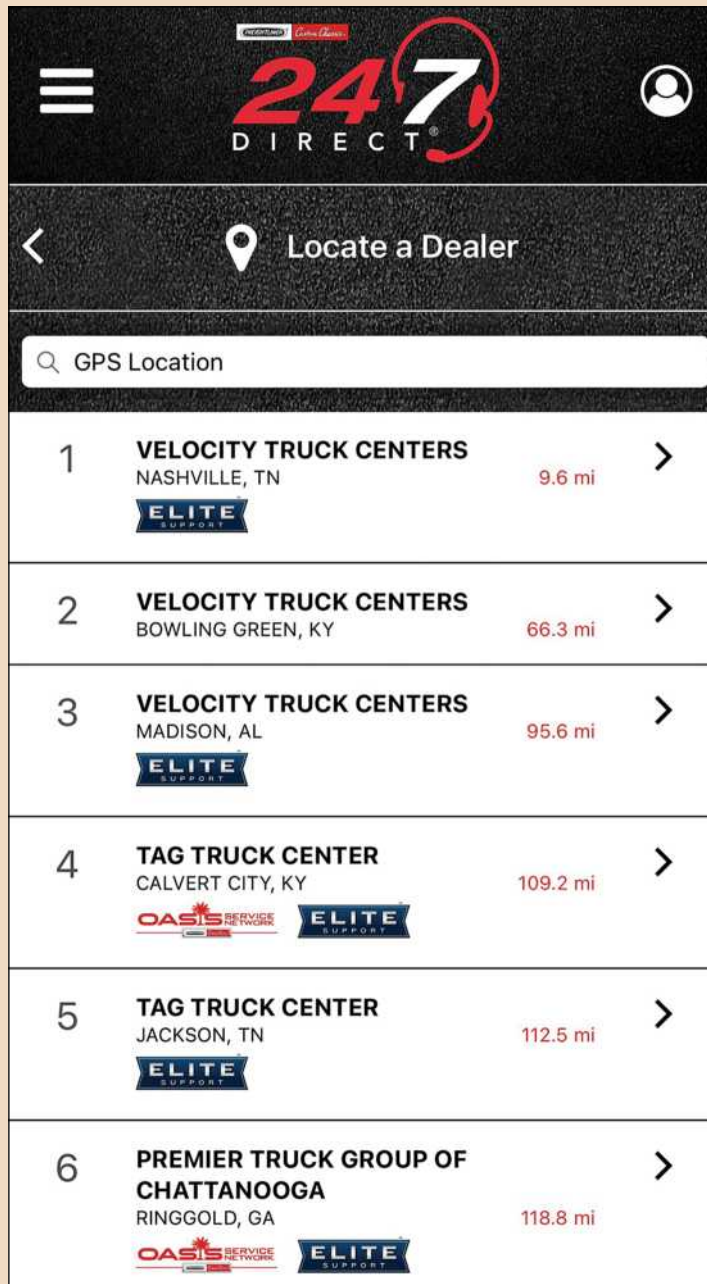
I have six air tanks with three chambers each and understand what the *psst* short blasts mean. Who knew? With air brakes, you can never have a total brake failure, so another worst case fear was eliminated.



or by calling the Freightliner Support Line at 800-385-4357.

If I have a problem, who do I call first? Shaun Bridges is responsible for all the techs and mobile techs in Gaffney as well as service techs at each of the body builder locations. “When you call the 24/7 Freightliner support line it is answered by a Freightliner technical employee who is able to pull up specifics on your coach once you give them the last six digits of your VIN, regardless of the age. They can troubleshoot to help you identify the problem, send parts overnight, or dispatch help, such as the nearest 24/7 response van along with a tech. If you are able to limp to the nearest of over 450 authorized Freightliner service centers, you can use your 24/7 Direct phone app (shown at right) to find it. If it is an Oasis center, it has RV specific techs and services, including a lounge and parking. If it is an Elite center, there is an express lane that guarantees your issue will be diagnosed within two hours.” Until taking my Camp Freightliner course, I had no idea of the safety net below me. This was huge.

I learned the differences in suspensions, how to properly use the engine brake and how to allow the transmission to perform





Each participant receives a sheet on their individual coach that has just about everything you want to know about it, including the engine, transmission, radiator, filter and belt replacement part numbers, axle ratings, chassis, build and in service dates, and even tire sizes. Mine is in a sheet protector in that front driver side cabinet for easy access, along with the 800 number, and last six digits of the VIN. “This sheet is gold!” stated Linda Jarzynka, a recent graduate who took the virtual course.

The two days are packed with information that is simple to understand with the way it is presented and does not overwhelm you. With knowledge comes confidence.



Why do I need to attend Camp Freightliner?

I took that question to Camp Freightliner instructor Bobby Wayne Scruggs (see picture at right). “Most of our students will never do much of their own work. Our objective in this class is to teach them what the systems are, what they do, what needs to be maintained, and how often to do it. Sometimes the spouse is even more uncomfortable and that leads to a lot of stress. We provide a schedule they can take to their service center to be specific about what needs to be done. Telling a mechanic to just do whatever he thinks is like handing him a blank check.”

Richard Johnson recently upgraded his Class A and already had about three years of diesel pusher experience, but delivery of his new Freightliner and a service tech recommendation was the gentle nudge he needed to take the course. “I don’t plan to do any of the work myself, so my biggest takeaway is an overall understanding of all the systems and how they work together. The class pretty much follows the owner’s manual, but is a LOT more interesting.”

Evolution of Camp Freightliner

Bryan Henke is the manufacturing product manager for FCCC in Gaffney. His responsibilities include everything related to Camp Freightliner. “Before the pandemic, classes were either in-person at the Gaffney service center or at rallies. The rallies were discontinued for a while, but are now back in full swing. Like many industries, FCCC improvised and moved to virtual training. The silver lining is the ability to train more owners plus make the course available to customers who live far away and do not see a trip to South Carolina in their future. Our customer satisfaction surveys show us people place a high value on our large network of service locations across the country with 24/7 response, but Camp Freightliner is also a big factor mentioned. Between these two, you can take away most of the worry, not just during the warranty period, but for the life of the coach. Currently, we estimate about 25 percent of Class A owners with a Freightliner chassis have attended Camp Freightliner. We would like to see that go much higher with our ability to offer remote learning.”

Who Attends Camp Freightliner?

“My previous Class A was a gasser, so I knew nothing about this diesel coach,” related Linda Jarzynka. “I tried reading the manual and it just didn’t connect. There were too many things I didn’t understand. I would have never gone to South Carolina to take it, but virtual made it practical for me. I was also concerned about being a woman, but never once felt that was an issue. At first, I thought the registration fee for the class was a little high, but now I feel it was totally worth it.”

Mitch Shapiro is a different story. He lost his sight at 24-years old, but is pretty independent. His wife Donna does all the driving. “I wax my own coach and climb a 10-foot ladder. It takes me three days, but that tells you how much I do myself. We took the course at a rally. I obviously couldn’t read any of the slides, so I asked our instructor if he would explain each one in detail. He



never hesitated, and I really got a lot out of it. Not only was he a great teacher, but also a great listener. No question was too simple, and I never felt intimidated. Coming up through the ranks, including experience as a service tech, gave him the knowledge, and he was able to explain it in a simple way that even I could understand. Even a blind guy was impressed by Camp Freightliner!”


“At the rally, there was a bare Freightliner chassis,” said Don-

na, “so I could actually see what was being discussed, like actual air bags. That brought it all home.” Mitch and Donna both agreed they would sign up for a refresher course down the road.

Betty was recently widowed and shared her story. “My husband and I had owned three Class A’s since 2007, but I never drove or kept up with any maintenance. He did all of that. I had dear friends from our RV travels across the country that I really wanted to visit, but I was so nervous. I planned to inch my way along stop by stop. My family convinced a very reluctant me to go to Gaffney for service and to get everything checked out first. When I checked into the service center and they learned of my situation, they strongly recommended I enroll in Camp Freightliner, which had a virtual class being run from there starting the following day. The instructor talked with me and was so concerned he enrolled me, made me a space at the corner of his desk where he was teaching, and there I sat for two days while he held his virtual class. The terms were familiar, but I never knew what they meant. Now I understand. Seeing how they sincerely cared for me there and in the service center gave me a new level of complete trust. We had been left unrescued three different times by our roadside service, so understanding how the 800-number and 24/7 Direct work gave me the confidence I needed to continue my travels.”

Just about everyone could benefit from Camp Freightliner. I highly recommend you enroll and spend the two days learning about your magnificent machine. Registration is available on the website only (customclass.com) and must be prepaid via credit card.

Continued on next page



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The Freightliner Service Center in Gaffney, South Carolina


I LIVE NEARBY IN TENNESSEE, so armed with all of my new knowledge from Camp Freightliner, I decided to go to the FCCC Service Center in Gaffney for my 12-month service. Gaffney is to Freightliner what Red Bay is to Tiffin. All Freightliner Custom Chassis are born there. This is the only service center that is company-owned and operated and sets the standards for the dealer repair network across the U.S. and Canada. Customers can stay at any of the 27 parking sites in the fenced lot behind the center with 30- and 50-amp service plus potable water and a dump station.

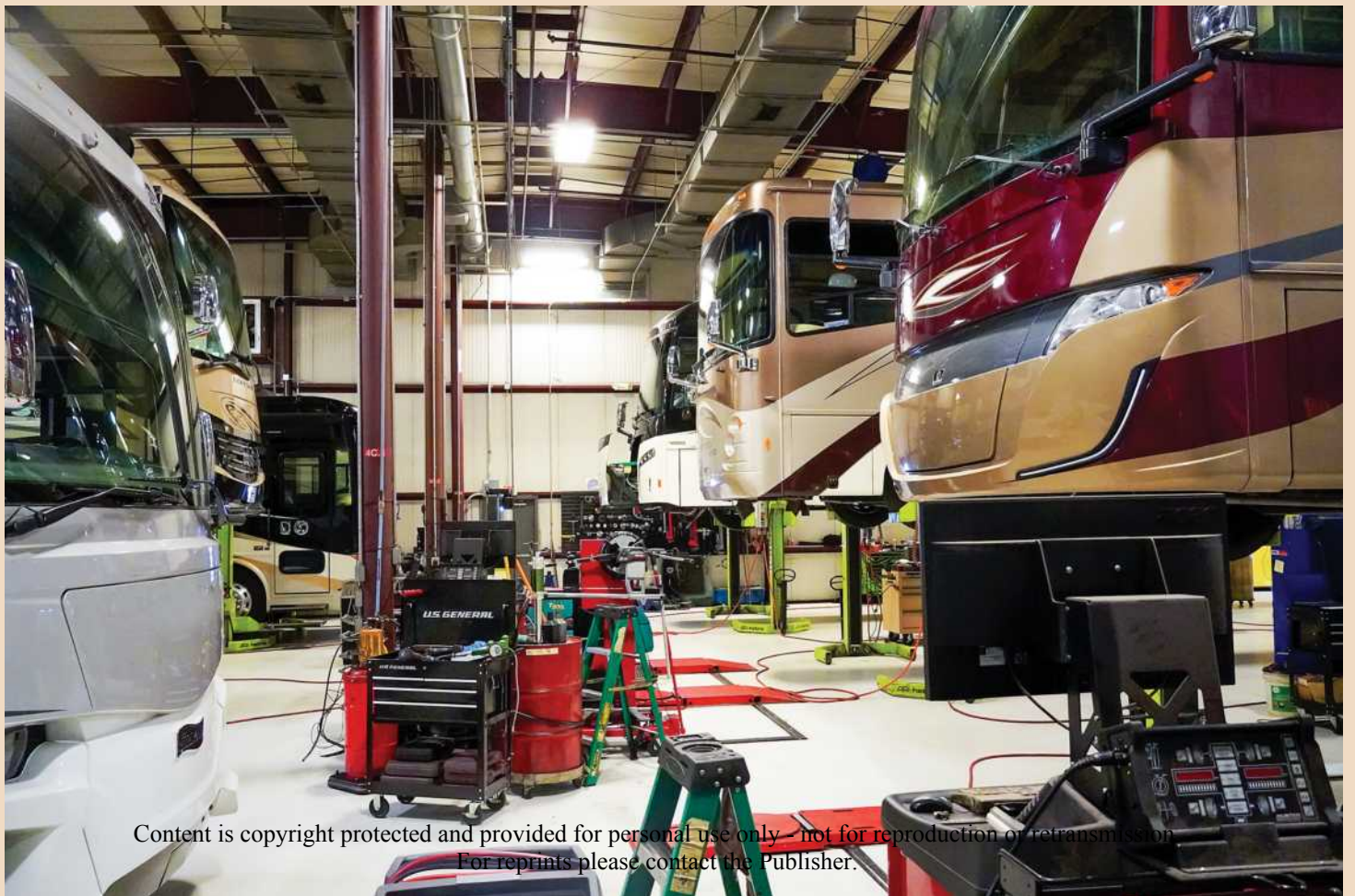
Willie Gilliam handles check-in and scheduling. She was the first smiling face I encountered. “We have six bays and schedule six appointments a day, usually months out. If you don’t have an appointment, you can show up and plug-in. We will work you in, hopefully within a few days. We have cancellations, and we also finish up early on some and can get to our waiting list.” The queued coaches waiting for service reminded me so much of my happy experiences at the Tiffin Allegro Campground waiting to get into the service center in Red Bay. At the end of the day, a propane campfire immediately attracted a circle of 10 new friends.

I placed my “Emergency Kit” order that I learned about at Camp Freightliner with parts manager Corry Johnson. Not only does he handle the parts for this service center, but for any customer who calls in through the 24/7 call center. “Those people who take your call are Freightliner employees who are techs. If you need a part, we can usually get it to you overnight, to your home, a campground, wherever. Freightliner also has 10 parts distribution

centers. It doesn’t matter if you have a 30-year old coach, if it was made by us or a company we acquired, we carry the parts.”

On the morning of my service, the tech reviewed all services to be performed for the one-year service visit plus two recalls they would complete. The Oasis RV Chassis Maintenance Schedule for twelve months includes changing engine oil and filter, fuel filter and fuel water separator, replacing axle hub oil, pressure test engine coolant system and test coolant, check ride height, check all fluid levels, inspect and lube chassis, and check tire pressure. Most people also have the generator serviced at the same time. Upon completion, I was informed that a crimped hose had been repaired under warranty and all other systems were great. He showed me before and after photos. Although not my tech, while waiting I spoke with Jason Varner about how they produce such a great experience. “Every morning we have a short huddle meeting to keep all of us on the same page. Work is structured with a procedure for everything. Our goal is to make every customer who leaves here happy.”

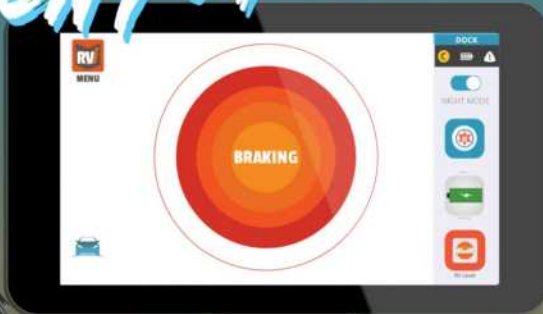
Before leaving Gaffney, I scheduled my appointment for next year, so there is comfort in knowing I will not be a fill-in and can schedule a trip around it. Camp Freightliner built my confidence and really boosted my comfort level. Having my annual maintenance done shortly afterward completed the circle by enabling me to apply what I learned in class to my specific coach. Thanks to this combined experience, there is a new swagger in my walk these days. 



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Austin

The Capital of Wonderful, Wild, and Weird

Austin, Texas, is the tenth largest city in the country and the capital of Texas. The *Wall Street Journal* in April of this year ranked the metro area as the best labor market in 2021 among regions with at least one million people. It's also the capital of the Hill Country, that area of Central Texas marked by rugged hills, canyons, and occasional immense outcroppings of granite. That would be enough for most places, but finally,

Austin justifiably calls itself the “Live Music Capital of the World.” We found the State Capital, the Hill Country, freewheeling singer/songwriters and much more in this surprising city. Music and great restaurants lure us travelers, but the thread of natural beauty woven into the DNA of Austin is irresistible. Museums, sports, and some of the largest entertainment festivals in the U.S. wait for you here. Let me share what we discovered.



If you're visiting Austin, you're going to the Texas Capitol building. Number 1 on everyone's list of attractions, it truly is worth your time. The city itself began as tiny Waterloo, but was chosen to be the new capital in 1839. When the government administration arrived from Houston, the population exploded to a grand total of 856. The ambitious city plan drawn up that year remains the blueprint of the city now at the heart of a metropolitan area with over 2 million residents today. The plan shows Congress Avenue stretching a mile south from the capital building, straight through town to the Colorado River, just as it does today. Cross streets exist as planned, then named for Texas trees, but now numbered (Pecan Street has evolved into the rowdy 6th Street).

The capitol wasn't begun until 1882, and was the seventh largest building in the world when completed in 1888. Such superlatives are oddly downplayed these days. Literature told us that Texas had the largest state capitol building in the country, and indeed, the U.S. Capitol could fit within the Texas Capitol with room to spare. A large chart illustrated the fact in case you didn't grasp the concept. Today there is only a modest acknowledgement that, yes, seven feet separate the U.S. and Texas structures in height.

Upon entering the main entrance, the foyer impresses with large paintings of Davy Crockett and other founders. You should go first to the rotunda to gawk at the beautiful ceiling. Each floor above you, bounded by white balustrades, recedes higher and higher towards the dome. Visitors are allowed as high as the fourth floor, each lined with portraits of past governors or presidents of the Republic of Texas (1836-1846).

We were surprised we could roam the hallowed legislative halls on our own, poking around without a guide and looking into the various public rooms.

Texas has a bicameral legislature. The grand Senate and House chambers are of equal size, although the House's ever-increasing number of members now sit closer together. The wide staircases and hallways that lead to various offices and meeting rooms are spacious and impressive.

The capitol building is covered in Texas red granite, the same stone that squirted up and created Enchanted Rock near Fredericksburg, only this rock came from slightly smaller Granite Mountain in Marble Falls. Geologists tell us that these are extremely old rocks, like 1.4 billion years old, thus substantially pre-dating the state's twin plagues of feral hogs and state legislators.

The Texas State Capitol may be the largest cash-free building project since the pyramids. ♦ As state government grew, the capitol building ran out of space. Rather than destroy the symmetry of the building, an extension with skylights to the surface was built entirely beneath the north plaza in 1993. ♦ The impressive rotunda is large enough to encompass the rotunda at the U.S. Capitol, as Texans modestly note.

Text and photography by Charles Breckenridge



In building the Capitol, the owner of Granite Mountain offered to provide the granite at no cost if the state would extend a railroad line a few miles to the quarry and provide a few hundred convicts to help the professionals excavate and cut the stone. This was a deal the legislature could get behind—they had already pledged three million acres of land to get the building constructed without any cash.

Unfortunately, the professional stone workers didn't like sharing the work with unpaid convicts and went on strike. The official website now says "boycotted," but the result was the same. Scottish stonecutters arrived, unpacked their tools and the work resumed, and the fate of the original stone workers is lost in the mists of time. If you go to Marble Falls, what you'll see is half of Granite Mountain—the huge granite rock has been steadily nibbled away to cover other state buildings over the years. Huge blocks were used to build the Galveston seawall. Visit the Enchanted Rock State Park to see a vast untouched mound.

As the apparatus of state government grew, the capitol building, once so immense, ran out of space. Rather than destroy the symmetry of the building, in a rare move of legislative and architectural brilliance, an extension with skylights to the surface was built entirely beneath the north plaza in 1993. Even a hundred years after the original construction, the new subterranean extension displays the same Texas red granite, quarried from the same Granite Mountain.

A few years ago, we visited a mountain in Italy where the stone for Michelangelo's *David* was quarried. This is a real mountain, thousands of feet tall, and basically all marble. They will be blasting white marble out of there for centuries to come, and it struck me that if a further extension of the Texas capitol is ever needed for this land obsessed with size, there'll be miles more of Texas red granite here in the Hill Country to build it. See tspb.texas.gov for information about visiting the Capitol. For information about Enchanted Rock and other state parks, see tpwd.texas.gov

A King's Ransom

Sometime recently, perhaps when I stepped away from my desk for a moment, Austin suddenly became, as previously mentioned, the tenth-largest city in the United States. That's tenth with a bullet, riding an economy based on technology and entertainment, backed by the nearly recession-proof industries of state government and higher education. In 1984, Austin boasted a population of 448,000. That year Michael Dell began selling computers and today the Dell Corporation employs around 14,000 in the Austin area alone. In those same 38 years, greater Austin's population exploded to 2,117,000.

Dell's success has brought other tech employers. Apple's only U.S. plant is in Austin. Last year the giant software firm Oracle announced the relocation of their headquarters to Austin. In November, Samsung announced they would build a \$17 billion

dollar facility north of Austin, and in December, Tesla Corporation followed its founder and owner, Elon Musk, to the city, relocating their corporate headquarters to a 2000-acre site where their gigafactory is located. Mr. Musk owns a home in a classic central Austin neighborhood.

Austin may now owe its white-hot economy to the huge high-tech and entertainment industries but for years the local economy revolved around two comfortably recession-proof components—the state government and the huge University of Texas. Constantly growing, the university's cozy campus is now home to an enrollment somewhere north of 50,000 students supported by 24,000 faculty and employees. Austin is no longer a college town, but nevertheless, let's start our visit on the University's campus. Even if you have one of the 110,000 tickets sold

to watch the Longhorns play football on a fall Saturday, you'll want to find other things to do here, and it won't be difficult.

The **Bullock Museum** (at left) is dedicated to Texas history, and there we saw the ship used by the French explorer La Salle in 1686, during his ill-fated search for the mouth of the Mississippi River. The *La Belle* sank in shallow water in Matagorda Bay, and was recovered along with thousands of artifacts and now sits in the museum. Not a replica! Much of the actual assembly of the 300-year-old ship was aided by the Roman numerals thoughtfully labelled by the French on all of the major timbers. Other floors describe the state's fascinating (and successful) efforts to re-brand Texas in the 1930s, the flamboyant oil and gas era, and finally the state's pivotal role in air and space travel.

The nearby **Perry-Castaneda Museum** is one





of the largest university museums in the world, and the LBJ Presidential Library is also on campus. The Harry Ransom Center dwarfs them all, if not in size, certainly in its vast collection of literary treasure.

The Center is described as a research center. Manuscripts? 42 million. Rare books? A million. They have an excellent photography collection—5 million photographs and 100,000 works of art. In the latter part of the last century, rising energy prices increased the Center's war chest by several multiples, fueling an incredible riot of activity, allowing the Center to generate no small amount of criticism and resentment in the somewhat insular world of book collectors and collections. The Ransom bought everything available—at any price—regardless of price, actually. In an incredible fever of acquisition, crates of books, the trophies from various auctions or estate sales, poured into Austin to be stacked in rows, piling up more rapidly than they could be cataloged.

It seemed as if the University's buyers were competing, not with other institutions or collectors, but with each other. We can enjoy the results today. One of only 21 complete Gutenberg Bibles is on display here, acquired in 1978. Shakespeare's *First Folio*? Three copies, thank you. Never know when you might need a spare. Twenty-three copies of the first printing of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* are known to exist, one lives on the shelves here at the Ransom.

How about modern writers, a specialty of the Ransom? The Center has the archives of D. H. Lawrence, John Steinbeck, Lewis Carroll, James Joyce and dozens more. In addition to the writers, the records of an entire distinguished publishing house, Alfred A. Knopf, have been transported to this institution. Rounding out the collection are comic books, stage and screen memorabilia, all before you get to the paintings.

The Bullock Museum displays the hull of the *La Belle*, a relic of France's 15 minutes of fame and dominion in Texas. ♦ A complete Gutenberg Bible on display at the Ransom Center. This was the first book printed with movable type, a concept that 400 years and many inventions later led to digital typesetting used to create the pages of the magazine you hold in your hands. Lucky you!

If you enjoy literature, you could spend your entire trip to Austin at the Ransom—but don't.* There's lots more to do, see, eat, and hear. After many hours at the Ransom, we followed Congress downhill in the later afternoon to one of Austin's biggest and most unusual attractions.

If you love Halloween, you're probably squarely in the target demo for the long-time "Keep Austin Weird" campaign which features the largest urban bat population in the country, appearing every twilight from under the Ann Richards Bridge across the Colorado River. Bats doing their thing in town certainly appeal to city fathers, since their thing is eating 10–30,000 lbs. of insects a night. The flying mammals are on everyone's Austin must-see lists.

What you don't want to see is what happens when 1.5 million Mexican Free-Tailed bats return home, stomachs grumbling after their nightly nosh. I recommend you do your swimming or paddling upstream from the bridge, before the river receives its daily 30,000 lb. contribution from the bats. You can confine your Austin experiences, bat-wise, to watching them swarm out after sunset—a pretty cool, rustling, rushing experience—then searching out your own dinner and music, combining Austin's natural and man-made attractions in a single, only slightly weird evening.

* Go to thestoryoftexas.com for outlines of the Bullock exhibits; hrc.utexas.edu will tell you about special exhibits at the Ransom while you're in town.

Music? It's Bigger in Texas

Music and entertainment are a major part of the Austin experience, from the rambunctious Sixth Street to more serious encounters like SXSW and *Austin City Limits*. Austin claims more musical venues than Memphis, Nashville, or even New York City, which seems impossible until you look around the city for yourself. But Austin music goes beyond the typical nightspots and clubs.

To understand Austin, you need to understand SXSW, a two-week conference, street festival, and outdoor drinking competition. All of these and more, the sort of thing that really belongs here. Instead of being quietly forgotten as Austin grew into a major corporate center, SXSW grew, too, Blob-like, keeping pace with its host city. Knowing exactly what makes up S (South) X (by) SW (Southwest) is more difficult.

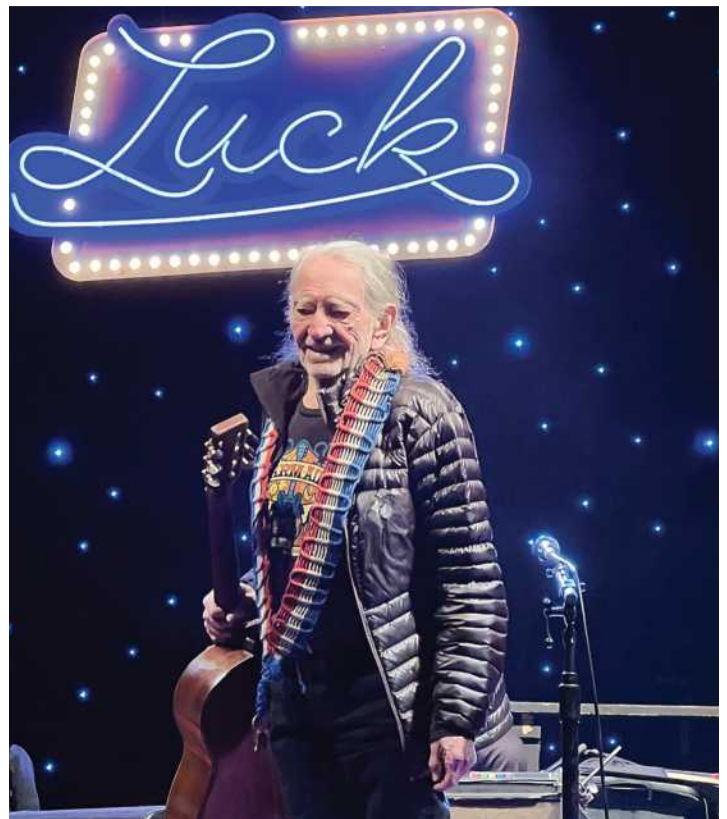
I went to the SXSW website for a precise definition and got this: "South by Southwest dedicates itself to helping creative people achieve their goals. Founded in 1987 in Austin, Texas, SXSW is best known for its conference and festivals that celebrate the convergence of tech, film, music, education, and culture." If you include the unofficial food competition, where every restaurant, food truck or Ding-Dong dealer in town shovels food at the masses, you still won't have a perfect definition, but you're getting closer.

Remember, in 1987 Austin sheltered about 500,000 souls, and what suburbs existed were a scintilla of their current size. Then, SXSW was a neat idea to combine the local talent and enthusiasm for music and film into a series of events where the talent could rub shoulders, learn from each other, and network. Then they threw the doors open and invited the rest of the city to hang out.

The music at SXSW differs radically from the offerings of the Spoleto Festival in Charleston (*RIS*, 18:3. July 2021), both in style and quantity. This year, hundreds of thousands attended a SX concert, screening, open forum, or dinner. About as many more were able to follow the proceedings remotely, in total approximating the entire population of Austin back when SXSW began. The SXSW acronym, too cool for school in 1987, has today entered the lexicon. The event is an incredible mash-up of entertainment, serious education, discussion, and professional networking—all draped over the framework of a two-week house party.

And Ninja spoke. Don't know him? SXSW does from previous appearances. Tyler "Ninja" Blevins is a video gamer, and evidently a very good one. Good enough to make \$10-20 million dollars a year from his digital efforts, a superstar in gaming circles. He modestly admits to over 24 million subscribers on YouTube, and makes over half a million dollars every month just from streaming *Fortnite*. At least once, an NBA game has been

Sharon Jones and the Dap Kings performed songs from *I Learned the Hard Way* in their appearance at Stubbs during the SXSW Music Festival in Austin. ♦ Willie Nelson gives his benediction to an Austin audience. ♦ Paul Val playing at Sixth Street bar Pour Choices in Austin Texas during the SXSW Music Festival. This historic street is famous for its live music bars.



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delayed following the announcement of his supernova presence courtside when players from both teams left their benches and jostled to meet the superstar.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (think Oscars) says that “. . . technology is causing more wide-sweeping changes than any other industry has faced since the introduction of sound in 1926.” Technology-wise, SXSW dates back only as far as *Roger Rabbit*, but in Austin change and technology spell opportunity, not challenge. Ninja, GOAT, embodies the ever-expanding hi-tech aspect of entertainment—a billion-dollar industry in large part midwived by SXSW.

We visited with an agent who represents some of the artists who performed this year. “There’s always a place to perform for a musician, even if it’s the Holiday Inn by the airport,” he said. I’m not 100 percent sure that’s true everywhere, but it feels like the truth in Austin.

For many, the 350+ musical events are the heart of SXSW, and the spiritual heart of Austin itself, but the original huge entertainment event in town, *Austin City Limits*, has presented musicians on Zilker Park stages and on PBS for 43 years. This fall, 130 acts will appear over two weekends at the park for 450,000 patrons.

Austin carries music in its DNA—art-

ists warble, wail, and strum next to food trucks, on vineyard patios, in shopping centers, and every restaurant or bar is likely to offer some version of performance, let alone the innumerable clubs centered around music and booze. Austinites may work on computers or at computers, but it’s the haze-covered Willie Nelson, not Michael Dell, who’s the unchallenged patron saint of Austin and the Hill Country.

If your visit coincides with either South By or Austin City Limits, gird your loins, fight the traffic and participate. Return home and you’ll be the one to explain what SXSW really means. Contact SXSW.com and aclfestival.com.

Better Than Beaches

Austin’s blast-furnace economy may be drawing lots of new residents from California, but that state has high-tech business and the allure of golden Pacific beaches, too.

Beaches? We don’t need no stinking beaches—Austin has the Colorado River. Not the one running through seven states and forming Lakes Mead, Powell, and Havasu. See, Texas has its very own Colorado River, running completely within

the state until it empties into the Gulf of Mexico. Running right through the heart of Austin, it features the Highland Lakes, six lakes in the Hill Country spread over 600 miles, give or take a few golf course communities or condo developments.

“Our lakes provide clean water, flood control, and 295 megawatts of electrical generating capacity, most of it clean and renewable hydroelectric,” said Clara Tuma, of the Lower Colorado River Au-

thority. The primary goal of the LCRA was originally flood control, and the river was tamed with a chain of lakes. Over time, providing a clean water supply and recreation for the booming Hill Country population grew in importance.

“And we have 11,000 acres of parks,” she said. All of these parks, lakes and riverfront are a short drive from Austin and one of the area’s greatest attractions.

The LCRA parks have over 120 RV sites, most with full hook-ups, and they can be reserved. Go to lcra.org, then find and click on the picture block labeled “Parks”. You’ll find every park, including Matagorda Bay on the Gulf coast. We stayed at **Sunset Point RV Park** on Lake LBJ, an LCRA property leased to private operators. Level sites, nice water, 30/50 amps at every site and gated security. We were maybe 30 yards from the lake and experienced the spectacular sunsets the name promises. Friendly and helpful staff are constantly cleaning and polishing this gem.

There’s one problem with Sunset Point—only about 60 campsites, and they stay busy. But help may be on the way. “We’re looking for partners to develop additional parks,” said Ms. Tuma.

And that’s good news for RVers, indeed. sunsetpointljb.com



My commute should look like this— from Barton Creek heading downstream to the city.

Resort to This

Should you celebrate a special event while in Austin, you'll want to consider cocktails or dinner at the **Commodore Perry**, Austin's one-of-a-kind resort hotel. The property began as a private home, and the tasteful renovation preserved the wonderful architectural details and its posh ambiance. If the CP feels like a private club, that's because it is a private club, but one where you're welcomed and assured of a lovely experience. We know that's true because the CP has an Experience Curator, Jaqueline Gilles, who showed us the resort and described the types of experiences we might enjoy and she might curate.

"We pursue the element of excellence in everything that has our name on it," said Jaqueline, "Our community building, and of course our guest rooms, suites, and dining options." The experiences can take you beyond fine dining and bring the property to life with elements of local culture that visitors could not arrange on their own.

"This is the new luxury," she said, referring not to cooking demonstrations or

book signings, but the opportunity the CP may provide to share a real conversation with renowned chefs, writers, filmmakers, or whoever, in a luxurious environment.

If one of their many special events isn't a possibility, try **Lutie's** for dinner. The best of Texas regional flavors are presented in the relaxed elegance of the room, where the glass walls barely separate you from the candlelit grounds outside.

Jaqueline walked us through the resort's 10 acres (some of the gardens date back to 1910), where we noticed a small stage being installed in a garden—it wouldn't be an authentic Austin experience without music. The first spring fragrances drifted from the landscaping, the patios and decks were supremely attractive and hinted at the graceful lifestyle the owners of this estate must have enjoyed. Think of it like living in a Zephyr for an afternoon or an evening—and if you al-

ready have the Zephyr, you'll feel quite at home. Find your experience, or just cocktails and dinner, at aubergeresorts.com.



With the ambience of a private club, visitors enjoy terraces and intimate retreats at the CP.

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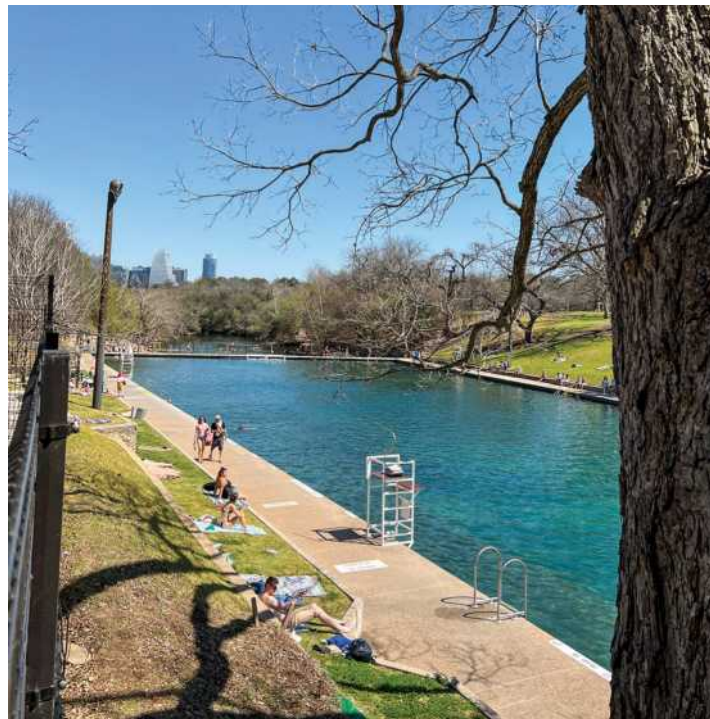
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Endangered Species and Lifestyle

The lakes, river, and hills that border Austin continue inside the city limits, so walk, ride your bike, or rent a kayak—you can spend a great afternoon on the water in the shadow of downtown.

When the jewel of the city's park system is the habitat for an endangered species or two, you know "Keep Austin Weird" is thriving. Barton Springs is a half natural, half man-made three-acre swimming pool fed by underground springs and Barton Creek. Its sloped grassy banks have long been an iconic spot and the highlight of Zilker Park—351 acres and maybe the most visited park in Austin. Leaving the pool, the water resumes its Barton Creek identity and soon joins the Colorado River and the bats at Congress Street, where a fresh series of parks line the river and Lady Bird Lake.

In the 1960s, biologists learned that both a weird little species of salamander and far more visible nude swimmers co-existed in Barton Springs, and two things guaranteed to capture the heart and mind of a red-blooded amphibian biologist are new perennibranchiates and nude hippies. Yet in spite of all the heavy breathing, by the late 1990s, both nudists and salamanders managed to become endangered. Thankfully, recent habitat restoration efforts in the park offer hope for the survival of both species. austintexas.gov



The Barton Springs pool—three acres of summertime memories waiting to be made.

Crime Fighting and Cracker Jack

Cracker Jack, Shredded Wheat, and the zipper were introduced at the Chicago World's Fair, but two more significant discoveries truly changed the world and evidence still exists in Austin today. Edison's electric generation business had been taken over by J.P. Morgan, and the resulting company, General Electric, was the favorite to provide the lighting for the fair, but Westinghouse, with technology developed by Nikola Tesla, had a superior system and a much lower bid. When the fair chose the Tesla system of alternating current, it became the de facto standard for all U.S. electrical generation and transmission systems to this day.

Still standing in Austin are some of the first practical mass illumination systems using that new technology—the Moonlight Towers, the eventual result of another Chicago Fair introduction—the serial murderer. Dr. H. H. Holmes confessed to 27 murders, most of them committed during the Fair, although many of his "victims" were living at the time of his confession and unaware they had been murdered. But the furor surrounding the first highly publicized serial killer in this country forced cities to improve public safety, and the newly available lighting that amazed fairgoers was an obvious answer.

A dozen or more cities had already installed Moonlight Towers with electric arc lights that could illuminate several blocks more effectively than the conventional gas lights, but only Austin's, erected following the Fair, survive today. While other cities

eventually dismantled their towers, Austin restored theirs and (of course) celebrated with a citywide festival in 1995. The towers are marked on maps, and we found one at Barton Springs hung with lights to make a 165-foot Christmas tree and help keep Austin, if not weird, at least quirky. austinot.com/austin-moon-towers



One of 13 centenarian Moonlight Tower survivors, this one at Zilker Park makes a good-sized Christmas Tree, when called upon each season.



Music and Motorsports

Ironically, the largest and perhaps busiest entertainment venue in Austin has a lower profile than the prime downtown parking garage at the Bullock Museum (I recommend the underground facility whenever you're downtown). The self-styled **Circuit of the Americas** racetrack last year hosted one of the largest events in the world, the U.S. Formula 1 Grand Prix. Over 400,000 watched the racing, the entertainers, and each other. Like SXSW, the COTA deals in big numbers—1,037 acres, over 400 events annually and, since this is Austin, an outdoor amphitheater for musical events. Seating 14,000, it's the largest musical venue in town.

After a lurid startup replete with financing shortfalls, pleas for governmental handouts, lawsuits and lies, COTA has hit its stride and become perhaps the premier motor-racing venue in the country. If you want to take your Cobra down to the track, there are many days when you can—but bring your gold card, too. Or you might prefer to drive someone else's car—perhaps

an Audi? For \$595–4,995, depending on your appetite for speed, you can. Or race your motorcycle or go-kart or even take your bicycle on a leisurely tour of the main track's 3.41 miles.

But most of us self-identify as spectators, and we're content to watch the NASCAR, motorcycle, or sports car racing at COTA. Still, the Grand Prix remains the big show. It generates about as much revenue for Austin as a Super Bowl, and it does it every year. If you're not allergic to crowds, it's a spectacular weekend in a gorgeous facility. Formula 1 racers somehow manage to defy the laws of physics when they dash through turns, then vanish in an explosion of sound and a cloud of scorched fuel and lubricants that leaves you in shocked disbelief at what you just witnessed. Then mingling with the international Formula 1 crowd and a post-race concert—you've had quite a day in the Hill Country. You'll find COTA's schedule of events at circuitoftheamericas.com





More Than Luck

Looking for a restaurant in a new city, we ask for help, google best-of lists, or ask friends for their favorites. In Austin, we found a place that's been highlighted in *Food and Wine*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Netflix*, as well as local papers—we had to check it out.

In *Suerte*, we found more than a restaurant. A lot of chefs have their origin stories or the history of the restaurant as a base for their menu, marketing, design, whatever, and if they don't have something, someone invents it for them. But here was a chef with a slightly off-beat concept so obscure, it had to be real. And because it's real, it works.

Fermin Nunez knows corn. He studies corn, he understands how corn behaves when you work with it, he maybe loves corn just slightly more than is healthy. But we can let him take that risk, while we enjoy what his kitchen turns out. Fermin shoehorned me into his schedule to give me some insight into what makes *Suerte* so special.

"When we prepare a meal, that moment is the first time that tortilla has been cooked," he told me.

So you don't buy tortillas?

Fermin shuddered slightly, but at-

tempted to ignore my *faux pas*.

"We make our masa every morning, but dinner starts the night before."

One hundred pounds of dried corn are soaked overnight, then drained in the morning, brought to the desired temperature, and ground again to his preferred consistency into masa—the dough for the lightest tortillas and quesadillas possible. If you think this attention to corn—yes, he's chosen the best varieties, visited the farmers who grow them, and probably quizzed the ears in the field to judge their willingness to live up to his standards—if you think this borders on obsession, you may be correct.

I watched Helen and Dayanara Villafranca make the masa one morning. The apparatus used to soak the corn and the grinder that turns it into masa have their own section of the kitchen. Light reflected from the stainless-steel machines, both custom-made for *Suerte*. The sisters began at 7:00 a.m., stirring and draining the corn as other staff and chefs arrived and began work. Somewhere a radio played a *ranchero* station. Helen took two stone wheels from a shelf to mill the corn.

Rene Garza, Chef de Cuisine, told me, "Fermin and I will grind the corn, then

fiddle with it, work and make adjustments, trying to get it exactly the way we want, but Helen and Dayanara just show up and make it—exactly right every day."

Expertise is everything. There's no wasted effort, and in little over an hour, and with only three ingredients, they are filling containers with fresh masa, ready for today's tortillas. *Suerte* means "luck" in Spanish, but skill and talent have replaced it in this kitchen.

Later, we enjoyed brunch on the other side of the counter in the lively dining room—delicate smoked salmon tostadas, then open-faced tacos with smoked brisket and enchiladas including roasted corn, and a delicious salad—everything on our plates was light and layered with flavor. We soaked up the wonderful morning.

Contrary to what I had read about the difficulties of maintaining good employees in the time of Covid, the staff was attentive without intruding on our meal. I asked Fermin about staffing.

"Austin is a wonderful place for us. Customers here appreciate what we are doing, and the talent we need is here, too," he offered. The hostess, waitstaff, and bartenders worked as a team, and a happy one. How did Fermin create this positive energy?

Wine, Texas Style

The Balcones Escarpment popped into existence a few fractions of an inch per year, beginning about 20–25 million years ago, eventually splitting Austin in two. I don't think there was much to see in Austin 20 million years ago, but today there is. The land east of the Escarpment ("escarpment" sounds neater than "fault line") is basically flat, while west the landscape looks like what we expect of the hill country - jagged hills and ravines speckled with live oaks in a thin layer of dirt trying to hold onto the limestone beneath. Once we learned this, it's easy to see on a map, because Highway 1, or the MOPAC Expressway, runs along the Escarpment, and old Austin and its dense grid of streets lies to the east, while new neighborhoods and streets twist around the hills in an obviously different pattern in the west.

Early European settlers took one look and chose the rich, flat eastern land for their farms and communities, while the west wasn't really good for anything other than grazing cattle. But the families who hung on in the rugged western terrain are having a moment now, because every tech millionaire in the country has discovered the Hill Country and land prices need to be quoted like stocks, constantly changing, but always rising.

A recent development has only added to the area's popularity: Texas wineries.

We had a lot of fun visiting the wineries, breweries, and distilleries in Austin and the Hill Country. Said all together like that, it sounds like sort of a boozy place, but it's really not—most people are going to enjoy just two or three and call it a day. I'll tell you about some of the places we enjoyed, mainly wineries, but not bore you with my favorite wines or beers—you'll have fun exploring the almost unlimited varieties out there for yourselves. If you're hesitant about driving and tasting, there are several tours available that will do the driving for you—some even provide a picnic lunch as well.

We visited several breweries in the Austin area, and I was able to talk with the manager of one, Doug Winter of **Bear King Brewing** in Marble Falls. Bear King



"I'm like a coach. I want people to grow. Sometimes you have to let them make mistakes, but they learn," was his reply.

What began thousands of years ago as a weed in Oaxaca is now the central component of our diets. If we aren't eating corn directly, we're eating chicken, pork, or beef fed on corn. Other restaurants may make their own tortillas and others may grind their own corn, but nowhere is this grain treated with more respect than in Fermin's kitchen. He has combined traditional Mexican flavors with cues from other cuisine. The result is something quite memorable.

"Restaurants compete on flavor," he told me, "So to have the best food, you must have the best ingredients. He who has the best pantry wins."

Take it from me, the best pantry is at Suerte, and the battle has been won. Book your table at suerteatx.com.

◆ ◆ ◆

You must eat barbecue if you go to Austin. There is no option, but we weren't

eager to spend half a day standing in the much-publicized line at **Franklin Barbecue**, generally accepted as one of the best barbecue places in the country. Fermin recommended a favorite of his that might be even better, so who were we to argue?

Leroy and Lewis Barbecue advertises "New School BBQ, Old School Service." They did not disappoint, although the old school service came only after standing in their own line at a food truck window. The wait was well worth it, and not too unpleasant, since other trucks offer coffee shop staples, soft drinks, and beer.

Like Suerte, L&L uses local suppliers that they know and trust, and the results coming out of the black smokers next to their truck are incredible. Beef cheek was my favorite, rich slices of beef that were that close to falling apart. My spouse and partner in crime had a pulled pork sandwich that she said was as good as any she had ever had. We ordered pork hash, which I think missed the mark, but we could have happily made an entire meal of their excellent braised cabbage and sausage. The L & L truck anchors one end of the Cosmic Coffee + Beer Garden, which has faux waterfalls splashing, trees, and lots of tables—a great setting for a great meal. leroyandlewisbbq.com



boasts a large tasting room with a complete food menu—hence it’s called a taproom. Interestingly, and we saw the same thing at some of the wineries we visited; the taproom generates more sales than packaged beer sales, though packaged goods are more profitable for many reasons. But the taproom is an essential part of the overall marketing effort.

The U. S. has a complex mish-mash of laws and regulations governing every aspect of beer making, advertising, selling, and drinking. It’s difficult for a commercial brewery or winery to get started, and more difficult to grow. I asked if the climate was more favorable than it used to be for independent brewers.

“Right now, I’d say it would be easier for a brewer to get started, but more difficult to get distribution,” Doug replied. “We’re at the top end of the small breweries,” he said, but they are large enough to get into the major regional grocery chain, HEB. Pretty impressive, since they’ve only been at it for three years. Their shiny new brewery complete with canning equipment is on display, something we found in almost all the wineries we visited, too. But we came for the tasting, and Bear King brews a wide variety of beers, with 8–12 in the taproom at any given time.

“The brewers like to challenge them-

selves,” said Doug, and one of the beers on the menu was based on guava. I’d guess drinking a guava beer would be challenge enough for most guys, and I passed, but the beers we did drink were great. Good enough, in fact, that we returned several times to the super open-air patio for burgers and truffle fries. It’s a hard place to beat. bearkingbrewing.com



Texas has over 500 wineries, most of them in the Hill Country and offering beautiful facilities designed to host visitors, so there are plenty to choose from. Around Fredericksburg, you may pass a winery every hundred yards or so. They can be this close because the wineries are not burdened with the task of actually growing grapes. This, the decidedly less glamorous end of the business, takes place on the High Plains of West Texas, where the modern Texas wine industry was born, and the climate and soil can produce very nice grapes, indeed. In fact, while most of the wineries are in the Hill Country, the opposite is true of the grapes—about 85% come from West Texas.

The grapes are harvested, then either shipped to the wineries or pressed into juice and then shipped, thereby reducing shipping expense. The better wineries will have people in West Texas to direct or at

L-to-R: Great burgers and fries, but you’ll come back to Bear King for the brews. ♦ Modern Texas Farmhouse—it’s become a style and Spice-wood Vineyards defines it. ♦ Go big or go home. Big-time winery tasting rooms, like William Chris Vineyards, set the standard in the Hill Country. ♦ You’re joking, right? The half-submerged aging and tasting room at Calais Winery.

least observe the harvest. The magic begins when the grapes hit the wineries, as winemakers ferment their juice, blend the results, and then basically hope for the best. It’s an expensive proposition for the smaller entrepreneurs who run these wineries—equal parts science and art, with a strong measure of chance to keep things interesting. The financial risks for the winery vary with their size. Most you will visit will be smallish.

Distributors and retailers need a dependable supply of product to sell, and smaller wineries just don’t produce enough bottles to enter the typical distribution channels. So, happily, they are looking for us, the tourists, and have structured their marketing accordingly. A smaller winery can survive and even prosper with tasting room sales to visitors, mail order sales to wine club members, and generate a few more bucks from charcuterie trays and wine-type tchotchkes at the check-out counter. But the emphasis



tends to be on fairly large entertainment/dining/marketing venues with music, food, and lots of wine.

Most wineries will have at least a small vineyard. Many have tried to grow their own grapes and have evolved to a mix of estate (grapes grown on their property) and High Plains (West Texas) grapes.

We visited **Perissos Vineyard and Winery** near Burnet and found an exception to the general vineyard practice. Perissos has one of the larger vineyards in the area, 16 acres, and produces most of their wine from their own estate grown grapes. You can schedule a Winemaker's Tour and learn something of the vineyards and cellars before tasting their wines. Perissosvineyards.com

Nearby, **Torr Na Lochs Winery** sits high atop a giant granite hill, offering a great view from its very large terrace—you can see LCRA Lake Buchanan in the distance, and also Inks Lake from another point on the property. Like Perissos, Torr Na Lochs is the dream made real by the couple who created it. The sunny terrace, covered patio, or indoor tasting room give you lots of places to enjoy their wines, mainly varietals originally developed for the warmer areas of Italy and Spain. torrnalochs.com

Fall Creek Vineyards is at the other end of Lake Buchanan and is the epitome

of the classic winemaker's vision in Texas. Much older than most in the Hill Country, Fall Creek has been in the forefront of many important advances in the Texas wine business, not the least is providing a blueprint for other owners on how to build and operate a successful business while producing attractive wines. They now have a second winery and an inn in Driftwood, nearer to Austin, if you wish to spend the night close to the vines. fcv.com

Spicewood is home to Willie Nelson's ranch and to **Spicewood Vineyards**. Trust your GPS as it leads you down a gradually narrowing road that you can't believe doesn't lead to an ancient farmhouse. If you keep going, you'll find a winery with charming Hill Country architecture: an event center and tasting room with a wonderful patio and splashing stream under huge live oaks. Spicewood also offers estate wines as well as High Plains-sourced wines. Spicewood has an active schedule of special events, and you may hear music while you sip. spicewoodvineyards.com

William Chris Vineyards is near Johnson City, and boasts impressive collections of wine tasting options and six modern Hill Country buildings that project a campus-like feeling. The wines here live up to their surroundings. An old friend was waiting for us here—the Blanc du Bois

grape we first met at the Haak Winery is a relatively new varietal. Here it is sourced from a vineyard "in the east of Texas." We finished our tasting just as a singer was setting up his guitar and amplifiers on a large covered terrace—I didn't want to leave. williamchriswines.com

Calais Winery was recommended to us by a sommelier in a Hill Country restaurant and if we hadn't trusted his expert opinion we might have never persevered and discovered the wines when we visited. Calais is the complete outlier to the general rule here, the entire facility resembles nothing more than a half-buried shipping container, and the day we visited, the tiny sign giving directions had fallen over. Where most Hill Country wineries have taken marketing to the limit, here the sales prevention team worked overtime.

Instead of gorgeous tasting rooms and patios, we stood at a wooden plank on a bare concrete floor. No charcuterie board or cafe menus for us: we didn't have so much as a saltine for refreshment. And we're paying for this, I thought.

Ben Calais began making wine in Dallas, of all places, but made and sold enough that he eventually convinced himself he could leave a successful career and become a full-time winemaker. While other wineries have millions invested in their



So much more than a shipping container—a tasting awaits us while incredible Texas reds bide their time at Calais.

tasting rooms and cellars, Calais built this facility himself, with help from his father and friends.

Today, Calais Winery produces 2,000–2,500 cases a year—a very small operation making very fine wines. Ben is the co-owner and winemaker of French Connection Wines, just down the road. They have a more traditional tasting room experience, larger production, and some nice wines, too.

“The bare-bones tasting cellar, rudimentary website, and minimal signage all are intentional,” said Gina Ross, general manager of Calais Winery.

“Ben wanted a more Old World-style of tasting,” she said. “We hope to have a more intimate, one-on-one interaction with our customers, where you can have the opportunity to taste with the winemaker or a member of the production team.” The concept makes a lot of sense for a visitor really interested in the wine more than the experience of tasting it.

“So no guitars?”

“The tasting room is an American invention. The Calais focus is on the wine,” she smiled.

I think she meant no guitars.

“Calais wines spend more time in the barrel, and we use more French oak than most. Vineyard and harvesting decisions are also based on achieving the Bordeaux style,” she finished, leaving the focus firmly on wines and winemaking.

The Calais approach pays off. I don’t know enough to compare Calais wine with Bordeaux, but the ones we sampled were

Continued on page 144

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Jim and Debra Kroboth
Hometown: Sarasota, Florida

Jim and Debra started camping in the early '80s. "We started tent camping, then borrowed a friend's pop-up camper, and eventually moved up to a motorhome," Jim explained.

"In 1987, we bought a used Allegro with my father. It had aluminum siding, shag carpet, and honestly looked like the one sitting in front of the Tiffin offices in Red Bay," Jim related. They have enjoyed RVing over the years, having owned six motorhomes.

Jim is retired from working at a boat manufacturer, and Debra still works part-time at a mortgage business. They have always lived near the water and had a boat. "If it is just a short trip, we will tow our boat behind the RV. If it's a longer trip, someone will drive the boat. We especially like taking it with us when we camp in the Florida Keys for a month," Jim reported.

"Aside from boating, we ride our bikes, travel with friends, and go fishing. I enjoy a bit of photography, too," Debra added.

When asked if they had pets, Debra replied, "Not anymore. We used to have dogs and traveled with a parrot, but sadly our parrot died last year. So, at the moment, we are pet free."

Debra and Jim both agree they love their Phaeton. "Having the bunk area is nice because we use it as an extra closet and love the large living space. The best part of owning a Tiffin is if something breaks, I can call the Tiffin Service Department and have them ship me the parts and I fix it," Jim attested.

"We won't ever go full-time, as my wife wants
Continued on page 144

Editor's Note: Carolyn and Lee Breinich are full-timers in their 2019 Phaeton 40IH. She has a BS in zoology, Ohio State, and an MA in recreational therapy, University of Toledo. See her blogs: harley-dogsrving.com and leukemiagirl.com.



Beth Lebharr and Patrick Watkins
Hometown: Louisville, Kentucky

Patrick and Beth began dating in January 2019. While on a date one month later, they looked at RVs. "It was then we started talking and planning, and decided this was something we wanted to do," Beth said.

In March 2020, they bought a new-to-them 2013 Allegro Open Road. "We talked to many RVers and chose Tiffin based on customer service. Many people kept telling us how good Tiffin's service is," Beth stated.

They shared a story about their experience with Tiffin's customer service. They needed to replace their black tank. "Our dealer said it would take six months to get a replacement tank. We called Tiffin and got a new black tank in two weeks."

"Neither of us had ever RV'ed before, but we love it, and we love that we can bring our dog Bella with us," Beth explained.

Beth is retired. She sold her needlepoint store after owning it for 15 years. Patrick, who works at Ford Motor Company, is two years away from retirement. Currently, they travel based on Patrick's vacation time and work schedule. "We pick places to go based on temperature, distance, and Patrick's time off. The longer he has off the farther we go," Beth said. "We like having a house the kids can come home to, but plan on traveling nine months each year," she continued.

"We love to take our time and see the sights. I have an old lady bike we bring with us," Beth laughingly said. Some of their favorite adventures have included the redwoods in California, camping on the beach in Oregon, and Dog Island in Florida. Patrick loves photography and enjoys capturing their travels in pictures.

"Our Open Road is a great starter RV. When I retire, we plan on buying a diesel," Patrick assured. He describes Tiffin "as the Mercedes of the RV world."

"I've never felt so free in my life. I am happy and healthy when I'm on the road," Beth smiled.



Dick and Maggi Harding
Hometown: Crossville, Tennessee

Dick and Maggi Harding are part-time RVers who own a 2020 Wayfarer and travel with their two standard poodles, Tisha and Nika. They aren't ready to give up their house even though they enjoy traveling as much as they like staying home. As Maggi puts it, "Our garage is bigger than our house because Dick is a car guy, and we don't want to lose that."

Dick is a retired Navy pilot and Maggi a retired CPA. They usually take one big six- to seven-week trip a year and little trips closer to home the rest of the year. "We love seeing the sights and taking Tisha and Nika with us on walks."

When Dick was younger, he camped in a travel trailer with his siblings. "My mom was fearless," he stated. In 1996, when they lived in Alaska, Dick and Maggi bought their first cabover pickup camper. "Our biggest requirement was that it had to be a hardtop cabover. We wanted to make sure the bears couldn't eat us," Dick laughed. They both agreed camping in Alaska was great because during camping season it never got dark.

"We borrowed my parent's motorhome for a few years. In 2002, when my parents decided it was time to give up traveling, we bought our first motorhome from them. All in all, we have owned eight RVs. We've had two class As, two Super Cs, and two small Cs, a Born Free, and now the Wayfarer. I loved our Tiffin RED, but Dick prefers the class C style cockpit," Maggi explained. "I like the Wayfarer because it is small and can fit in the spaces at smaller parks," she continued.

Dick and Maggi have traveled in all 49 states and flown to Hawaii. "We like to seek out the unusual. We have been to ghost towns; we saw the first nuclear reactor in the U.S.; and we enjoy aviation museums," Dick said.

One of their favorite experiences was being camp hosts in Denali National Park. To us, "Life is a journey, not a destination."

Give us your best shot!



PRO LEVEL AWARDS

First Place

David Packer

The Eternal Night Sky

Box Elder County, Utah, west of the Great Salt Lake

Here is how David Parker describes his spectacular image: “My Open Road 32SA allows me to spend extended time off the beaten path enjoying... and also exploring the relics of times gone by. Weathered wood immediately made me think of this image I created along the old transcontinental railroad bed... There are not too many of these old trestles left...This one is about .4 miles east of ... what was Watercress Station...What man makes, nature reclaims... the heavenly view of the night sky is eternal.”

Pardon the pun, but this photograph stopped me in my tracks. The subject matter and composition are magical. The diagonal of the galaxy leads your eyes to the wonderful old train trestle. Parker keeps the movement going by ‘painting’ the old trestle with light, revealing the wood textures rather than being content with a silhouette.

Canon 5D Mark IV camera, Rokinon F/2.8 14mm lens, a tripod, and a Nebo Slyde programmable flashlight using its wide-angle beam

The winners for the Spring 2022 Photo Contest



PRO LEVEL AWARDS

Second Place

Kimberly Primavera

The Guardian of the Sands

White Sands National Park, New Mexico,
Dune Life Nature Trail

As four-year full-timers, Kimberly Primavera admits "... we are national park geeks! Our goal is to visit every national park in our 2017 40AP Allegro Bus. I was mesmerized by the haunting beauty before me. Her outstretched limbs, seemingly to protect the nature around her, set against the wispy clouds in the background, reminded me of a guardian angel that could only be Heaven-sent."

This is the best photo I have seen of this well-known tree. Yet on another visit Primavera might surpass even this excellent image. That's why photographers return to the same places—every day has new possibilities.

*Samsung S20 cell phone and Google One
Photo Editor*

Give us your best shot!



VERY GOOD LEVEL AWARDS

First Place

Mike Polk

Framed by a Giant

Olympic National Park, Washington, Rialto Beach

As Mike Polk describes it, “Forces of nature moved mighty trees down the Quillayute River from Olympic National Park to Rialto Beach. The beach is littered with the remains of many fallen trees. The day was stormy but that didn’t stop us from taking some dramatic photos.”

How do you get dramatic results when the lighting is uniform, making shadows weak or nonexistent? Polk used Photoshop to edit

Nikon D-850 camera, Nikon 24-70 lens, ISO 400 handheld @ 150 sec, f/8

his work. This is a possible strategy: Choose the Selection tool to isolate the tree root, then apply the Brighten/Darken tool and/or the Saturation tool to bring out the root’s many textures and colors. A photograph is a canvas on which you can express your own vision and style. Polk’s clever canvas is a scene within a scene.



VERY GOOD LEVEL AWARDS

Second Place

Meta Steeb

A Quiet Evening

Torch Lake, Michigan

Meta Steeb's words are understated: "Our old wooden boat dock becomes an architectural feature in this tranquil evening setting on Torch Lake, Michigan. Silence, only occasionally disturbed by a bird, and perfectly still, crystal clear water." Although everything is under-

Samsung Galaxy 10 with no use of editing, filters, or tripod

stated in this photograph—the sunset, the calm sky and water, the crisp edges of the weathered planks—the result is very dramatic. I love the geometry of the image's design, yet the delicate little structures at the far end of the dock add a perfect touch of asymmetry.



HONORABLE MENTION

Lissa Modesitt

Angels in the Woods

Pipestem State Park, West Virginia

Several of this issue's contest winners sense a spiritual connection in natural settings, and Lissa Modesitt is among them. Having driven their 2019 Allegro Red 37PA to Pipestem State Park, West Virginia, Lissa and her companion enjoyed a morning hike on the Farley Loop Trail. Somewhere between a foggy start and a sunny day, Lissa took this photo. "It looked like angels were reaching out to us!" Lissa comments. Not surprisingly, these sun shafts are called god rays.

iPhone 12 Pro Max



HONORABLE MENTION

Sandy Schlager

Storm-tossed Remnants

Manistique, Michigan

Manistique, Michigan, is on Lake Michigan, with smaller lakes nearby. There are many ways to access the water's edge, where Sandy Schlager created this peaceful composition. There is a painterly quality to the image. The smooth driftwood makes me wonder if some long-ago storm tossed these logs ashore

iPhone 7, edited with Macbook Air tools



HONORABLE MENTION

Debbie Payne

A Forest Troll

Grove of the Patriarchs Loop

Mt. Rainier National Park

“The burlled curls on the right side of this notable log seem to frame the strange face of a forest troll. Bulging eyes and a crest-like hairdo add to that interpretation. Or... maybe just a fallen log with intriguing textures,” Payne comments.

Canon EOS 5D Mark IV camera, Tamron 28-300mm lens, 1/60 at f/4.5



HONORABLE MENTION

Patty Hunt

A Mormon Row Barn in Winter

Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming

“T. A. Moulton built this barn in the early 1900s. Artists and photographers gravitate to it,” Hunt says.

Patty Hunt knew she needed a unique view of this much-photographed barn—and she found it. Her camera position created a snowy path to the focal point, and she did a little branch-pruning in Photoshop for an optimal foreground.

Nikon D850, 24-70 lens, ISO 90, f/11 @ 1/80



Sundial Bridge
Redding, California

Your Next Challenge: An In-Your-Face Focal Point

The solutions you submitted for weathered wood photographs were wonderfully diverse. There is no one way to compose an image, but you can learn a lot from several of the winners of this issue's contest. When winnowing down so many photos, I take into account their originality, how difficult it was to make the photo, if there is a conscious use of lighting, and elements that create movement or lead your eye to a focal point.

Mike Polk's giant driftwood root and Kimberly Primavera's 'guardian' tree at White Sands National Park are examples of the type of composition that I'll be looking for next time: Choose a strong subject matter with other elements that contrast with that subject, and little else. The scale of

the main subject can be any size from super-closeup wild flowers to a drone view of a pond, and it should take up most of the image. Create movement by having an element or more that leads your eye to the subject, or contrasts with it like the clouds in Lissa Modesitt's slender trees with god rays. Crop the image, then play with tighter cropping. Study your subject under different lighting conditions if possible. Straighten your horizons and eliminate distractions. Above, California's Sundial bridge cables lead to the pylon's curve and the person at lower right.

How & When to Submit Your Photo

Roughing it Smoothly uses MS-Word to prepare manuscripts. If possible, please use Word to create your document with the requested data. Converting your photo data from several word processing apps is very time consuming. If you have a great candidate but don't have Word, use the gmail address below and key your information into the email. Attach your image

to the email. You *must* include: Your name, mailing address, email address, phone number, a title for the image, and the location where the photo was taken. Write up to four sentences telling the story behind the scene. Name the camera brand or cell phone used. If applicable, add the lens and settings. Did you use a tripod, in-camera editing tools, or an app like Photoshopper, which is encouraged for cropping, leveling horizons, and tweaking colors and lighting? You are the artist and your medium is light. Like any artist, you can use tools that interpret your composition.

Email just one photograph to fred1902@gmail.com. Photos must be a minimum of 2.4 MB. Photos must look very sharp on your computer at 8 x 10 inches at 300 dpi. Do not embed your written contest data with the photo—send them separately on the same day. Entries must be received no later than August 15, 2022.

Prizes: Pro Level, \$100 first place, \$75 second place. Very Good Level, \$50 first place, \$25 second place.

Editors note: Suzanne Clemenz recently moved to Washington state from her home in Sedona, Arizona, where she will continue to write features for *Roughing It Smoothly*. We appreciate so much the work she does in designing and judging the photo contest, as well as the excellent photo essays she has authored for *RIS* since 2017. She has been a professional photographer for many years.



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DEBBIE WILKINSON

Debbie and her husband Mike were married in 1970. “We were both nineteen years old,” Debbie said with a smile. They lived in Ocala, Florida, where Debbie owned a gymnastic studio with her friend Linda. Mike was CEO of a mining company.

Between working and raising their children, Debbie and Mike lived busy lives. “We had three daughters and one son. During the summer we spent most of our time at the gymnastics studio. We never camped with the kids, although I did think about it and thought if I am going to camp, I am going to ‘rough it smoothly!’ I never had any desire to tent camp,” Debbie laughingly recalled.

In the mid-1990s, Debbie and Mike decided to buy a new class C. “We took a few long trips in it, one to South Dakota to see the Badlands, and one to New Orleans, which was its own adventure. We had no idea how narrow the streets were and even in a small class C it was hard to get around.” Debbie and Mike mostly used the RV to go to football games. “We both worked full-time, so we weren’t able to use it as much as we wanted.” They sold it after eight years.

“Most of our time was spent with family. We were blessed to have four kids and now I have 11 grandchildren,” Debbie proudly stated. “On Sunday nights we have a tradition called ‘Peeps’ where everyone gets together. Peeps are themed nights where everyone brings something to eat, and we have a lot of fun. It started as a way for the kids to see one another, and Mike and I used that time as a date night, but eventually, we started to join in the fun.”

In December of 2014, Mike was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig’s disease. For the next eighteen months, Debbie became his sole caregiver. Sadly, Mike passed away in May 2016, a few weeks shy of their 46th wedding anniversary.

“Once he was gone, I thought to myself ‘*What do I do now?*’ He was my life. When you are married for forty-six years, your dreams become tied to each other.” Debbie and Mike had bought a condominium in Daytona Beach and had plans for that to be their retirement home.

Debbie soon discovered dreams change. “When Mike was gone, I realized living in a condominium in Daytona Beach



was not my dream—it had been our dream. I still own that condominium and occasionally stay there, but I use it mostly as a rental property,” Debbie stated. “I tell people now that everyone needs their own dreams because when your dreams are tied to someone else and you lose that person, you can feel lost.”

The first two years after Mike’s death, Debbie drifted mentally. “It was hard. I was still living in our home where we had lived and where Mike had died. We owned a lot in a different housing

Text and photography by Carolyn Breinich

development, so after two years, my brother-in-law encouraged me to build a house on that lot.” Debbie had a background in interior design, so she designed her home and found a contractor to build it.

“Building the house was a great distraction,” Debbie recalled, but she soon felt as if she needed a new diversion. She knew she would drive her children crazy if she didn’t create her own

After losing her husband to ALS, Debbie’s outgoing personality was the catalyst that kept her on the road, meeting and enjoying new friends on every trip.

adventure. “I loved RVing when I was younger, and knew that one day I would want another RV. That is what drove my dream, and here I am!”

It took Debbie four months to make that dream come true. In 2020, she bought a new-to-her 2018 Wayfarer on her 70th birthday. Her first adventure was a month-long trip. Debbie spent the first night camping in the woods. She was able to set

the RV up by herself and recalls thinking, “What a birthday gift!”

The second day of her trip did not go as planned. “The toilet flap broke and I had to get creative. I discovered that if I filled a gallon Ziploc bag with water and placed it in the toilet, it would do the job of the toilet flap,” Debbie related. This minor setback did not stop her from living her dream. Debbie continued her trip and survived the entire month with a broken toilet flap and a bag full of water.

“I wasn’t going to let a minor problem stop me. I think that experience helped me gain the mentality of ‘don’t let the little things bother you.’ Life is short and we need to enjoy it,” Debbie said with a smile.

That trip was a memorable one for Debbie. “I drove to Little Rock, Arkansas, where I stayed on an alpaca farm. From there, I went on to Waco, Texas, where I got to see Chip and Joanna’s Magnolia Market (I am a fan of their show Fixer Upper), and ended up in San Angelo, Texas, where I saw sword dancers. I stayed at Harvest Hosts the entire trip,” she related.

After buying her Wayfarer, Debbie laughed at the fact that everyone thought she needed to go to a truck driving school before driving it. Everyone always asked, “Did you take a class? How did you learn to drive that?” One reason Debbie likes the

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Wayfarer is because it is easy to drive. “I never took a course, I just got behind the wheel and went,” she reported.

“It’s the ideal size for me. I love that my bed flips up inside, and I found the perfect sign to display in that space. It reads, ‘Laugh like you’re ten. Party like you’re twenty. Travel like you are thirty. Think like you’re forty. Advise like you’re fifty. Care like you’re sixty. Love like you’re seventy.’ This is an excellent piece for my Wayfarer and a great reminder to live,” Debbie shared.

With everything Debbie has been through, she still feels as if she is blessed beyond fathom. “To own a Wayfarer is a blessing,” she says, and the adventures she has been on prove it. “I am fortunate that my Wayfarer allows me to plan special trips with each grandchild, creating lasting memories.”

Debbie recalls one trip she took with three of her granddaughters to a Harvest Host goat farm. “My granddaughters and I had so much fun. I was pleasantly surprised to see three high school girls embrace the goat farm and RVing. They named each goat and were able to jump on a trampoline with the goats. It was also educational, as we got to milk goats, drink goat milk, eat goat cheese and goat ice cream, and buy goat milk soap.” It might have been a tight fit, but they made it work. After the trip, another granddaughter told Debbie, “Gaga, you have not taken me on a trip yet. When do I get to go?”

Debbie states she doesn’t ever want to be a burden to her children, and her Wayfarer gives her freedom she wouldn’t have otherwise. “I’ll admit I do get nervous planning trips, but I get such a sense of power and accomplishment from it,” she shared.

Solo RVing has provided many teachable moments for her grandchildren, showing them how to be independent. “They need to know whatever God puts in their lives, they will be ok.”

Debbie’s Wayfarer is the perfect size for her, with plenty of room to kick back, relax, and read. ♦ The Wayfarer rally at Jekyll Island was Debbie’s first, where she made friends and learned from others. ♦ Living large means being outside. Job one is setting up the outdoor mat, chairs, and table. ♦ One hobby Debbie can take on the road is basket weaving. She is currently working on this long pine needle basket.

As of now, the longest trip Debbie has taken has been one month. "I was lucky. In 2020, when everything was shut down due to Covid, I was able to see my sisters. I knew they would not be able to get on a plane to visit me, so I packed up my Wayfarer and drove to Arkansas to visit them." Debbie confirmed that it was good being able to see them when everything in the world felt uncertain.

"I love short trips. I drive for three hours and find somewhere to camp. I do not ever plan to stay somewhere for a month. After two days, I am ready to move on to see what is next," Debbie said. "As a solo driver, I find staying at Harvest Hosts reassuring. They are expecting you and take care of you. Some even have electrical hookups. When I get to my destination I tend to stay at state or city parks that have full hookups," she reported.

Debbie has found that camping people are friendly people. "When you lose a spouse, everyone is so nice at the beginning, and then slowly, you see the couples disappear. You do not find that in the camping community," she noted.

"I have so much to be thankful for," Debbie said. The Wayfarer may be small inside, but she has found that she spends a lot of time outside, making her livable space much larger. When she gets to her destination, she sets up an outdoor rug and an outdoor table and chairs. "I cook in my crockpot outside where I also have my morning coffee. I do not feel confined," Debbie commented.

Debbie has found that the RV lifestyle forces one to relax. "I recently picked up a new hobby, long pine needle basket weaving. It's fun, relaxing, and small enough I can take it with me," she jokes.

In 2021, Debbie attended two back-to-back Wayfarer Rallies that were hosted by other Wayfarer owners. The first one was in Jekyll Island, Georgia. "When I left Jekyll, I decided to spend the night at a Hilton Homewood Suite so I could enjoy a nice long hot shower before heading to the next rally in Myrtle Beach," she related.

At the Myrtle Beach rally, Debbie thought it was exciting that out of the forty Wayfarers in attendance, there were

only two that were the same. "There were so many different models, different years, and different paint jobs. Some exterior designs were simple with straight lines, while others had swirls and curved lines."

"I recently got back from an American Caravan rally which was a lot of fun. The previous rallies were hosted by owners. This one was bigger, and provided you with meals, planned things to do, and we had entertainment every night," Debbie

recounted. She admits it was nice to do things with a group of people.

While attending rallies, Debbie has met four other solo RVers. "We have created our own little group, four of us are women and there is one gentleman," she relates. "Out of the five of us, three have Wayfarers." She is in the process of planning a get-together in Florida for the group.

Debbie wants people to know, "It is never too late to follow your dreams." **RIS**

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Jamie Myrick

HOME-GROWN FRANKLIN COUNTY TALENT NOW MANAGING A TMH PLANT

Jamie Myrick last year became the director of operations at the VanLeigh RV fifth-wheel plant in Burnsville, Mississippi, a division of the Tiffin Motorhomes Group. A 1999 graduate of Russellville High School, he grew up in the Franklin County hamlet of Tharptown. For those not familiar with the geography, Tharptown, about six miles from Russellville, is in the northeast corner of the county and Red Bay is on the western edge next to Mississippi.

Myrick continued his education at Northwest Shoals Community College in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, and earned an AA degree in drafting design technology while working for Franklin Manufacturing, a division of G&G Steel in Russellville. “My internship led to a full-time position as a draftsman creating plans for steel fabrication,” he explained.

In 2003 Myrick saw an engineering position advertised at Tiffin Motorhomes to design cabinetry for the Zephyr, Allegro Bus, and Phaeton. Van Tiffin was expanding the woodworking shops at TMH to enhance the quality and craftsmanship of Tif-

fin’s interiors. “I realized the job was an opportunity to learn and develop my skills. Not long after my interview, I was offered the position. Van focused his work on the cabinetry as one area to improve Tiffin’s position in a very competitive market,” he said. “He taught us a lot as the drafting team created the plans to be used by the craftspeople in the shops to build superior cabinets.” Myrick also worked with Rodney Johnson, in R&D, and Brad Witt, who at that time was the engineering manager of the assembly line.

In 2008 Myrick accepted an offer with Engineers of the South in Florence, a civil engineering company specializing in water and waste processing facilities. Building on his academic background and seven years of experience, his career was advancing along with an active social life.

Jamie and Rebekah met on a blind date in April 2006. A local girl and also a graduate of Russellville High School, Rebekah

Text and on-site images by Fred Thompson

G E M E N T T E A M

also attended Northwest Shoals Community College where she studied to become a registered nurse. The couple married in August 2007.

Unlike many young couples who finish school and leave for “greener pastures” in more exciting cities, Jamie and Rebekah saw value in their hometown and stayed in Tharptown to contribute and raise their family. Rebekah recently found a rewarding job in the elementary school, using her medical background to work with special needs children.

The Myricks now have two daughters of their own: Raegan, 9, and Jacie Mae, 5. “Raegan loves softball, basketball, and beauty pageants,” Jamie said. “Jacie Mae is an extrovert and loves playing with friends. We all enjoy the outdoors. I enjoy working in the yard and working on small projects in my shop. I also like to hunt, fish, and golf, but I just don’t manage to find the time for personal recreation like I used to.” Family vacations usually involve trips to the Gulf—favorite spots include Panama City, Gulf Shores, and Orange Beach.

Myrick was very content with his position at Engineers of the South and had been there for seven years when Van and Leigh decided to start VanLeigh RV in 2014. “They had one really good engineer in Daniel Wright, but they needed someone to come in and help with the cabinetry engineering,” he explained. Van

remembered Jamie but had lost contact with him. After they networked and found him, Leigh called to see if he might be interested in working for VanLeigh.

“I had no intention of changing jobs when I agreed to discuss the position with them,” Jamie said. “I had a great job and enjoyed working with the people at Engineers of the South. However, I really thought a lot of Van while I was at Tiffin, respected him, and thought I at least owed him a conversation. During my visit, the excitement of the new business was contagious, and I thought it could turn into something special.” Jamie accepted the job in May of 2015 and three months later was promoted to engineering manager.

The nearest building suitable for the cabinet shop was in Yellow Creek, 15 miles from the manufacturing plant on Hwy. 72 in Burnsville, a facility originally built for a mobile home plant. Three years later a 75,000 sq. ft. building facing Hwy. 72, and just one block away from the assembly plant, became available.

“With Daniel Wright, we immediately began building an engineering team,” Jamie said. “Since the cabinets were built 15 miles away, they had to be trucked in daily. Our team grew slowly at first, and then ran an upward curve to eight engineers and draftsmen.

“Van worked closely with Leigh for four years as VLRV developed,” he said. “Managers and supervisors arrived well before 5 a.m. to get ready for the 6 a.m. start-up of the assembly line.”

In 2020, Jamie was appointed director of service and warranty. “We had 12 employees in the warranty department two years ago. We now have 14,” he noted. He was promoted again in May 2021 to director of operations. “As ops director, I essentially was

The VanLeigh management team. *Left to right:* Zack Nethery (Director of Engineering), Chase Davis (National Sales Manager), Jamie Myrick (Director of Operations), Shea Barnes (Production Manager), Brett Oliver (Director of Service and Warranty), Scott Martin (Director of Finance and Purchasing)





supervising the production operation along with service and warranty,” he continued. “When Leigh became president of the Tiffin Group in July, I then took responsibility for service and warranty, engineering, IT, quality control, purchasing, human resources, and, of course, production, essentially serving as the day-to-day manager at VLRV. Leigh has made some really good hires for vice president roles for the Tiffin Group.”

The management team includes Zack Nethery, director of engineering; Scott Martin, purchasing and finance manager; Shea Barnes, production manager; Brett Oliver, director of service and warranty; and Chase Davis, national sales manager.

“We now employ 300 at VLRV,” Jamie said. “That number divides up into 30 percent in our cabinet shops and 70 percent in the assembly plant. We were shut down for six weeks at the height of the pandemic. When we closed in March 2020, we were building five units/day. We returned in May 2020, still limited in our workforce, and could only manufacture two units per day. After five weeks, we were up to three. We got back to four in early 2021, and we expect to be back up to five units/day on May 1, 2022. Our paramount goal is to maintain the quality of our product.”

Parts shortages continue to be a problem, he noted. Jamie complimented the flexibility and skill of the management teams who make adjustments daily. “Our purchasing team is working really hard to insure we have the parts on time. The engineering team has to work on the fly to substitute interchangeable parts that are both suitable and tested. The production team does a good job of changing out and retrofitting the interchangeable parts. The service team must constantly stay abreast of the interchangeability of parts to be able to help our customers. Chase and his team are valuable in communicating to the plant what the feedback is on the new products. It really takes a team working together to ensure success with the state of business the way it is. This is all being accomplished as we assure the quality of each unit we are building.”

Since its beginning in 2014, VLRV has introduced four brands. “We began with the Vilano and added the upgraded Beacon in 2017. We offered the entry-level Pinecrest in 2018 and then introduced the Ambition in September 2021. We decided to discontinue the Pinecrest last year,” he said.

“In April 2015, Leigh asked me, ‘How would you like to design VanLeigh’s first toy hauler?’ Although many bridges needed to be crossed before that was possible, we both knew customer demand was spurring the development of a VL toy hauler. By 2021, RVer’s had been asking us that question for years,” Jamie said.

“The toy hauler is for a different customer, those more focused on ATVs and riding the trails—usually the younger set,” he continued. “It is a larger unit that we knew would affect every area of the company: purchasing, engineering, production, service, and warranty. We expected it to require additions to our administrative

The Myricks frequently find time for weekend family outings. ♦ Jamie thoroughly enjoys coaching Raegan’s softball team. ♦ Rebekah works with special needs children in the Tharptown schools.




staffing and more production employees. It is a very different RV. I think everyone at VLRV saw it as a huge challenge. VanLeigh employees are gritty, really tough you could say. When challenged, we will bond and fight together until we succeed, and that is just what we did!”

As Jamie accepted the job of director of operations, the design/engineering job became the responsibility of Zack Nethery, a 2016 graduate in mechanical engineering from Mississippi State. Originally from Sulligent, Zack lives in Red Bay.

“The engineering team came up with the floorplan, and I worked with them almost daily with advice and approvals as it developed,” Jamie said. “It took six months from concept to the day it went on the production line.”

The future at VanLeigh RV? “We think short term and long term,” Jamie said. “In the next two years, we will build more units per day. In the long term, our focus must always be quality and our customers’ needs, while keeping our valuable employees in the forefront of our planning.”

Jamie’s personal goal is to improve every day. “I believe you either get better or worse every single day, you never stay the same,” he said. “I aim to improve my management techniques, my efficiency, and my concern for our employees and customers each and every day. I am extremely fortunate to be able to work with such passionate, competent individuals that truly care about our customers.” 



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Traveling with Your Geriatric Pet

by Dr. John Pilarczyk

Now that summer has arrived and the pandemic appears to be winding down some, our thoughts shift to firing up the RV, time to travel! We usually start preparing with oil changes, brake inspections, and all the maintenance that goes with owning an RV. We've done this routine many times before, but one thing is different now: our traveling companion is a lot older. I am not referring to the wife. Our pets age as we do, but at a faster pace.

Large dogs age much faster than smaller lap dogs, so the generally-accepted rule of one dog year being equal to seven human years does not hold true in all cases. Regardless of size, the geriatric dog needs special consideration when traveling in your RV for an extended period of time.

First, make sure your pet is up to date on vaccinations and have a copy of all paper work on board. Heartworm medication and a flea and tick preventive needs to be ready for travel. Your aging pet may also have prescriptions that need to be refilled. Make sure you have enough of all necessary medications to last for the whole trip with some extra in case you are delayed for some reason.

If this is a trip of less than a week, you might want to consider leaving your pet at home with a caretaker, as they would appreciate the normal routine. If you will be traveling longer than a week, perhaps two to three months, leaving them behind would not be

good for your pet. Bringing them with you is the only solution.

While traveling, the best strategy is to pay close attention to your pet. A plan to schedule a stop every two hours for feeding, watering, and exercising your aging dog may not work out very well. If your pet is sleeping comfortably and you decide to drag them out at a rest stop, you might be disappointed with the results. Younger dogs are usually eager to explore at a stopover, but not so with very old dogs. It is best to watch your pet closely as you travel. When they wake up from a long nap or start becoming fidgety is usually a good time to stop.

As senior citizens ourselves, we must stop and get out often. The timing for those stops may not coincide with the timing for your pet's needs, so be patient with stopping frequently. Riding in an RV for six to eight straight hours is not good for anyone. Remember that rest stops are used by many dogs of unknown history. This is why vaccination and parasite control are so important, especially for a dog that will be traveling.

Hydration is an essential consideration to keep your pet's kidneys filtering properly. Prevention of numerous stops by restricting fluids is not a good idea. Offer fresh water at frequent stops, and allow your pet plenty of time to drink, as they may be distracted by the new surroundings.

Traveling for a long period can be stressful for you and your pet. Provide familiar surroundings as much as possible. Favorite beds or blankets, food bowls, and toys can help minimize stress. Try to remain calm if something goes wrong on the trip since our pets can pick up on our mood.

The next consideration on our list is to keep the aging pet's joints as comfortable as possible while traveling. A memory foam bed pad works much better to alleviate pressure on the pet's joints than the regular pad that comes with most pet beds. Short walks can also help to lubricate their joints. Frequent short walks are much better for geriatric dogs than a two-mile marathon.

Another problem that can occur while you are traveling is exposure to extreme heat. You may be making some stops at places such as museums or restaurants that do not allow pets to come inside. If so, you will need to keep the generator on and the air conditioner running to keep your pet safe. If you are leaving your pet in your tow vehicle, you must monitor the temperature carefully because heat stroke can occur very quickly.

Before your trip, it would be good to check with your veterinarian to make sure you are aware of any travel precautions specific to your pet. Also, your vet may be helpful in providing



names of veterinarians or emergency clinics based on your destination should your pet have need of care while you are away from home.

Depending on the type of RV you have, getting in and out can prove to be a problem for an older pet. A dog of large breed may need a ramp to aid their entry and exit. Very small breeds can be carried, but an older Labrador or Golden Retriever is another story. Check on Amazon or other internet sites as there are many choices and sizes of pet ramps available.

Diet is a very important consideration when traveling with a senior dog. They are very susceptible to problems resulting from a change in diet. If they are on a prescription diet, be sure to bring it along. Don't change their food or you will be making many more stops than anticipated, and need lots of cleaning supplies! Treats should be the same as those given at home.

With more people returning to travel this summer, it would be highly recommended to make your reservations well in advance. More and more people are traveling, and all the sites at federal and state parks are filling up fast, if not already booked.

Regarding your older feline companion, they generally travel much easier than older dogs. Most cats, if familiar with travel, do not need as much exercise as our canine companions. However,



most of what was recommended for your dog also holds true for your cat. The main difference is that a cat must have a litter box readily available. Needless to say, both a dog and a cat should travel in a well-protected kennel or crate until you reach your campground. Take precautions to ensure that any sudden stops or swerves don't produce unwanted results.

Traveling with an older pet has its challenges, but bringing them with you does take away the worry of how they are doing in your absence. This is especially true if you will be gone for a long time, not to mention avoiding the financial cost of boarding them for an extended period.

It is going to be crowded out there this year, so be patient and have alternate plans available.

Happy travels, John & Kay

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Snowbirding in Southwest Florida

DESTINATION BONITA SPRINGS

Text and photography
by Steve Blume

NEVER DREAMED I WOULD BE A SNOWBIRD. Good grief, we live in Tennessee. I first heard that term years ago when summer beach vacations consisted of hauling our kids to rental condos in the Florida panhandle. The rate sheets always had winter rates, which was puzzling. Who goes to the beach in the winter? We were told people actually drove from as far as Canada to stay months at a time. Did people really do that? For us Tennessee residents, the beach was for summer fun only.

The term “snowbird” has always referred to people who leave a cold area and head to a warmer climate for the winter, but maintain ties with family and friends by returning home each year. Snowbirds have been flocking to southwest Florida since the 19th century, riding out the harsh winters back home in this near perfect climate. They leave just ahead of winter snows in Canada and America’s northern regions, starting as early as October, and lasting sometimes through April. Florida alone gets over 800,000 snowbirds flocking to various areas of the state each year.

No one seems to have a good estimate of how many people pack up and head south. Those who own second homes or do seasonal rentals are not counted in the visitor statistics. Fort Myers estimates that 55percent of all rental properties are in seasonal use. While traditionally snowbirds were retirees, this group has swollen to include many who are no longer required to be in offices and have the opportunity to work remotely. Parents who can work remotely are home schooling children and taking advantage of this new-found freedom. The popular snowbird states are Florida, Arizona, Texas, and California.

When I retired at the end of 2020, I still planned to work a few hours remotely each week. Our fifth wheel camper was sitting there in our driveway and we had time on our hands. Work had always limited us to local weekends and an occasional vacation



week. This was our time, but I still felt glued to home and balked at my wife Nancy's suggestion that we book the entire month of February somewhere warm. An entire month? What about our friends, kids, and grandkids? With her persistence, I finally relented and she found an opening at The Sanctuary RV Resort in Bonita Springs, Florida, way down in the southwest corner of the state between Naples and Fort Myers. We were going to Florida.

While there are a thousand reasons to come to southwest Florida, surveys by the Lee County Visitor and Convention Bureau indicate the top three factors for most people are the warm climate, peaceful and relaxing atmosphere, and the fact it is a safe destination.

Bonita Springs Ranked #1 Snowbird Destination in 2022

Nomadic News has been publishing daily news and articles on RV lifestyle for the last 28 years. Recently they ranked Bonita Springs as their #1 Snowbird destination for 2022 (nomadicnews.com/2022-snowbird-destinations). "It offers a quiet suburban feel as opposed to its bigger neighboring city of Naples. The area offers outdoor recreation from water sports to beaches, and there are plenty of shops and restaurants for outings. It also has several islands that you can enjoy via boat. Best of all, the weather is pleasant year-round."

Our plan was to take three days to drive the 900 miles from our home in Tennessee to Bonita Springs. On departure morning the clouds parted and the angels sang. It was sunny, warm and the weather forecast for each of our three travel days was outstanding. Our perfect plan had us riding the sunshine rainbow all the way to Bonita Springs. With this unseasonably warm travel window, we unpacked our summer clothes, turned the music up and pointed our diesel truck down the road. It was a

good sign, at least until the dreaded Diesel Exhaust Fluid (DEF) light came on after only 115 miles, warning it was about to shut us down on I-24 in the middle of nowhere towing a 36-foot fifth wheel. Those same angels were still watching, because a rest area appeared just ahead. From there we called Ford and found five dealerships within 80 miles of us. The message was the same, "We can't even look at it for another week." This was a new Ford F350 with less than 1000 miles on it! None were too keen on us staying in our fifth wheel at the dealership, so it was time to locate a campground within a few miles. Google showed one at the next exit, and looking across I-24, we realized we could actually see it! No one camps on a lake in winter next to the interstate, so they had a spot for us. The tow truck picked up our new F350 and took it 60 miles away to the dealership with the most hope. Winter caught and pummeled us for the next week as we sat there dressed for south Florida. "Maybe this trip wasn't a good idea," I told Nancy.

Eventually, we were back on the road, still with a fearful eye watching for that DEF warning light, and in two more days drove right out of winter.

It was 82 degrees and sunny when we pulled into The Sanctuary. Of course, everyone at the front desk knew us already from our infamous journey since we called daily, fearful they would give away our spot. Little did I know they would soon be considered friends, not just staff. We set up the RV and walked outside. I took a deep breath, surveying what would be our new home

Far left: Bonita Springs was rated the number one RV snowbird destination for 2022. The Sanctuary has premium sites on the water which are reserved four months at a time. You can get beautiful weather with a resort lifestyle. ♦ Cypress Trails RV Resort offers lot ownership. ♦ Night descends on The Sanctuary RV Resort.



base for the next month. Standing at my site, I could see the pool was packed, hear Jimmy Buffet music playing, and see everyone laughing. Our neighbors from all around began stopping by and introducing themselves and their dogs. This was not at all like the camping we typically experienced. Many of these people were here for six months, October through March, and some had been coming for several years. They sincerely welcomed us and seemed to be looking for friends, not just another RV neighbor parked next to them. It just felt different, better.

I think we must be the only couple who does not travel with animals. It's not that we don't like them. We had big dogs, little dogs and simultaneously big dogs and little dogs, but when the last one passed, we never replaced him. Dog names are usually catchy, descriptive, and easier to remember than their owner's, plus you hear them repeated constantly. A couple would walk by and we might say to each other, "There's Harmony. What are her parent's names?" It soon became a game of names by association.

My hard resistance to staying an entire month soon began to crumble. There was laughter everywhere, the pool, office, game room, and even the laundry room. Everyone was so happy! Happy people are friendly. Friendly people want to include you and help you be happy, too. About 90 percent of the people are retired and have a great reason to be happy, but the working 10 percent still came out when they could and were happier than they would be back home in the snow.

I am going to go ahead and give a spoiler alert now. Two weeks after arriving, the temperature back home was 12 degrees and we had spent the day at the beach here in the 80's. I walked to the front office and asked the girl behind the desk if I could extend our stay a little. She looked at her screen and asked how many days. My reply was "Two months?" We were hooked.

RV Resorts

Everyone has the perfect resort in mind, one that fits your lifestyle, offers your favorite activities either onsite or nearby, and fits your budget, but *availability* is now a bigger factor than ever before. Some have a one- or two-year waiting list. Most parks are upgrading and are trying to find ways to expand to meet the demand. I prefer a gated park, which provides an extra level of security and prevents outsiders from cruising through. Since all your neighbors know you and can see anyone coming around your site, nothing walks off. Low rates and more availability during the off season between April and October are a great opportunity to check out different parks and learn the area.

Treehouse Communities owns multiple RV resorts in many states, including The Sanctuary. Dalton Lee is the local district manager responsible for this one and eight other properties in south Florida. We had an opportunity to discuss the similarities and differences among seasonal RV properties. "All properties typically offer the basics such as full hookups, pool, and laundry. Most have some type of activities director who plans events to engage the residents. Depending on the size of the properties, they may have bigger pools and more pickleball courts. We encourage our staff to be more than employees, showing up at events to play alongside the park residents. It is important for us to have current guests come back the next year and the next, so

Counter clockwise from bottom left: Patio music and other outdoor events take place all winter thanks to the warm Florida evenings. ♦ Pickleball is easy to learn and provides opportunities to meet new players everyday. ♦ Try out a new paddle in the local store. ♦ Every day is pool day. Don't forget to use your sunscreen. ♦ There is an organized activity for everyone. Directed by a qualified instructor, water aerobics are offered frequently throughout the week.



we offer them the ability to reserve for next season ahead of the general public. Our minimum stay here for advance reservations is four months and maximum is six months. We are RVs-only with no permanent park model units here at The Sanctuary. Most resorts that have both tend to have them in separate areas so seasonal guests are together.”

Dean Banet and his wife, Michelle, came here from Devils Lake, North Dakota. He runs asphalt plants, which depend upon good weather and therefore only operate six months per year. “For years, I worked six months during the good weather and spent the next six at home trying to stay warm. One day it hit me. Why not wait for summer where it is warm? That brought us down here. Last year we stayed in a resort near Daytona Beach that had about half permanent park models. We noticed those folks didn’t really associate with us seasonal people, not like here where everyone is seasonal.”

In evaluating resorts, ask for a copy of their monthly social calendar. If you are looking for fun activities and want to know your neighbors, you participate. We had never played Bingo and had no idea it could be so much fun. There are planned activities such as ping pong and cornhole tournaments, DJs and live music on the patio, food trucks, painting and yoga classes, water aerobics, Bible study, card nights, group tours, pot lucks, and beginners pickleball instruction. The constant interaction with your neighbors at social events builds what will hopefully become long-term friendships.

There are also RV lot ownership options in the area. To better understand the reasons and benefits, I visited with Jim Bertram at Cypress Trail RV Resort in nearby Fort Myers, a 457-site true luxury property now owned almost exclusively by individual owners. “Many of our owners started out renting here and real-

ized they could have the best of both worlds by owning their site. They could build a tiki hut or fully finished small shed structure, most fully finished with a full bathroom and laundry, and then landscape it to make it theirs. They could quit worrying about finding a place to stay every winter, and have us rent it out if they wanted to go somewhere else for a season. Just like the housing market, many have experienced tremendous appreciation in those lots as well.” The property has a full activity schedule and many amenities, including a fishing lake. Those waterfront sites are spectacular. cypresstrailrv.com

Snowbird Lifestyle

“Where is home?” starts the first conversation with a potential new friend at the pool or any other social event. As we are



basking in the 80's, the next comment is a weather report such as, "It was snowing and 15 degrees back home this morning." You agree, give your weather report, and we are now brothers acknowledging our great fortune to be sharing this paradise while those other working Joes back home are dealing with the cold and hopefully continuing to pay into our Social Security.

Happy hour at the pool seems to be whenever the first person shows up. Obviously everyone has their own personal schedule, but there is no official start time, and early birds are not frowned upon. At The Sanctuary, there is Funday Monday afternoon where the resort provides beer and wine. Bobbing up and down in the pool on a pink pool noodle while balancing a beverage of choice just above the waterline is normal, and groups of noodles soon make a circle so everyone can hear and be included.

The Sanctuary is not a 55+ community, but the majority of people would fit that age group, and there are not many children other than the occasional grandkids. Geno Williamson and his wife Kathy are from Long Island, New York, and this is their second winter here. He made a great observation. "Most people here are older couples with a history, and therefore we all seem to have so much in common. We all have family we miss back home, but choose to stay here in this fun place because we earned this opportunity. The decision to spend months at a time in a 400 square foot space with someone is not to be taken lightly. Most of the people here seem to be happily married and enjoy being around each other."

This is the second snowbird season for Mike and Cheryl Prisciandaro, who are from Rochester Hills, Michigan. Mike talked about family separation. "I think this is the happiest we have been in our life, this lifestyle," said Mike. "I feel like a kid, getting up every morning, grabbing my pickleball paddle and going out to play with my buddies. However, being away from the grandkids and family back home is the hardest part for us. We all have family, and that can pull at us, making us feel guilty for being away for long periods and missing out on sports, parties and other events."

The majority of Florida snowbirds stay in sticks and bricks homes, apartments, and semi-permanent mobile homes called Park Models. There have always been RV parks as well, but over the last few years with the increase in RV sales and the ability to work remotely, RV parks abound and cater to these seasonal travelers, and the community welcomes them with open arms. Local church attendance rises and falls with the seasons, but they plan events and budget accordingly.

There is no better market to sell RVs than at an RV park, so every few weeks at 9:00 a.m. on Monday a local RV dealer brings coffee and donuts along with a few motorhomes for residents to tour. I never considered trading our fifth wheel until last year, but this planted the seed and before we left in April our new 2021 Tiffin Allegro Red 38KA with bunks was ordered to accommodate the grandkids who kept showing up to visit.

Pickleball is everywhere. According to the USA Pickleball Association, it grew 21 percent from 2019–2020, with over 4.2



Clockwise from above: Kayaking is incredible here. Peaceful waters put you close to the abundant wildlife, including manatees. ♦ A local favorite is Doc's Beach House, with convenient food, beverages and rentals. ♦ Delnor Wiggins State Park has easy beach access. Avoiding the sun? It has shady options with a view.

million players nationwide, and over half are 55+. According to their website, "Pickleball is a court sport played on a badminton-sized court with the net set to a height of 34 inches at the center. It is played with a perforated plastic ball and composite or wooden paddles about twice the size of ping-pong paddles. It can be played indoors or outdoors and is easy for beginners to learn. But it can develop into a fast-paced, competitive game for experienced players. In addition, the game has developed a passionate following due to its friendly, social nature, and its multi-generational appeal."

No special clothing is required. Gloves may help if your hands get very sweaty. Most people start with whatever shoes are in the closet, but be aware that running shoes provide little side to side support. As your level of play increases, I do recommend getting some type of court shoes with more stability, especially if you are quick, aggressive and run hard. Beginners can find a pair of good composite paddles on Amazon for around \$60, and these work just fine. If you find yourself advancing in skills and really taking the game seriously, you can always upgrade later. Pickleball & Tennis US is a locally owned store in Bonita Springs with an indoor court and several small practice areas where you can try all different brands and find the perfect paddle for you. I bought a totally different paddle than what I thought I would purchase thanks to that comparison process.

In all resorts where I have played pickleball, players are very welcoming and rotate in and out according to the number of courts and people waiting. You meet everyone on your court.



The many pleasant encounters which we enjoyed at the pickleball courts invariably created new friendships for future encounters during our stay at The Sanctuary.

Location, Location, Location

The second longest north-south interstate in the country is I-75, beginning in Michigan at the Canadian border and running through Bonita Springs. Just south of here, it turns east to the outskirts of Miami. Not only does it deliver snowbirds here, it makes it easy for them to do outstanding day trips. You can drive two hours to watch the Tampa Bay Buccaneers or Miami Dolphins or check out major league baseball spring training. Fort Myers and Naples are both minutes away. Consider an Everglades airboat tour. It is only an hour drive.

Now that we have our Tiffin coach, we leave The Sanctuary and drive to places such as Tampa for the RV SuperShow, Fort Desoto State Park with a waterfront site, Daytona Speedway for a race, and the Florida Keys—because we can! Just because you are booked for months in an RV park does not mean you have to stay parked there the entire time.

The Southwest Florida International Airport is twenty minutes from Bonita Springs. It averages 226 flights per day and is served by 14 airlines, offering low fares and direct flights to many locations. This is both comforting and convenient.

Things To Do

BEACHES

There are many beautiful beaches within minutes of Bonita Springs. Unlike the soft powdery sand of the panhandle, the beach is more coarse. Shelling is extremely popular, and you will find shell scallops, conchs, nauticas, lettered olive shells, worm shells, and many more. All beaches have parking and are an easy walk from the car. On warm days in winter at busier beaches,



these spaces fill up early. If you are planning a serious beach day, get there early and have what you need with you. People begin leaving later in the day and parking opens back up, but then the sunset seekers show up, especially at Bonita Beach Park, where several dining options are within walking distance. No pets are allowed except on Dog Beach.

Bonita Beach Park is located at the end of Bonita Beach Rd. on Little Hickory Island. There is a \$2/hour parking fee with a self-service kiosk to print your receipt. Restrooms are available. You can also take in the sunset while enjoying food and drinks at a beach table next door at Doc's Restaurant (leegov.com/parks/beaches/bonitabeach).

While not part of Bonita Beach Park, if you continue past it on Hickory Blvd there are several numbered beach access points with free parking for just a few vehicles.

Lee County Dog Beach, also known as Bonita Beach Dog Park, is located along the edge of Lover's Key State Park. According to *BringFido.com*, this dog-friendly, off-leash beach allows dogs to run free and frolic in the shallow, calm water of the Gulf of Mexico. There are no fences, leashes, or worries. Just plenty of dogs of all sizes to play with. Many people visit that don't even have dogs but enjoy watching them run and play with their furry friends on land and water. You can't see it from the main road, but follow the signs around the trees and a clearing will open up to Dog Beach. During high tide, you may have to wade through some water to get to it, so be prepared. There is a portable toilet, and no running water so remember to bring some for your pet (visitfortmyers.com/beaches/dog-beach-park).

Little Hickory Island Park is just down the road from Bonita Beach Park. Parking is \$2/hour and there are no restrooms.

Lovers Key State Park. This is a busy park with a two-mile-long beach. There is lots of parking with a shuttle serving drop off points to the most distant point. There are trails for hiking and bicycling, and you can rent kayaks, paddleboards, and even bicycles. Manatees may even be found here in the winter months.

Barefoot Beach Preserve. This beautiful park is part of the Collier County park system, even though it is next door to Bonita Beach Park. There is a \$10/day parking fee per vehicle. Gopher tortoises consider this home, so check under your car before you leave. There is also a one-mile walking trail (collierparks.com/collier_park/barefoot-beach-preserve).

Delnor-Wiggins State Park Pass. This popular destination for Bonita Springs beach goers boasts five parking areas with restrooms and easy beach access. Along scenic paths, picnic tables with charcoal grills provide a nice cool respite from the sun. Mature trees along the shore provide both shade and a view if you choose properly. Concessions at #4 provide food as well as kayak and paddleboard rentals. Parking is \$6/day.

FISHING

Bonita Springs offers great inshore fishing as well as offshore. There are also many beach areas where you can fish in the surf from your chair. There are several experienced and highly rated charter companies available.

A few of the fish you can expect to catch offshore include Snook, Redfish, Trout, Mangrove, Snapper, Sheepshead, Tarpon, Mackerel, Grouper, Cobia, and Pompano.

Inshore fishing in smaller boats with less chance of rolling waves results in catching Redfish, Snook, Trout, Tarpon, Snapper, Pompano, and Flounder. According to Captain Sullivan with Flat Hound Fishing Charters (flatsbound.com), "Our recommendations depend upon the weather and seasonal migrations of the fish. For example, Snook are always here, but we are waiting for the Tarpon to come in."

GOLF

There are 30 golf courses within 10 miles of Bonita Springs. Seasonal visitors are a way of life here, so some offer seasonal memberships. Green fees are higher in winter, but many offer afternoon discounts. One of my favorites nearby is the Bonita





Fairways Golf Club, an 18-hole executive course, 3388 yards par 61. It is the only true all public course in Bonita Springs. Everyone wants to play in the winter, so tee times are in high demand.

If water intimidates you, the driving range at Arrowhead Golf Club will bring on a panic attack. The flags are actually in the lake and every shot lands in the water.

TRAILS AND BIKE PATHS

We use the AllTrails phone app to locate nearby trails, read reviews, and plan our adventure for the day. The elevation of Bonita Springs is a whopping 10 feet above sea level, so there are no hills.

One of our great discoveries for hiking is the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW), which manages over 60,000 acres for natural flood protection, water purification, and critical aquifer recharge. The watershed also serves as important habitat for animal species such as the endangered Florida panther, snail kite, and wood stork. CREW includes the CREW Marsh, Flint Pen Strand, and Bird Rookery Swamp.

Four hiking trail systems provide a variety of recreational opportunities for all ages. They are the CREW Marsh Trails, the CREW Cypress Dome Trails, the Bird Rookery Swamp Trails, and the CREW Flint Pen Strand Hiking Trails (including the Billy G. Cobb Memorial Trail).

Our favorite is the CREW-Bird Rookery Swamp Trail, which offers 12 miles of hiking and biking trails, including a 1500-ft. boardwalk with wheelchair accessibility. Rookery actually means a colony or breeding ground, which explains this unique name. You are guaranteed to see a lot of alligators in their natural environment, plus many species of birds and mammals. If you are a photographer, this is a must see.



Opposite page: Surf fishing is a popular sport in Florida, doing it the easy way or strenuously casting and trolling. ♦ Driving range at Arrowhead Golf Club. ♦ *Above left:* Original bridge at Koreshan State Park.

♦ Paved path or offroad trail, the flat terrain is perfect for biking.

♦ One of the stars of the CREW Bird Rookery Swamp Trail.





Florida is flat, perfect for bikes. Rumor has it you can stand on a brick here and see clear across the state. The growth of eBikes has also opened up this mode of transportation to older people who thought their biking days were over. These also enable them to cover more ground and see more things. According to a June 16, 2021, an article by Laura Tichy in *Florida Weekly* on “Liking BIKING” (fortmyers.floridaweekly.com/articles/liking-biking/), “Every county in our publishing area offers off-street options for riding. They come in the form of paved linear parks and rails-to-trails paths as well as multi-use side paths set off a few feet from

RVers love their eBikes ♦ The manatees are seen December through February ♦ Pick your own strawberries and tomatoes all winter at Farmer Mikes ♦ The gopher tortoise is protected, but easily seen thanks to its distinctive entrance. ♦ Thomas Edison, Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone were friends and icons, with winter estates in Ft. Myers.

the roads they parallel. Unpaved options on public lands range from gravel roads to shell and grassy paths to challenging mountain bike trails. More paths and trails lie within a couple hours’ drive for weekend biking trips. There are also options for renting bikes or riding eBikes if you need a little help with pedaling.”

Nearby Destinations

MANATEE PARK

Manatees are large docile sea mammals that come upriver seeking warm water in the winter months. Sometimes called sea cows, they are found in December through February when the

Gulf of Mexico temperature drops below 68 degrees. There are many places to view them, but Manatee Park just off I-75 in Fort Myers is a non-captive warm water refuge that will sometimes have 40-50 together at the same time. A power plant discharges



warm water here and they find it. If you have never seen one (leegov.com/parks/parks/manateepark), this is the perfect opportunity to check it off your bucket list.

KIDS FAVORITES

Farmer Mikes is a produce stand where you can also pick your own strawberries pretty much year round. They have bounce houses and other things for kids to climb. We offer to pay extra to compensate for the strawberries that never make it back to checkout. farmermikesupick.com

The **Naples Zoo** is a 43-acre zoo and a great place to see animals and enjoy the day. They have a boat tour of the monkey islands which is both entertaining and relaxing. napleszoo.org

Golisano Children's Museum is a hands-on adventure with high sensory activities. It is Southwest Florida's first museum for children and families to learn through play with a variety of interactive exhibits. cmon.org

Bonita Nature Place is a quiet little sanctuary along the Imperial River. It is home to 24 active gopher tortoises surrounded by a beautiful butterfly garden. The Bee House is home to a European Honeybee Observation Hive. There is also a bat house. Make sure to take the beautifully shaded walking trail beside the river. bonitaspringsparks.org/parks_trails/bonita_nature_place

Everglades Wonder Gardens is a botanical garden & refuge for over 300 rescued, rehabilitated and non-releasable birds and reptiles located right in the middle of Bonita Springs. Walk with peacocks and iguanas among lush foliage. Feed alli-

gators and all types of birds. Speaking of iguanas, these huge cold blooded reptiles sleep in trees, so when the rare cold front comes through, they become unconscious and fall out. Seriously, there are news warnings to beware of falling iguanas. wondergardens.org

RESTAURANTS

Great restaurants are everywhere and there are too many to list. Some of the popular local ones are Coconut Jacks, The Fish House, Doug's Seafood, and Dolly's (breakfast and lunch only).

SHOPPING

Coconut Pointe Mall is just minutes north of Bonita Springs in Estero. This is a picturesque outdoor mall featuring over 140 stores including Dillard's, Target, Apple Store and Barnes & Noble—all surrounding several acres of lakes with a boardwalk.

Miromar Outlets is an outdoor mall where you can save up to 70 percent off retail prices at well-known stores like Nike, New Balance, Neiman Marcus, J.Crew, Kate Spade, Vera Bradley, and more. While you are there, have lunch at Ford's Garage and check out the unique old Ford decor.

KAYAKING, PADDLEBOARDS, CANOES Rentals and launch areas are everywhere, including most beaches. The meandering waterways among mangroves make for a peaceful relaxing tour with close encounters with nature.

The Great Calusa Blueway Paddling Trail is a 190-mile marked canoe and kayak trail that winds through the coast-

al waters and inland tributaries of Lee County, Florida. It attracts everyone from first-time kayakers to advanced paddlers and is home to abundant marine life, shore birds, and crustaceans.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Marion Poggas and his wife Christy live in Zeigler, Illinois, and have been snowbirding in their 2011 Phaeton since 2016. He is an avid photographer and she paints, so this area is full of incredible subjects. "First, we come for the weather, but then we take advantage of the photo opportunities inland and down to the Everglades. You can find anything you want in a 50-mile radius here."

The **Visual Arts Center** contains multiple fine art galleries and fully equipped art studios, a gift shop, library, and beautiful sculpture gardens. A variety of classes are offered at this center, including painting, drawing, glass, clay, and sculpture. There are also several art festivals in Bonita Springs during snowbird season that make for a fun afternoon of browsing.

Other nearby excursions

Edison and Ford Winter Estates. Henry Ford and Thomas Edison maintained winter estates in Fort Myers. Tour their homes, gardens, laboratories, and the museum. Take a look into the lives of these neighbors and friends, sit on the porch where they were photographed together along with Harvey Firestone, and be amazed at their accomplishments and how they changed our world. edisonford-winterestates.org



Matlacha (pronounced mat-la-SHAY). With a population of 677, it is listed as a census spot, not a town. One road down the middle is it, so grab any parking spot available. It is surrounded by water and flooded with vibrant color. Imagine flower children who grew up. The art is unique and the food superb. Try the Blue Dog! bluedogmatlacha.com

Sanibel is a barrier island near Fort Myers. Over two-thirds of this tranquil

vacation destination is designated as a wildlife habitat with a large area lying within the J.N. "Ding" Darling Wildlife Refuge. Great biking trails. Start out at Sanibel Pier and the Lighthouse State Park. The beaches are famous for shells and even historic shark teeth. End up at Mucky Duck for food, drinks and sunset. muckyduck.com

Marco Island is our more posh neighbor, ranked as the sixth most affluent

metro area in the nation. While it only has two beaches, the shopping and restaurants are outstanding.

Koreshan State Park is minutes away in Estero. The Koreshans were a unique religious sect that built this commune in 1894. They believed the universe existed on the inside of the Earth. The inhabitants are long since gone, but you can walk the trails along the Estero River surrounded by majestic oaks and bamboo forests that sway and crack together in the breeze. Explore the historic buildings and gardens that remain. The park also holds geocaching events, so check the schedule.


Visit **Key West** by water via jet powered catamarans. Catch the ferry at Fort Myers and ride 3.5 hours to the southernmost point in the U.S. Spend the day or a night. keywestexpress.net

Roadside attractions. If you like quirky things to see and do there is a great phone app for that. Roadside America guides you to off-the-wall art, statues, and sites. Think of it as your local Route 66 type adventure. An inexpensive subscription is required, but you can select specific regions only.

We can't help but wake up smiling every day. The perfect weather, activities, and natural beauty make us feel so fortunate to be here in the winter months.

Living this adventure requires planning ahead since things get booked a year out. Start now. If you can't get into Bonita Springs, widen your search to Naples, Fort Myers or even inland. There are many great RV parks in this general area.

Everyone has someone back home who misses them. You can always fly or drive home or welcome the family here. Life is short with no guarantees, so take advantage of opportunities while you can.

If I were a typical tourist flying or driving in for a week, I would probably stay close to the beach in Fort Myers or Naples. I would visit the beach, try the restaurants nearby, and go home very satisfied. Staying in my RV for several months, however, I want it all, so Bonita Springs is my perfect location. For accommodation options, see **Bonita Springs RV Parks** on page 144. 



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The Remarkable Story of the Mighty Eighth Air Force



The National Museum of the Mighty Eighth Air Force

RESEARCH AND NARRATIVE BY FRED THOMPSON

WESTERN EUROPE ANTICIPATED the worst as the German *blitzkrieg* struck Poland on September 1, 1939. In two decades since the end of World War I, how had Germany transformed itself from a defeated country into a war machine of 5 million men? Fifteen months later on December 7, 1941, Japan's sneak attack on Pearl Harbor forced President Roosevelt to ask Congress for a declaration of war. The United States was now in a global war with Germany, Italy, and Japan—the Axis Powers.

The 8th Army Air Force was established in January 1942, barely a month after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The U.S. military leadership realized immediately a massive air campaign against the Third Reich would be necessary to win the war. The plans for the campaign were made in an armory in Savannah, Georgia. The story of the success and tremendous sacrifices of the courageous aircrews who flew the bombers and fighters was not fully told until the National Museum of the Mighty Eighth Air Force was opened in Pooler, Georgia on May 14, 1996.

THE BACKSTORY

Blamed for starting World War I and saddled with war reparations by the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919, Germany was enfeebled. Its economy, government, and social order was in disarray. It had lost 1.7 million men in the war, over 4 million more had been injured. The country was a seed bed for radical change that could promise a foundation for recovery, a vision for the future, and national pride.

The Weimar Republic was formed in September 1919, coincident with a political party known as the *Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (DAP), German Workers' Party. An early member of DAP, Adolf Hitler rose to a prominent position in the party that through several iterations over the next 18 years evolved into the infamous Nazi Party. His seminal ideas and skill created an ideology that ultimately magnetized a powerful government and military into a blind belief that the Third Reich could establish a superior Aryan race to rule the world. President Paul von Hindenberg, at 85 and in failing health, made Hitler the chancellor on January 30, 1933.

With the president's death in August 1934 and the fast-waning influence of the social democrats, Hitler successfully merged the chancellorship with the presidency and became the Führer—nothing short of a dictatorship. His acquired power enabled Hitler to marshal the vast resources and production of the 400-year-old Krupp dynasty (steel, battleships, munitions) and the Daimler Benz corporation (engines, transportation). The best engineers and scientists were corralled to create the technology for the rapid development of Hitler's plan.

Germany hosted the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin. Ger-

many was selected in April 1931 at the 29th IOC Session, two years before Hitler came to power. In an effort to outdo the 1932 Los Angeles Games, he built a 100,000-seat stadium, six gymnasiums, and several smaller venues. Hitler banned Jews from participating.

Land grabs in Eastern Europe initiated by Germany, but including the participation of Poland and Russia, ignored recent pacts and agreements that had involved assurances by France and Britain. It was complicated!

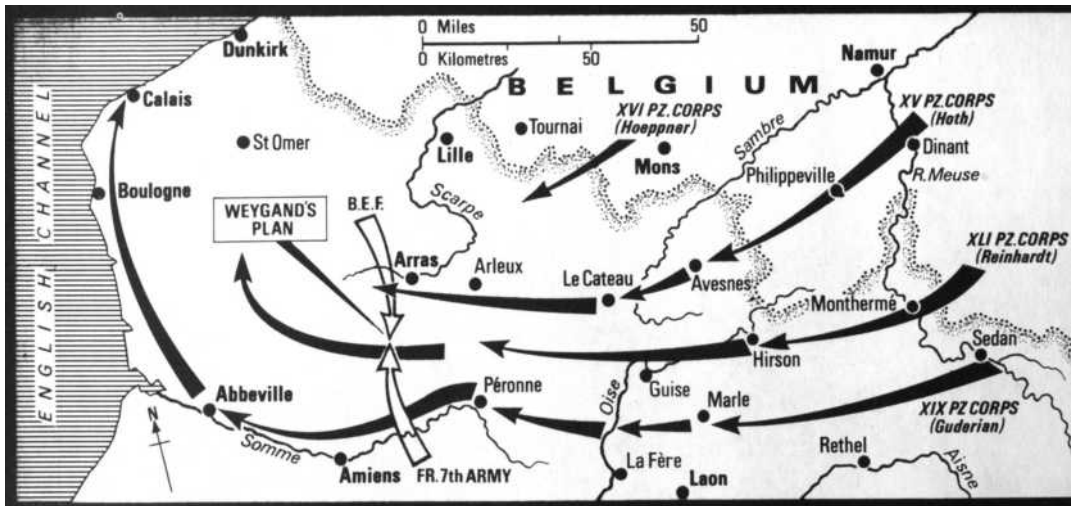
To appease Hitler, Czechoslovakia ceded to Germany on October 1, 1938, its Sudetenland that included 140,000 German-speaking Czechs, as well as other segments of territory on its border with Poland, a move that was encouraged by Britain. The loss was detrimental to the defense of Czechoslovakia and left it militarily weak. Germany soon occupied the entire country.

Nazi propagandists accused Poland in August 1939 of persecuting ethnic Germans living in Poland. In collusion with the German military, the *Waffen-SS** staged an attack on a German radio station, accusing the Poles of the attack. During that summer, Hitler's generals amassed 1.5 million men, 2,000 tanks, 900 bombers, and over 400 fighter planes. The German army invaded Poland in a surprise attack at dawn on September 1, 1939.

Britain and France fecklessly stood by their pact with Poland and declared war on Germany on September 3. Poland quickly found itself fighting a two-front war when the Soviets invaded Poland from the east. Warsaw surrendered to Germany on Sep-

* German: *Waffen-Schutzstaffel*, a ruthless Nazi paramilitary organization.





At left: The German invasion of France began May 10, 1940 and was over in just eight days. World military authorities referred to it as the blitzkrieg, or “lightning war.” An armistice was signed by France and Germany on June 22, 1940. Less than a month later on July 10, the Nazis began the incessant bombing of Britain.

Below: This map shows the acquisitions made by Japan from 1931–1942, as they invaded surrounding countries.

tember 27. In accordance with a secret protocol to their non-aggression pact, Germany and the Soviet Union partitioned Poland two days later. The world adopted a new term to describe Germany’s successful war tactic: *Blitzkrieg*, or “lightning war.”

As Germany recovered from significant losses suffered in Poland, the Allies (France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands) prepared for more German aggression. Both France and Britain refused Hitler’s offer of peace in October 1939.

By April 1940, Germany had mobilized an army of 4.2 million, an air force with 1 million, a navy of 180,000, and 100,000 of the *Waffen-SS*. The army included 2,400 tanks and 7,400 artillery pieces. The invasion began May 10, 1940. British, Belgium, and French forces were pushed back to the sea and evacuated at Dunkirk between May 26 and June 4. Hostilities ended on June 18 with the collapse of the French Army. An armistice was signed by France and Germany on June 22, 1940.

In an attempt to compel Britain to agree to a negotiated peace settlement, Germany began an air and sea blockade in July 1940. The British recognize the duration of the battle as being from July 10 to October 31, but terror bombing and night bombing raids known as the blitz lasted until May 1941. The Germans targeted aircraft production and strategic infrastructure. An amphibious-airborne assault fizzled with the failure of the Luftwaffe to overwhelm the RAF.

In spite of the fall of France and the severe losses in Britain, the isolationist movement in the U.S. persisted, but polls had begun to show a concern for the possible roles the country might have to take.

On June 22, 1941, Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Named Operation Barbarossa, the ultimate goal was to acquire more living space, natural resources, the agricultural productivity of Ukraine, and the eventual extermination of the indigenous Slavic peoples by mass deportation to Siberia, enslavement, and genocide. Germany’s total operations on the Eastern Front involved more forces than any other theater of war in history. Early successes resulted in German armies capturing 5 million Soviet troops. The Nazis starved or killed over 3.3 million POWs with

mass shootings and gassing operations. They murdered over a million Soviet Jews.

The German offensive failed in the winter of 1941 during the Battle of Moscow. The Soviet counteroffensive in the brutal winter of 1941–42 absorbed the Wehrmacht’s strongest blows and bogged the Germans down in a war of attrition for which they





The German invasion of Soviet Russia began June 22, 1941. The war was anything but the successful *blitzkrieg* that captured France in two weeks. Germany's initial success bogged down in a fierce winter for which they were not prepared. Losses were extremely high for both armies. Desperate for relief, Germany withdrew in March.

were unprepared. As the offensive collapsed, Germany withdrew.

During the Depression years, the Japanese imperialists and the German Nazis rose to power brandishing fierce ideologies of racial superiority and insatiable territorial expansionism. Most thought their ideologies, each promoting racial superiority, would have clashed. Surprisingly, Hitler entertained the possibility of the Japanese as a potential partner despite his belief in the inherent inferiority of non-“Aryan” races.

Japan had taken over Manchuria and was fighting communism in the early thirties as Hitler became chancellor in 1933 following his suppression of communism and workers' rights parties. Both countries objected to the League of Nations, considering it a mask of Franco-British interests, with Japan withdrawing from the League in March 1933 and Germany in October. Racism, imperialism, anti-communism, and integral nationalism characterized their positions and politics.

The Third Reich's foreign minister used old diplomatic and business contacts to put out feelers to determine if the Japanese military establishment might be interested in stronger bonds with Germany. Japan responded favorably. Conversations between the governments found more common interests and led to serious diplomatic negotiations in the fall of 1936. The German foreign minister and the Japanese ambassador to Germany signed a pact on November 25, 1936. Japan's fears of Soviet moves to stymie their entrenchment in Manchuria helped fuse the new Berlin-Tokyo Axis.

In December 1937, another conflict resulted in Japan capturing Nanking, the capital of the Chinese Nationalist Party, followed by six weeks of mass killings. The U.S. passed economic sanctions against Japan, including severe trade embargoes. Their expansionist-minded leadership saw the U.S. interference as a force that had to be stopped. In May 1940, the U.S. made Pearl

Harbor the main base for its Pacific Fleet, providing strategic access to the Asian countries bordering the Pacific Rim, and specifically Japan and the Philippines.

In September 1940, Japan signed the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy, fascist regimes already at war with the European Allies. The pact provided for mutual assistance should any of the signatories suffer attack by any nation not already involved in the war. This formalizing of the alliance, of course, was aimed at neutralizing the U.S.

On December 8, 1941, Japan invaded the Philippines. The Battle of the Philippines lasted for six months and ended with a full occupation on May 8, 1942.

Toyko continued negotiations with Washington to mitigate the sanctions and embargoes, ostensibly aimed at improving relations. In retrospect it provided time for Admiral Yamamoto to plan and execute a naval offensive.

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor began at 8 a.m. on Sunday, December 7, 1941, and lasted for two hours. Nineteen ships and more than 300 airplanes were crippled or destroyed. More important, 2,403 sailors, soldiers, and civilians were killed and about 1,000 were injured. Dry docks and airfields were destroyed. The *USS Arizona* became the tomb of over 1,000 sailors. But the Japanese failed to cripple the Pacific Fleet. All of the fleet's carriers were at sea. The Japanese assault left oil storage depots, repair shops, shipyards, and submarine docks intact.

Declarations of war flew in all directions. Japan declared war on the U.S. two hours after the attack ended. The U.S. declared war on Japan the next morning. Germany faced a dilemma—the Tripartite Pact required the defense of a member against an aggressor. Germany hesitated for four days and declared war on the U.S. at 9 a.m. Eastern time on December 11. The U.S. reciprocated with a declaration later that afternoon.

The Early Days of the Mighty Eighth

ON DECEMBER 8, 1941, as President Roosevelt proclaimed a declaration of war against Japan, the United States realized it was facing major wars in two theaters against formidable enemies: Japan and Germany. The Pacific Fleet went into high gear to recover from Pearl Harbor.

On December 11, the U.S. officially joined the Allies with its declaration of war on Germany as they investigated their strategic options. After analyzing Germany's success in sweeping over Poland and France with huge armies supported by the Luftwaffe, the U.S. military command realized a massive air campaign focused on Germany's refineries and the manufacturing facilities building the machines of war was the only way to destroy the ideology of a desperate maniac whose purpose was to rule the world at any cost.

As land invasions of North Africa and Europe were discussed in the closing days of the year, the U.S. command recognized the armed forces had to be expanded and reconfigured. The formation of the air force was ordered on January 2, 1942, and was initially called the 5th Air Force. It was soon redesignated as the 8th Air Force and the 5th was reassigned to the Pacific Theater of Operations.

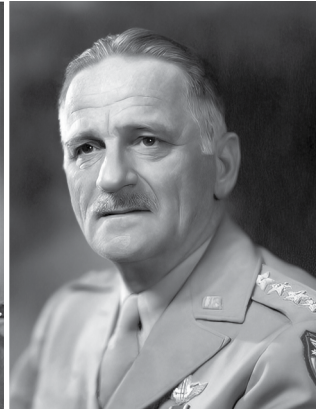
Army Chief of Staff George Marshall named General Carl A. Spaatz commander of Air Force Combat Command in January 1942. After a promotion to major general in May, Spaatz became commander of the 8th Air Force.

On January 28, the 8th Air Force was activated in the former National Guard Armory in downtown Savannah, Georgia. It had been given two critical objectives: *First*, destroy the German Luftwaffe to gain air superiority over Europe. *Second*, bomb and destroy Germany's war production—factories; transportation, including bridges, arteries, and plants that built vehicles of any kind; refineries; aircraft manufacturing; and fortifications throughout Nazi-controlled Europe. Achieving both would make a cross-channel invasion of the European continent possible.

In January 1942, Gen. Ira C. Eaker was



Gen. Ira C. Eaker

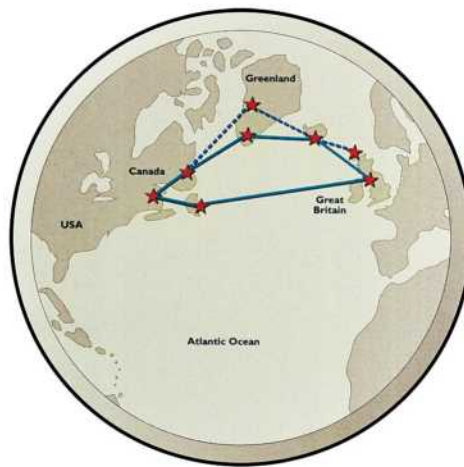


Gen. Carl Spaatz



Gen. Henry "Hap" Arnold

The Generals Who Launched the Startup of the 8th Army Air Force in England



Delivering the Airplanes

In the early days of the war, a non-stop flight over the Atlantic was not possible. The B-17s and other aircraft were ferried by the actual flight crews. The usual route originated at Presque Isle, Maine, with the first stop in Goose Bay, Labrador. Two destinations in Greenland offered an alternative in case of bad weather. Poor communications also complicated the crossing. The route ended in Prestwick, Scotland.

For a comprehensive narrative on the Mighty Eighth, read *Masters of the Air*, by Donald L. Hill.

Building 100 Airfields in England

Beginning in March, 1942, the 8th Air Force launched a massive building program to construct nearly 100 airfields in southeastern England from which squadrons of bombers were launched for missions against the Third Reich. The airfields were built on farms which after the war were returned to agriculture and industry. This field at Debach was reconstructed for educating the public about what took place in 1942–45.



assigned to organize the VIII Bomber Command and study the British system of bomber operation. He defined the challenge and framework for turning Britain into an "island aircraft carrier." Eaker set up the 8th's logistic base of supply and repair depots, air fields, and living quarters needed to support what would soon become the largest, most powerful air force on Earth.

East Anglia, a farming area north of London, was chosen to become the home of approximately 100 8th Air Force bomber and fighter airfields. In early May, General Spaatz, 39 officers, and 348 enlisted men arrived to join Eaker in England to begin the daunting task of readying the airfields. Later that month, another 11,000 men sailed to England to join the preparations.

The 8th Air Force Command worked closely with the English Royal Air Force (RAF) to set up the Eighth's infrastructure and mission support. Many of the RAF units used to support 8th Air Force missions in the beginning were replaced by U.S. support units. Members of both the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) and the Royal Air Force demonstrated tremendous cooperation, friendship, and respect for each other throughout the entirety of the war.

British intelligence integrated American officers into their ranks at all levels. British air crews began training American flyers, most of whom had less than 200 hours to their credit. The USAAF introduced some new technology. British radio sets were installed in U.S. aircraft in order to integrate them into the RAF's radar and communications systems.

The physical transport of men and materiel to Britain began in late April and continued into early winter. Planes began arriving by ferry flights through Greenland and Iceland on July 1. An air crew from the 8th Air Force, 15th Bombardment Squadron, got their first taste of the air war flying with the RAF against German airfields in the occupied Netherlands. A similar raid on July 12 hit an airfield in France.

Escorted by RAF Spitfires, the 8th



The 8th Air Force's First Raid on August 17, 1942

The 8th Air Force's first raid using twelve B-17Es took place on August 17 against a German target in France. The B-17s were escorted by RAF Spitfires.

Air Force's first raid using twelve B-17Es took place on August 17 against another German target in France. Two days later, 22 B-17Es escorted by Spitfires again bombed the German airfield in France they had previously hit in July. The daylight bombing raids throughout occu-

ried Europe, and finally into Germany, increased in late summer and into the fall against industrial plants and an aircraft factory. On a raid against U-boat bases, 66 B-17s and 24 B-24 Liberators ran into heavy flak and the Luftwaffe's newly introduced Focke-Wulf 190. Three B-17s

The Casablanca Conference, January 1943

To coordinate the war effort against Germany, President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill assembled their generals to agree on a plan to make the air war against Germany more effective.



were lost.¹ By the end of 1942, with 882 aircraft in Britain, the Eighth Air Force had made a powerful entry on the British mainland.

The RAF had built its air war based on strategic nighttime bombing. The commanding general of the USAAF, General Henry “Hap” Arnold,² analyzed the results of their strategy and was convinced the additional risks of enemy fighter attacks and more accurate antiaircraft gunnery in daylight runs were more than offset by the destructive precision attained with day-vision bombing runs, plus the defensive capability of the B-17’s machine guns when fired in mass formation. When the Allies met at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, Prime Minister Churchill and the British generals were firmly set against daytime bombing. With Roosevelt’s permission, Gen. Arnold sent Gen. Ira Eaker to Casablanca for a meeting with Churchill.

Churchill was certainly impressed. “Young man,” he said (Eaker was 22 years younger), “you have not convinced me you are right, but you have persuaded me that you should have further opportunity to prove your contention. How fortuitous it would be if we could, as you say, ‘bomb the devils around the clock.’ When I see your president at lunch today, I shall tell him that I withdraw my suggestion that U.S. bombers join the RAF in night bombing and that I now recommend that our joint effort, day and night bombing, be continued for a time.”

As the 8th stepped up its raids against the Third Reich early in 1943, casualties began to mount. The Germans began to appreciate the formidable firepower of



The Resilient B-17

After a direct hit from flak, the tail section of the stricken B-17 was swaying from side to side. Lt. Bragg made the decision to try to fly the 90 minutes back to home base. He gave the crew their chance to “come along for the ride or bail out over enemy territory.” All opted to stay aboard. They made it! A Boeing company expert said, “A plane hit like that can’t fly!” They opened the rear door and the whole tail section fell off.

At right: After Luftwaffe fighters began attacking the bombers head-on, they occasionally scored hits on the engines or the nose. The “Lovely Julie” from the 398th BG took a direct hit instantly killing toggler SSG George A. Abbott. Lt. L.M. DeLancey miraculously flew the B-17 back to the base at Nuthampstead and was awarded the Silver Star.



massed Flying Fortresses, especially when attacking from the rear. They changed to attacking the B-17s head-on where it was the weakest, going for the glass-enclosed bombardier’s seat, the cockpit, and the engines. Instead of approaching from behind and catching up, the Luftwaffe pilots attacked from the front, increasing dramatically the closing rate between the two planes. Sharp dives averted collisions.

The munitions engineers quickly installed additional gun mounts in the nose of the B-17Es and B-17Fs. In the fall of 1943, the B-17G introduced an electrically operated Bendix chin turret armed with two .50-caliber machine guns.

A February 26 attack on Wilhelmshaven by 65 bombers saw the loss of

seven B-17s. By April, the 8th was able to launch 100+ planes for a single attack on a Focke-Wulf factory in Bremen, but the Luftwaffe swarmed the bombers and downed 15, with one more lost to flak. The loss prompted Gen. William Kepner, commanding general of the VIII Fighter Command, to call for another 20 fighter groups to defeat the growing Luftwaffe fighters defending Germany’s aircraft factories and refineries.

In June 1943, General Arnold sent orders to Major General Barney Giles, the USAAF Director of Military Requirements, to expedite the development of the new long-range P-51 Mustang to provide full-mission fighter escort for deep penetration bombing missions.

1. Narratives describing the raids and bombing missions are excerpted from *The Mighty 8th at War: The Missions, The Aircraft* by Chris McNab. Elephant Book Company, 2017. Colchester, United Kingdom.

2. Born in 1886, Arnold enjoyed the distinction of being taught to fly by the Wright brothers. His career began as airplanes were becoming an instrument in conducting warfare, and advanced as he became an advocate in the development of the four-engine B-17 Flying Fortress and the B-24 Liberator, and the precision training of crewmembers. At 56, he was almost a legend in his own time. In September 1938, Arnold was promoted to major general and appointed Chief of Air Corps. His title changed again to Chief of the Army Air Forces on June 30, 1941, and he received his third star a week after Pearl Harbor.

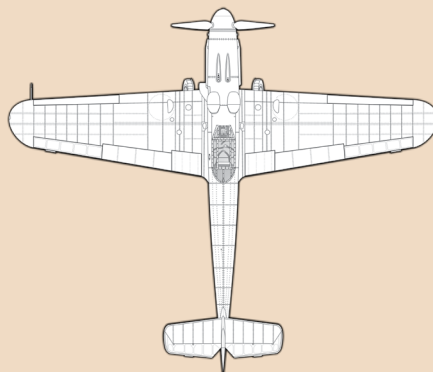
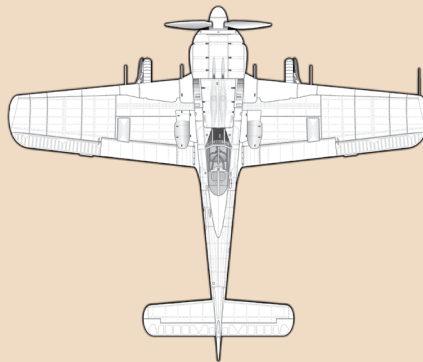
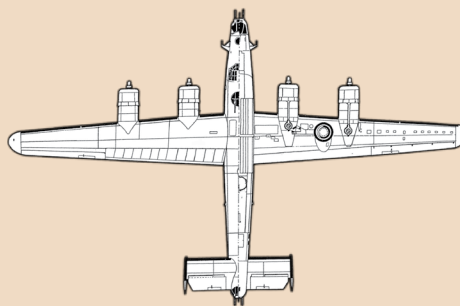
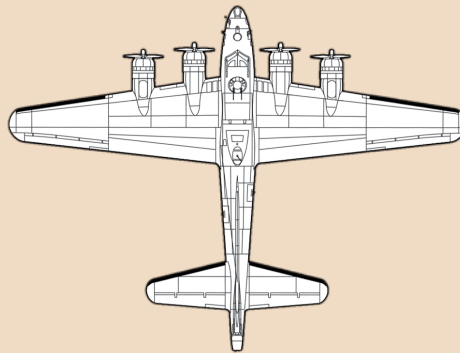
August 17, 1943: a double header mission sent 230 B-17s to strike a ball bearing plant at Schweinfurt. They were swarmed by 400 Fw-190s for six hours. The mission lost 36 B-17s, 118 damaged, three damaged beyond repair. The other segment sent 146 B-17s to bomb the Messerschmitt plant at Regensburg. They lost 24 B-17s, 51 damaged. Total casualties: 580, with most listed as MIAs.

Three weeks later on September 6, the 91st mission of the VIII Bomber Command involving 338 B-17s from 16 bomber groups was a strike on the aircraft and weapons factories in Stuttgart. The seven-hour, 1200-mile raid was at the limit of the B-17's operational range and beyond full fighter protection. Dense cloud cover obscured the target area preventing most of the bombers from attacking the primary targets. Fifty aircraft were destroyed and 500 airmen were MIA or KIA.

In stark contrast, on September 7, a bombing run attacked targets in occupied France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. With an escort of 178 P-47 Thunderbolts, 290 bombers completed a successful mission with no losses.

The second raid on the ball bearing factories in Schweinfurt on October 14 produced tragic losses. Wartime intelligence claimed the first mission in August had reduced bearing production by 34 percent. With two months to replace some of the bombers lost in the first raid, planners added additional escorts to cover the outward and return legs of the mission. But the B-17 crews had to fly the last leg into the target area without escorts. The Luftwaffe bided their time and waited until the escorts had to turn back due to the P-47's shorter range limitation.

Of the 291 Flying Fortresses on the mission, 60 were lost, 17 were so heavily damaged they were scrapped after returning, and another 121 had varying degrees of battle damage. The losses represented over 26 percent of the attacking force. The 650 men who were KIA or MIA represented 22 percent of the 2,900 on the mission. The losses were so great that the USAAF would not return to the target for four months. The VIII Bomber Command had



B-17 Flying Fortress

The Model 299 prototype of the thousands of B-17s to follow was rolled out of Boeing's Seattle plant on July 28, 1935. A reporter, impressed by the planes five machine gun installations, called it a "Flying Fortress," and the name stuck. The design lent itself to many modifications required by battle experience. Loved by its crews, its rugged construction allowed it to absorb great punishment and still fly. Iterations of the design included the B-17A through the B-17G. To get greater production, 12,731 B-17s were built by Boeing (Seattle), Douglas (Long Beach) and Vega (Burbank).

B-24 Liberator

One of the great bombers of World War II, the Liberator would serve the Allies in a variety of roles. The contract for the XB-24 was awarded in March 1939. Less than nine months later, the prototype was airborne—an incredible achievement. By the end of the war, 18,188 B-24 aircraft had been delivered, a greater number than any other American warplane. It served first as a bomber, but also as transport, fuel tanker, reconnaissance, maritime patrol, and VIP transport. The secret of the B-24's long-range performance is attributed to its long, slender Davis wing. It was eventually replaced by the Boeing B-29.

Focke-Wulf Fw-190

The Fw-190 was one of the best fighter in the war, and the only German fighter to use a radial engine. Its performance was superior to the British Spitfire MkV. The plane was successful as a fighter-bomber, especially on the Eastern Front. Over 20,000 were built, 13,367 as fighters.

Messerschmitt Me-109

The Me-109 was the Luftwaffe's most important fighter. It was designed as the smallest airframe which could contain the largest available engine. The basic design was adaptable leading to the wartime production of more than 33,000 units.

to acknowledge that for the time being the Eighth Air Force had lost air superiority over Germany.

The severe losses prompted a reorganization of commands and leadership, and a three-fold increase of materiel. An inventory in July 1943 showed the 8th Air Force had 1,260 aircraft in Britain. By January 1944, they had 4,242 aircraft. America's aircraft plants were working 24/7.

Change was beginning to happen. The 8th Air Force became part of the U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe (USSTAF) with Gen. Spaatz as the overall commander. Lt. Gen. James H. Doolittle took command of the 8th Air Force on January 6, 1944.

Tactically, in January 1944, the 8th Air Force fielded the P-51D Mustang powered by the Packard V-1650-7 and armed with six .50 caliber AN/M2 Browning machine guns. Using the British-made 108-gallon underwing drop tanks, the P-51 could now accompany the bombers throughout their longest missions.

The P-51 Mustang first entered squadron service in Europe with the British in early 1942. The P-51A Mustang with the Allison V-1710 engines had great success with the RAF, although it found the aircraft's performance inadequate at higher altitudes. Rolls-Royce engineers rapidly realized that equipping the Mustang with a Rolls-Royce Merlin engine with its two-speed, two-stage supercharger would substantially improve performance. Also, by using a four-bladed propeller, rather than the three-bladed one used on the P-51A, the performance was greatly improved; the XP-51B achieved a level speed of 441 mph at 29,800 ft, over 100 mph faster than the Allison-engined P-51A at that altitude. At all heights, the rate of climb was approximately doubled.

The USAAF now finally had an aircraft that could compete on equal terms with the Focke-Wulf Fw 190 and the later models of the Messerschmitt Bf-109. The USAAF was finally fully sold on the Mustang, and a contract for 2,200 P-51Bs was issued. The engine was to be the Packard V-1650-3, based on the Rolls-Royce Merlin Mk68.

In late 1943, the P-51B Mustang



P-51 Mustang

When the 8th Air Force received an early delivery of P-51 Mustangs in December 1943, the long-range bomber missions were given fighter protection all the way to target and losses plunged immediately. By March, the P-51s were delivered in quantity. With two 110-gallon drop tanks, the fighter had an operational range of 1,600 miles. The 1,490-hp Rolls Royce, Packard-built, V-1650-7 Merlin 12-cylinder engine developed a maximum speed of 390-mph. Originally ordered by the British from North American Aviation in April 1940, the P-51 began combat operations in the RAF in April 1942. The plane was adopted by the USAAF shortly thereafter.



P-47 Thunderbolt

Weighing 10,000 pounds empty, the Thunderbolt was the largest single-engine fighter built by any country during World War II. Fully loaded with pilot, fuel, and armaments, it topped out at more than 17,500 pounds—yet was exceptionally fast as a fighter-bomber, achieving a top speed of 426 miles per hour. It was arguably the best ground-attack aircraft America had at that time.

“The P-47 was one of the most versatile aircraft we had in World War II,” said Jeremy Kinney, curator and chair of the aeronautics department at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum, which houses a P-47 in its collections. “It was not as famous as the P-51 Mustang, but it ranks as one of the best for that era. The Thunderbolt was the hammer: big and strong, it could take a lot of punishment and still deliver a lethal blow. It was unparalleled as a ground-support aircraft and it was also a great dogfighter.”

In the European Theater, P-47 pilots were responsible for destroying more than 7,000 enemy aircraft—more than half in air-to-air combat. Though at least twice as heavy as the Britain's Spitfire, the Thunderbolt was surprisingly agile and fast. It was well-regarded for its exceptional diving ability—considered crucial by ace pilots—and how it transformed that energy into climbing power to get back into the fight.

“As an escort plane for bombers, it more than held its own against the best the Luftwaffe had despite its range limitations,” Kinney said. “With eight .50-caliber machine guns and the capability of carrying rockets and bombs, the P-47 was a formidable aircraft against ground targets as well.”



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was introduced to the European Theater by the USAAF. It could fly as far on its internal fuel tanks as the P-47 could with drop tanks. However, the P-51B was introduced as a tactical fighter, so the first deliveries of the P-51B in November 1943 were assigned to three groups in the tactical Ninth Air Force at the expense of VIII Bomber Command, whose need for a long range escort fighter was critical. The first escort mission for the bombers was not flown until December 5.

As a result, the fighter threat to U.S. bombers was greatly diminished by summer 1944. Reichmarshal Hermann Göring, commander of the German Luftwaffe during the war, was quoted as saying, "When I saw Mustangs over Berlin, I knew the jig was up." The P-51 pilots now had a plane that could whip anything in the Luftwaffe.

On January 4, 1944, 371 B-17s and 115 B-24s attacked Kiel, escorted by 70 P-38s and 42 P-51s. The mission lost 11 B-17s, six B-24s, and only two fighters, representing 3.5 percent of the aircraft.

Three days later, 502 bombers were dispatched to destroy the I. G. Farben complex at Ludwigshafen, Germany's largest exporter of chemical products in the 1930s, and the source of rubber, synthetic oil, and other war-related materiel. Farben was one of three companies prosecuted in the Nuremberg trials in 1946. The bombers flew in the company of 71 P-38s, 463 P-47s, and 37 P-51s. No aircraft or crew members were lost on this mission, although 10 Fw-190s and 10 Me-109s were encountered. The escort fighters with the underwing drop tanks had made the difference.

The Luftwaffe was not giving up. On January 11, the 8th Air Force sent 525 B-17s and 138 B-24s to hit aviation targets near Oschersleben and Halberstadt, where they were met by approximately 500 German fighters. The plan called for P-47s to escort in and P-51s to pick up support over the target, while fresh P-47s met the formation on its return. The relay and hand-off did not work well and 60 bombers were lost.

Spatz and Arnold knew the Luftwaffe losses were mounting and the success-



The P-47 Thunderbolt and Colonel Gabby Gabreski

On the afternoon of November 26, 1943 in the skies over Germany, the 56th Fighter Group of the U.S. Army Air Forces raced toward Bremen to cover the withdrawal of 440 B-17s and B-24s after a bombing run to destroy industrial targets.

Major Gabby Gabreski, leading the 61st Fighter Squadron, was pushing his Republic P-47 Thunderbolt to rescue the American bombers, which were being swarmed by Nazi fighter planes. As they arrived on the scene, the commander ordered his pilots into the fray.

Gabreski could see targets everywhere. He gunned the turbocharged engine in his powerful plane and went on the attack. Gabreski spotted a twin-engine Messerschmitt Bf-110 and drew a bead. At 700 yards, the burst from his eight .50-caliber machine guns caused the twin-engine plane to explode in flames. He had to dive to avoid colliding with the disintegrating aircraft.

Minutes later, Gabreski spotted another Bf-110. He zoomed in on the unsuspecting fighter, fired, and hit the plane at the wing root. It spiraled to the ground in a massive fireball. Those two kills were his fourth and fifth of World War II, making him an ace.

On July 20, 1944, Gabreski with 166 combat sorties had reached the 300-hour combat time limit for 8th Air Force fighter pilots and was awaiting an aircraft to return him to the United States on leave and reassignment. His fiancée, Kay Cochran, was completing wedding plans. His hometown of Oil City, Pennsylvania, had raised \$2,000 for a wedding present.

When Gabreski learned a bomber escort mission to Russelheim, Germany, was scheduled for that morning, he requested to "fly just one more." Returning from the mission, Gabreski observed Heinkel He-111s parked on the airfield at Niedermendig and took his airplane down to attack.

He was dissatisfied with his first strafing run on an He-111, and circled for a second pass. When his tracers went over the parked bomber, he dropped the nose of his Thunderbolt to adjust, and its propeller clipped the runway, bending the tips. The damage caused his engine to vibrate violently and he was forced to crash land. Gabreski ran into the nearby woods and eluded capture for five days. He was interrogated and eventually sent to Stalag Luft I. Following his repatriation, Gabreski returned to the United States and married Kay Cochran on June 11, 1945.

Gabreski was officially credited by the USAAF with 28 aircraft destroyed in air combat and three on the ground. He was America's top ace in World War II. Colonel Gabreski remained in the Air Force after the war and was called up for service in the Korean War where he flew the F-86 Sabrejet, becoming an ace again with five kills.

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“City of Savannah”—The 5000th airplane processed thru Hunter Field, Georgia in 1944

The *City of Savannah* B-17G Flying Fortress (#83814), now the centerpiece of the Combat Gallery at the National Museum of the Mighty Eighth Air Force, rolled off of the Douglas Aircraft Company production line in Long Beach, California, on May 15, 1945, one week after World War II ended in Europe. It never saw combat. It spent the next 30 years serving a variety of peacetime purposes. In 1953, Kenting Aviation acquired the plane and re-configured the Plexiglas-enclosed bombardier’s location to allow for state-of-the-art camera equipment. It flew photographic mapping flights from 1953 until 1971. Black Hills Aviation acquired 83814 from Kenting in 1971 and retrofitted it as a firefighter/air tanker. From 1971–1981, Black Hills Aviation flew several hundred missions, dropping fire retardant on forest fires in the southwestern states. Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum—acquired the B-17

in 1981, where it languished in a hangar for 25 years. Following negotiations in January 2009, the Smithsonian gifted 83814 to the National Museum of the Mighty Eighth Air Force. The airplane was disassembled, loaded onto tractor trailers, and transported down I-95 to the Mighty Eighth museum in Pooler, Georgia. On January 16, 2009, the B-17 was squeezed into the Combat Gallery of the museum and reassembled over the next week. The very next day after the reassembly was completed, the restoration process began. After six years of work by a dedicated band of 150 volunteers, major restoration of the airplane had been completed to the level it could be declared an official exhibit. In January 2015, a dedication ceremony honored both the World War II veterans who served in the Eighth Air Force and the volunteer crew that restored the bomber to like-new condition.

ful bombing of their aircraft plants had severely limited replacing those losses. Since early January, the planners had been working on a massive six-day offensive for February 20–25. With attacks aimed at key targets throughout Germany, bombing raids and air-to-air combat began early Sunday morning, February 20, and raged intensively for six days. The Mighty Eighth was carrying the battle to the enemy to inflict decisive losses and regain air superiority over Europe. U.S. losses were higher than anticipated: 97 B-17s, 40 B-24s, and 28 fighter planes. The Luftwaffe lost 260 fighters and over 200 of their best pilots.

On March 6 over Berlin, the 8th lost 69 bombers and 11 fighters. Antiaircraft artillery ringing the major cities was intense. But the Luftwaffe now had to contend with the P-47s and the P-51s over their

homeland, combined with the incredible productivity of the American factories which they could not bomb. Combined with the RAF’s nighttime operations, the air offensive was destroying Germany.

Preparations during the first six months of 1944 also focused on shifting the emphasis to the West as the Allies prepared for the May–June invasion. Road and rail networks were bombed to stop the German effort to resist the anticipated Allied invasion. From April through early June, the 8th flew thousands of sorties against marshaling yards, bridges, hubs, and transportation targets. Now armed with bombs in addition to their .50-caliber machine guns, the fighters made low-level sweeps against locomotives, lorries, and targets of opportunity.

When Operation Overlord began on

June 6, the Allies had absolute air superiority over the battlefield. Gen. Eisenhower told his troops, “Any planes you see overhead will be ours.” The 8th began bombing the Wehrmacht’s coastal positions with specific emphasis on the roads and infrastructure that supported the five Nazi submarine pens on the French coast. The pens themselves were impenetrable, protected with 25-ft. structures of reinforced concrete. Not even the Allies 12,000-ton “bunker buster” was successful. The U-boat pens today are a tourist attraction, except for the two that are used by the French navy.

Germany was being squeezed between the Western and Soviet fronts. U.S. fighters provided tactical cover over the battlefields, strafing and bombing any German unit attempting to move. Both the U.S.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRED THOMPSON WITH ASSISTANCE COURTESY GREG KINDRED, B-17 RESTORATION PROJECT MANAGER

Defending the B-17

The bomber crews expected attacks from the Luftwaffe. The B-17 had nine .50-caliber machine gun installations. *Above top:* Gun turrets were positioned in the tail, underneath, in the roof behind the pilot, plus a chin turret under the nose that was added on the B-17G.

- ◆ At mid-fuselage, gunners could fire against attacks from either side. The positions are staggered to allow the gunners 150-degree rotation without interfering with one another.
- ◆ The radio operator on the B-17 provided the only link with the crew and other aircraft

as well as home base. Transmissions used Morse code and demanded accuracy throughout long communications. A command set allowed communications with other bombers in the formation. A log was kept for all transmissions.

and the RAF continued to bomb strategic sites that supported the Reich's continued effort to survive.

Gen. Spatz's "Oil Plan," which had been delayed by Eisenhower in favor of concentrating the Eighth's support of the preparation for the invasion, was now implemented. The plan concentrated on the final destruction of the Reich's oil refineries and transportation hubs.

The 8th launched the largest air offensive of the war on Christmas Eve, 1944: 2,034 bombers and 853 fighters. The objective was to completely neutralize German airfields, destroy road and rail networks, and logistics, as well as stop the Ardennes Offensive. Also called the Battle of the Bulge, it was the German army's last-gasp effort in the dead of winter to stop the Allies from sweeping over Germany.

Operation Clarion began February 1, 1945, by sending 1,428 bombers and 862 fighters against an exhaustive list of targets. The bombers were attacking from 10,000 feet. The scale of the raids was overwhelming, regularly numbering over a thousand aircraft. On April 15, 1,348 bombers without escorts struck a wide range of German positions on France's Atlantic coast that retained the fringes of the German occupation. The 8th flew its last combat mission on April 25.

In the final days of the war, the Allies moved against Berlin from the west and the Soviets from the east. The war raged from April 16 to May 2 in several battles. A large segment of the German army surrendered the night of May 2/3.

On May 7, General Alfred Jodl, acting on behalf of the German High Command,

signed the unconditional surrender of all German forces, East and West, at Reims, in northeastern France.

On May 9, the Mighty Eighth started ferrying thousands of aircraft and hundreds of thousands of weary men back to the United States for long awaited reunions. The war in Europe was over.

Over 26,000 men died in the hundreds of missions flown by the Eighth. Compared to all branches of the military, with the exception of the U.S. submarine service, the Eighth suffered the highest percentage of men both killed and wounded in action.

The Fall 2022 issue of *RIS* will feature the World War Two Museum in New Orleans as a sequel to this story. It addresses all theaters of the war which became global and involved every continent.



Flying the Plane to the Target THE PILOTS

After intensive screening for mental stability and physical fitness, pilot recruits learned to fly in a low-powered aircraft. Moving on to more advanced aircraft, the decision was made for single or multi-engine aircraft. If the latter, the pilot was trained on heavier aircraft with retractable landing gear and adjustable pitch propellers. Then, it got real—training on the units they would be flying in combat. Now a commissioned officer, a pilot reached England with 300 to 400 flying hours, but no experience in formation flying at high altitudes and only a minimum of instrument flying time. The rest was “on-the-job” training.

In the left seat, the pilot flew the plane on the most critical segments of the mission: take-offs, ascents through the clouds, the bomb runs, and landings. The co-pilot executed the check list, monitored the flight and engine instruments, and managed the crew. When attacked by enemy fighters and flak, it took iron nerves to keep in formation and concentrate on reaching the target. It took extraordinary skill to fly a damaged aircraft home with crew members killed or wounded, and perhaps make an emergency landing.

THE BOMBARDIER AND TOGGLIER

The last step in a successful mission was the ability of the bombardier to release the bombs on the impact point (IP). Bombardiers were highly trained in the use of the super-secret Norden bomb sight. He flew in the plane leading a bombing run. Just before the bomb run began, the bombardier took control of the plane to assist in accurately lining up the IP in the bomb sight. It required bravery and intense concentration to ignore attacks while



Bombardier chair & Norden bomb sight

looking through the bomb sight and simultaneously keeping his aircraft flying straight and level. When the cross-hairs aligned with the IP, he released the bombs.

Togglers operated the bomb sights in the bombers following the lead plane. They were less skilled and still in the learning curve.

Just before reaching the target, the bombardier or togglier went to the bomb bay and removed the safety pins from the bombs. If under attack while enroute, the bombardier or togglier would man one of the machine guns on either side of the Norden bomb sight. The navigator manned the other one.

THE NAVIGATOR

Usually a commissioned officer, his job began in a special briefing session prior to the main

crew briefing. He plotted the flight path, primary and secondary targets, and made a smaller auxiliary chart for the pilot. He verified the fuel load was adequate for the mission. Located in the plane near the pilot, he kept a detailed log showing the time crossing the enemy coastline, where flak was observed, and the location of fighter attacks. He made flight path adjustments for weather conditions. If the plane was damaged, he plotted the quickest route back to England.

THE BOMB LOAD

A 4,000-pound bomb load was typical for long missions, although the B-17 could carry up to 8,000 pounds for shorter distances at lower altitudes, and occasionally even more on external racks beneath the wings.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRED THOMPSON WITH GREG KINDRED ASSISTING. SPECIAL EFFECTS BY ANDY CARGILE.



The Gallant Foe
Michael W. Wooten

THE MISSION: "A Higher Call"

The story of B-17 "Ye Olde Pub," Dec. 20, 1943.

BACKGROUND: Between the Bomb Group display cases in the "Honoring the Eighth" section of the Museum is a painting called "The Gallant Foe" that many visitors may walk right past. Next to the painting is the incredible story of a U.S. B-17 crew and the German fighter pilot who saved their lives in an extraordinary act of compassion. Author Adam Makos tells their story in his book, "A Higher Call," which has drawn more attention to the painting previously hanging, often unnoticed, on the wall.

On Dec. 20, 1943, pilot Charlie Brown and his crew, part of the 379th Bomb Group out of the RAF Kimbolton, England, were on their first mission. That day's target was a Focke-Wulf factory in Bremen, Germany. Their B-17 was heavily damaged on the bomb run by flak. The plexiglass nose was shattered, the #2 engine was destroyed and the #4 engine was barely functioning. As a result of all the damage, *Ye Olde Pub* fell behind the formation, which made it an easy target for the German fighter planes.

A group of Me-109s and Fw-190s saw the B-17 limping along and promptly attacked it until the plane went into a dive and appeared to be crashing. In reality, Charlie Brown had passed out after the oxygen system was shot out, and regained consciousness just in time to pull the plane out of the dive and level it off just above the trees. Determined to make it back to England, Charlie

continued on despite major damage, including the vertical stabilizer that was almost completely destroyed.

While refueling on the ground, German Ace Franz Stigler spotted *Ye Olde Pub* flying overhead. With 27 kills to his credit, the heavy bomber (worth 3 credits), would get Stigler to the magic number of 30, thereby earning him the much-coveted Knight's Cross. Stigler got back into his plane and quickly chased down the B-17. As he approached from behind, Stigler found it odd that the tail gunner did not raise his guns to fire. What he did not know was that the tail gunner was already dead, most of the crew was injured, and only three of the .50 caliber machine guns were functioning. As Stigler got closer, he saw the tail gunner slumped over his guns and saw the extent of damage the plane had sustained, later saying, "It was the most badly damaged aircraft I had ever seen still flying."

He recalled a superior officer who was angry over reports of his German pilots shooting at American crewmen in parachutes. He told his men that above all they were fighter pilots, and he expected a certain amount of respect to be shown any foe. If a man was bailing out, he argued, you had done your job and beaten him as a fighter pilot—there was no reason to kill a now defenseless man. That officer also said if he heard of any of his men shooting at men in parachutes, he would pull out his gun and shoot the offending officer himself.

To Stigler, to shoot down this already damaged plane would be the equivalent of shooting a man in a parachute. In that moment, Stigler decided to spare the plane and try to get them to land and surrender in Germany or land in neutral Switzerland.

Charlie Brown and his crew were horrified when they looked out over their wing and saw the Me-109 flying next to them. The German pilot gestured for them to land to no avail. He switched to the pilot's side of the plane to try again, but Brown did not comprehend what Stigler was saying. As they approached the European coast, Stigler knew the battered B-17 would never survive the anti-aircraft guns that were stationed there, so he decided to risk his life and his career by providing cover for them. Stigler knew the spotters at the anti-aircraft guns would recognize an Me-109 and not fire on him. He was not sure if they would assume the B-17 was a German plane, but he gambled on them holding their fire, which they did. The unlikely duo of an Me-109 and a B-17 sailed over the anti-aircraft guns and made it over the English Channel. Stigler doubted *Ye Olde Pub* would make it across the channel, but he saluted Brown, peeled his fighter away, and returned to Germany. "Good luck," Stigler said to himself. "You're in God's hands."

To follow the moving sequel to this story, go to arise1380.com and enter "Two enemies discover a higher call" in the site's search line.

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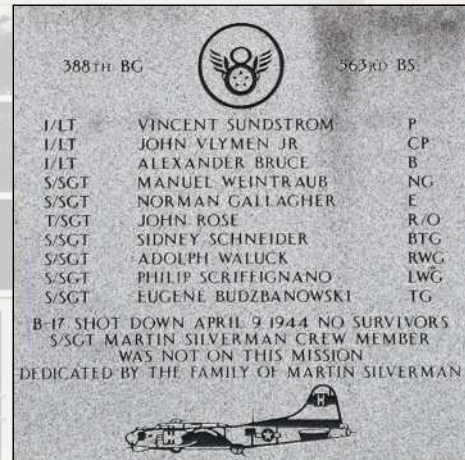
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The Memorial Garden

AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE MIGHTY EIGHTH AIR FORCE



The Museum's Memorial Garden lies outside the rear of the museum to remember those who have served in the Eighth Air Force as well as those who love and respect them. The Memorial Garden pays tribute to those who served in the Eighth Air Force during WWII and subsequent conflicts, and who are being remembered by families, friends, aircrews and others. There are

many beautiful memorials throughout the garden on both sides of the reflective pool. All the memorials in the Garden have been purchased by Eighth Air Force veterans or by their families. On Memorial Day, 26,000 flags are posted throughout the garden, each flag representing a young man in the Mighty Eighth who died between 1942 and 1945. Each name is solemnly read.

The Tiffin Tech Talk Team Welcomes Your Questions

The Tiffin Tech Team invites your questions and will address them with a platoon of experts and specialists in the Tiffin Service Center who field owners' questions 10 hours a day Monday through Friday.

Please send your questions about your motorhome through our email site at risomag.org/contact/techtalk, and especially those questions that may be useful to all of our readers. If you prefer to send a letter, please use the following address:

Tiffin Tech Talk Team
 Roughing It Smoothly
 PO Box 1373
 Monroe, GA 30655-1373

Bob Tiffin would also like to hear your ideas, suggestions, and innovations that would make our motorhomes more useful and functional. If you have a photograph to send, please put the postcard and photo in an envelope and send it to the same address. Please send a SASE if you would like for us to return your photographs, disk files, or manuscript.

In the Q&A text, we abbreviate "passenger side" as PS, and "driver side" as DS.

For answers to urgent questions and problems, call the Parts and Service number at (256) 356-0261.

Dear Bob and the Tech Talk Team . . .

Slides on 2020 RED 33AA Extend and Retract Erratically

I have a 2020 Tiffin Allegro RED 33AA. I took delivery in March 2020, just in time to go nowhere because of Covid 19. In early fall, I noticed the DS slide was out about an inch. With the inside controls, I got the slide all the way in, but had the same problem three more times through mid-2021. In October 2021, the slide was still extended 2-3 inches when I tried to bring it in. After using the override to bring it in, it would go out about 1-3 inches almost immediately. I parked the coach in late October 2021.

When I winterized it in mid-November, the PS slide would not retract although I could hear the motor running. The slide would come in an inch or so, but when the switch was released, it went back full out. A day later, I tried it again and it came 90% back in, very slowly. The next day, it had gone out 8 inches and would not retract. The information in the manuals did not address this problem. The pull-out for the HWH system only comes out half way, so I can't see how the hydraulics are connected. If I can get the slides in and locked, I will take it to a Tiffin dealer.

Alan Morrison, Wooster, Ohio

Dear Alan,

Your problem may be that one of the solenoid valves is remain-

ing open and allowing the fluid to flow back into the holding tank. Make sure all the white levers on the end of the hydraulic solenoids are straight out. The solenoids are located on the pump with two above the motor and six above the tank.

Replacing One of the Sofa Beds in a Phaeton with a Set of Recliners

We have a 2019 Phaeton 40QKH. Given the available space, we are focusing on wall-hugging recliner sets. We have looked at a few after-market retailers and are considering those options. Does Tiffin have a recliner set available for this floor plan or for a similar floor plan?

Russ Kearney, Garrettsville, Ohio

Dear Russ,

Sorry, Tiffin does not manufacture or use wall-hugging recliner sets. However, Bunkhouse Conversions of Alabama in Red Bay carries the Lambright brand of recliners that offers the wall-hugging feature and the Ultraleather colors you need. Contact information: (256) 356-8634 or karen.bunkhouseserv@gmail.com

Passenger Seat on 37BA Will Not Recline

I have a 2021 Phaeton 37BA. I cannot recline the passenger seat because the small plastic lever is broken where the wire attaches. I have been able to use the chair by using a plier to grab the wire and pull on it to recline the chair. Our dealer was not able to make the repair. I will appreciate your response and assistance.

Stanley B. Corey, Great Falls, Virginia

Dear Stanley,

In order for the seat to return to a proper working order, the cable with a handle on it will need to be replaced. You can order it through our parts department.

If your dealer can't make the repair, you may want to try a local RV service center. They normally do all kinds of repairs because they work on many different makes and models.

Update on Rail Extension Issue for Wayfarer

I own a 2019 Wayfarer 25FW. When will repair parts be made available to dealers to correct the rail extension issue with the trailer hitch?

Mike Ring, Shell Lake, Wisconsin

Dear Mike,

Parts are now available to dealers to correct the rail extension issue. When you visit your dealer, check the recall on the water pan and have it corrected during the same appointment.

Continuous Beeping Tone Near Entrance Door in Allegro Bus

I own a 2020 Allegro Bus 40IP. A beeping tone comes from a device located above the entrance door. The device is mounted up

next to the shades. Can you direct me on sourcing the problem and correcting it?

Rocky G. Mathews, Upland, California
Dear Rocky,

There is a Spyder connector block in the console by the passenger seat. The sound could be coming from the block or the touch pads. If that is where the tone is, you need to call Tiffin Service at (256) 356-0261 for instructions on correcting the issue.

Modifying the Inverter/Charger Parameters to Reduce Generator Time

I have a 2021 Tiffin Allegro Bus 37AP. Thank you for the lithium battery option. We boondock a lot and I've noticed the inverter/charger never goes into bulk/absorption mode unless the batteries are almost completely depleted. Is there a way to force this to happen so that I don't have to run the generator for endless hours because it always goes to float mode charging? I've tried setting the battery parameters manually in the Spyder system, but it does not help. The threshold voltage to initiate a full bulk/absorption/float charge cycle seems to be too low for lithium batteries. Since the discharge curve for lithium is almost flat, the inverter apparently does not recognize the actual state of discharge in the batteries.

Bruce Long
Corrales, New Mexico

Dear Bruce,

The batteries do need a lithium-capable inverter to properly maintain lithium batteries. You need to confirm that your inverter is lithium-ready, as the wrong one could have been installed. You can contact Magnum Energy or Tiffin Motorhomes Service with your model number to verify which inverter is in your coach.

Replacing the Rubber Seals Around the Slide-Outs

I just replaced the rubber seals around both slide-outs on the driver's side. The project went well. I was able to cut the rubber so the corners folded correctly,

with the vertical rubber laying over the horizontal rubber. But there is an air gap at the corners and I can see light coming through when I am inside the RV.

I noticed that the old rubber seal had been glued together at the corners to prevent an air gap. Can you explain how the corners are glued together during manufacturing? I have tried super glue and silicone, but neither worked. What adhesive will glue the rubber together?

I want to do this myself since we live in our RV and it is inconvenient to bring it to the shop. Can you explain in detail the procedure to glue the corners together?

Vince Pepe
San Mateo, California

Dear Vince,

First, clean the rubber seal with soap and water where it is to be glued. Make sure it is dry. Position the horizontal flap to the outside and across the vertical flap at the corners. Lift the flap and run a bead of glue to be sure the flap has a good seal against the coach wall. Add extra glue to connect the flaps on the corners. We use 3M Scotch-Weld Instant Adhesive.



Intermittent Wiper Operation on 2019 Phaeton

I own a 2019 Phaeton 40QKH. Recently, I have experienced intermittent operation

of my windshield wipers. Specifically, the wipers sometimes do not come on when demanded and more often fail to travel full down when they are demanded to cease operating. The problem seems to be more frequent when using the delay feature. I recently read in *Roughing It Smoothly* of a recall [NHTSA #20V-433, Tiffin Recall #TIF-113] which seems to outline what I am experiencing. However, the recall does not include my year or model. I am inquiring to see if this recall has been or is currently being considered to be applicable to the Phaeton fleet. Can you provide me any details related to the wiring issue outlined in the recall which could help me to research my issue?

Russ Kearney
Garrettsville, Ohio

Dear Russ,

The recall you referred to was for a PowerGlide chassis. You have a Freightliner chassis. We will send you a print for the Spyder wiper module located above the generator on the firewall. With the ignition switch on and the wiper switch on, check the input wires for 12VDC at the Spyder wiper module. If present, then check for the same +DC voltage output from the Spyder wiper module on to the wiper motor. If present at the motor, check the motor's ground wire. If there is no voltage to the Spyder wiper module with the ignition key and the wiper switch both on, then check the output from the Freightliner SmartWheel module.

Need Replacement Fog Lamps for 2017 Allegro Bus

We have a 2017 Allegro Bus 45OPP. The fog lamps have both cracked. When we contacted Tiffin about getting replacements, we were told they're no longer made. We've attempted to locate the item online through various vendors and have come up empty. We will be in Red Bay mid-April and also at the 50th Anniversary rally in June. Any chance you could help us locate replacements? Thanks in

advance for any help you can provide!

Paul Schoonover
Hastings, Minnesota

Dear Paul,

We have no replacement at this time. We suggest that you purchase fog lamps from Amazon where you will find a good selection. You will have to modify the brackets on the new fog lamps to fit the Tiffin brackets.

A Fix for Those Jumpy Remotes

This is in response to Bill & Cheryl Socha on their TV remote turning on and off and changing channels on all the TVs. We have a 2012 Phaeton and when we first got it, I was going crazy with the living room remote. We have DirecTV receivers, one in the LR & one in the bedroom. I purchased a Radio Frequency (RF) remote for the LR and kept the Infrared (IR) remote for the

BR. It is very easy to set up the new remote through the menu options. Just make sure you have the new remote, with the batteries installed, ready to go, before you start the procedure. You will need to use the old remote to get to the correct menu options, select RF vs IR, then follow the instructions. After that is done you will use the new remote to see if it works. The RF remote is omnidirectional. You don't have to point at the TV. Since our receiver is in a cabinet to the side and behind us, it has made all the difference in the world. Also the signal is entirely different than the IR, so it will not interfere with the bedroom or vice versa. This will also work with DISH systems. However, if you are using the original remotes that came with the TVs and over the air signals, then you will need to contact the TV company and see if they have similar RF remotes

available. Hope this helps. I always enjoy reading Tech Talk. I have learned many things over the years.

Joyce Skoien
Port Townsend, Washington

Dear Joyce,

Thank you so much for sharing your experience and solution to a problem about which many owners have inquired.

Undiscoverable Sources of Smells and Odors

I own a 2014 Phaeton 42LH. A strong intermittent exhaust smell gets inside the coach occasionally, maybe 10 times since I purchased the coach new. A more serious issue is the black water tank flush system. Every time the toilet is flushed, I get a terrible odor inside my bedroom. I am guessing there is a loose fitting causing the problem, but I cannot find a schematic

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in my manuals for the flush system to try and resolve this. Thanks for your help.

H. Brooks Bonnell

Dear Brooks,

An exhaust smell coming in will need to be inspected from the outside engine compartment to see if there are any obvi-

ous open seams or fallen insulation. The access from the inside of the coach can also be taken out and checked for a bad seal. The odors from the tanks could be coming back inside if the roof pipe vent has a blockage and forces the tank odors back through the HEPVO valves or P

traps. For a schematic and help finding the smell you will need to call service at (256) 356-0261.

Bleeding the Air Brakes on a 2012

Breeze

I have just purchased a 2013 Breeze 28BR. I understand I should bleed the air brakes daily, or often, but I could not find any info in my manuals on exactly how to do it. Do I need to make sure the air pressure is below 75 lbs.?

Bob Haddock
Hardy, Arkansas

Dear Bob,

Air brake systems do not require bleeding in the same way a hydraulic brake system does. Air brake systems only need to have moisture drained or bled from the compressed air storage tanks. When air is compressed, it becomes hot and as it cools condensation forms in the air system. Most of this condensation is removed by the air dryer and purged from the system at each cycle of the air compressor. However, some moisture will eventually wind up inside the air storage tanks. Drain valves are plumbed to a compartment where they can be easily accessed and opened to drain any moisture from the air storage tanks. We recommend doing this before and after each use of the RV. It is not necessary to completely drain the storage tank when you open the drain valve. Only leave it open long enough for any moisture to escape.

Missing an Overflow Valve in 2022

Allegro 36LA

I have a 2022 Allegro Open Road 36LA. While filling my fresh water tank from the wet bay, I was distracted and the water overflowed into the living area of my coach. I spoke to a technician at the Tiffin Service Center and he told me the fresh water tank does have an overflow that sends the water down to the ground under the coach. After inspecting the underside of the coach, we could not find an

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overflow pipe. I find it hard to believe that Tiffin would not put in an overflow valve to direct the water to the ground. This is my fourth Tiffin and the first time I have not had an overflow valve. Is this something that can be added to the fresh water tank?

Debbie Castilaw
Brusly, Louisiana

Dear Debbie,

The water tank should have an overflow line. If yours does not, you will need to go to an authorized service center to have it checked out and, if needed, have one installed.

Correct Time to Replace DEF Filter

I have a 2018 Phaeton 37BH with only 11,000 miles on the odometer. My Cummins service advisor said that I needed to replace the DEF filter. He said it should be changed at three years. The Cummins manual says to change the filter every 200,000 miles or 5000 hours, whichever comes first (Cummins SCR & DEF Training Module).

Robert Tuley
Colleyville, Texas

Dear Robert,

According to the Cummins L9 Owner's Manual, Section 3, pages 3-6, the DEF dosing unit filter should be changed at 200,000 miles or 6500 hours, whichever comes first.

Rear PS Slide on 2007 Bus Not Retracting

On my 2007 Allegro Bus 40OA, the rear PS slide-out will not go back in. It will come out under power, but I have to push it back in. Can you tell me the problem and maybe the part number that I need to fix the problem?

John Flamma
Aurora, Oregon

Dear John,

If this is the bed slide, it could be in the switch or it could be a shorted wire to the motor.




If it is the hydraulic slide, it may need

a hydraulic solenoid valve. Call Brent at (256) 356-0261, ext. 3822, and he will be happy to help you troubleshoot it.

Servicing the Transmission on a Ford V10

I own a 2016 Allegro Open Road with a Torqshift transmission. I was told to ser-


vice it every 30,000 miles. I am getting ready to do this as I have 34,000 on it now. All the info I read says to replace the two filters in addition to the fluid. The mechanic we consulted said the flushing out of the transmission will also flush the filters. He said they don't remove the filters, especially the one in the pan, because they

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have so much trouble with it leaking later. He said that is how it is being done now. We would like a second opinion.

Diana McVey, Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Dear Diana,

We must refer you to a Ford service center for this question. We do not do service work or offer advice on the Ford chassis or engines.

Using On-Board Air Compressor to Inflate Tires Over 110 lbs.

I just replaced the tires in my 2014 Phaeton. The dealer inflated the new Michelins to 110 lbs. The compressor in the Phaeton is limited to 100 lbs., presumably due to the regulator. Can I use the on-board system safely in the future to maintain the 110 lbs. of pressure in my tires without adversely affecting other functions of the compressor, such as the brakes?

Jim Palenscar, Oceanside, California

Dear Jim,

If this is a Freightliner chassis and only has the front connection for the air system, it will be a struggle to get enough pressure out of that location due to the line size and length of the run from the compressor in the rear to the front electrical box. Using the on-board air to air up tires will not negatively affect any of the other on-board systems. The only noticeable outcome would probably be that the air tank pressure would not be increased while also pulling air off to use in the tires.

Replacing a Tile DIY Style

A floor tile under the guest bathroom door jamb at the entrance of the bedroom has cracked in half. I understand it was purchased from D&D Hardware and the product name is 18x18 Paladino Classic, which is no longer available per your Tiffin Store. Any suggestions as to where I can purchase a couple of these tiles? Is there a DIY site for tile replacement? Your department in the *RIS* magazine is always a pleasure to read as is the whole magazine, too. Thank you.

Steven and Cathy, Gresham, Oregon

Dear Steven and Cathy,

We have not found anyone who knows where to get this now. There were replacement tiles placed in your Bus when it shipped. Most of the tiles used through the years are discontinued after a two- or three-year run. That is why we put a box of replacement tiles in each new coach. Check with your dealer to see if they have any of these tiles available. Finding a motorhome from the same year may help you find an owner who has extra tiles in his basement.

Installing a Window in the Rear Wall of a Wayfarer 24TW

We own a 2019 Wayfarer 24TW. It came without a backwall window. On February 24, 2022, it was at the Wayfarer Service Center in Winfield for the tow and hubcap recalls. I purchased a 12 × 48

window with a trim ring at that time and plan to install it myself. Question: Are there any structural elements or electrical wires across the backwall of this motorhome? Is there anything else I should know before I start cutting this hole? Thanks,

Steven Ekstrom, Paris, Texas

Dear Steven,

There are no wires across the back of the rear cap. However, we should remind you there is no structure in the fiberglass cap itself that would provide framing to which you could firmly attach the window.

Remote Access Software to Monitor Systems in 2019 Phaeton

I own a 2019 Phaeton 40IH-XSH. Does Tiffin provide an add-on remote access capability to manage the electrical, climate, and door locking systems in our coach? I would like to be able to monitor the temp in our coach, set (or re-set), the generator settings, unlock (or lock) the doors, etc. I'd like to do this from my phone or a tablet from distances far away from the coach. The coach will have internet service where I leave it.

Stephen Benjamin, LaBelle, Florida

Dear Stephen,

Firefly Integrations, an approved Tiffin vendor, has developed an app for your phone which will allow you to monitor and adjust the settings included in the Spyder control panel if your coach is connected to the internet. Call Firefly at (574) 825-4600.

Over-the-Air TV Antenna No Longer Works

I have a 2011 Phaeton 36QSH. The over-the-air TV antenna no longer works. The model on my roof is no longer manufactured. What does Tiffin use today on its new motorhomes? Will it work on my 2011 Phaeton? If so, how do I purchase and install a new one?

Bill Lloyd, Brigham City, Utah

Dear Bill,

The new one on our units is the KING Over The Air (OTA). It can be retrofitted for the 2011 Phaeton. The part numbers are 5115425, 5115426, and 5119800. Call Tiffin Parts and Service at (256) 356-0261 to order the necessary parts.

Searching for Cause of Non-Functioning Awning

I have a 2011 Phaeton 42QBH with a Carefree electric awning. It has stopped working and will not extend when I depress the awning switch inside the coach. What are the steps that I need to check to identify and fix the problem? I checked the fuses in the outside compartment below the driver side. That didn't work. Are there other fuses or places to look? If it is the motor, how do I get to it?

Richard Lombardi, Williamsburg, Virginia

Dear Richard,

The fuses you checked are the only ones for the awning. However, check to be sure power is coming to the fuse and through the fuse. Please call (256) 356-0261 and ask for electrical service if you need additional assistance. If it's a Powerglide chassis, the awning power will be in the Powerglide fuse box. It is a 20-amp fuse in the front DS compartment. You may want to remove the awning switch and check those connections.

Follow-up on Wayfarer Wheel Covers Recall

I own a 2018 Wayfarer 25TW. I recently received a recall remedy for the standard wheel covers that are causing valve stem damage. TMH recommends that owners remove and dispose of the wheel covers. With verification of disposal, Tiffin sends the owner \$150. Without the wheel covers, the metal tire rims are very ugly. Are other safe wheel covers available? I am not satisfied with this solution.

Eugene Allen, Oak Ridge, Iowa

Dear Eugene,

We now have a replacement. Brand new aluminum wheel simulators (wheel covers) with the Tiffin logo will be arriving in a few weeks. The replacements will be supplied free of charge. An updated recall letter will be issued in the near future.

Ceiling Lights Flashing in 2015 Phaeton

I have a 2015 Phaeton 36GH. Over the past four months, I have noticed a flash in the ceiling lights in both the living and bedroom areas. It seems to be related to the water heater cutting on and off. I have been able to reproduce the flash when I turn on the electric switch in the Spyder main display. I have tried resetting all of the breakers. Do you have any suggestions to solve this problem?

Victor Sabo, Redding, California

Dear Victor,

This problem was addressed and a solution presented in a document by Spyder Controls issued on January 20, 2015. It can be resolved by adding a diode to the solenoid on one or both of the modules controlling the gas portion and/or the electrical portion of the water heater. The repair should be made by a qualified technician. The technician should request the documents and illustrations by calling service at (256) 356-0261. Ask to speak with the electrical group. They can send the document to a technician.

Does the 2007 Allegro Bay 35TSB Have a Double Water Tank?

It is my understanding this coach has an 84-gallon fresh water tank that is divided into two tanks with a "cross-over pipe." However, I can only get 35 gallons in the reservoir. Apparently,

I am only filling one side. If there is a cross-over pipe to fill the other side, how do I access or check it to determine if there is a problem?

Larry Virnoche, Belfair, Washington

Dear Larry,

We ran two different fresh tank configurations during the time period your coach was built, so I cannot say for sure how yours was plumbed. However, if you have the dual tank version, there will be a crossover line connecting the main tank to the secondary tank with just one fill line feeding the tanks. We will email you the engineering drawing.

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Why Attend a Tiffin Allegro Club Rally?

by Sally Moore

Tiffin Allegro Club rallies have become increasingly popular in recent years! I am sure you have heard complaints and comments on social media about how hard it is to register. Many people will not even attempt to register due to the short window of time it takes for the rally to sell out. Many suggestions have been given for better ways to sell our rallies, but everyone at Tiffin management believes we have the most fair and equitable way available. Every owner throughout the world has an equal opportunity. We have had guests register while traveling in Egypt and Japan! All it takes is fast internet and attention to the time zones!

We encourage everyone to attend a rally occasionally. It is not necessary to attend each rally as much of the information is directed to first-time owners and is often repeated at rallies. What cannot be duplicated is the chemistry of Tiffin owners gathering in one location to share adventures and advice! This give and take is an invaluable experience for our coach owners. Basic seminars

are presented at each rally along with new classes from various vendors. We monitor the number of first-time rally attendees at each rally and it always exceeds 65% new guests. There is a small group of advance team volunteers who travel at their own expense cross-country to assist in setting up the rally and work tirelessly to be sure everyone has a great rally and learns information to assist with their coach.

If it sells out quickly, why should you make the attempt? Today's motorhomes are complicated machines featuring modern and complex electronics. Walk-throughs when you buy a coach cannot possibly cover all the components and features. After each rally, we hear comments saying how much new information owners have learned about their coach. Information comes from our seminars, vendors, our service representatives, and other owners. Service techs are also on the grounds making a brief, complimentary visit to your coach to make minor adjustments or repairs.

To offset the serious knowledge be-

ing given at the seminars, fun activities are mixed into the rally. Craft/swap meets, ice cream socials, and live entertainment nightly are only a small bit of the enjoyment when attending a rally. Oftentimes, members of the Tiffin family are on site to meet with owners and take pictures. Multiple door prizes are given out nightly! Each rally also features an emotional salute in honor of our veterans.

With 2500-3000 coaches being built annually, there is no way we can accommodate every owner with the quality rally Tiffin offers. Service techs cannot visit more coaches. The cost of attending Tiffin rallies is budget-friendly considering everything provided. The result of all these features is that many Tiffin owners want to attend a Tiffin rally!

We encourage you to follow the instructions given regarding rally registration. Everyone has an equal opportunity to register wherever you are located. Always add your name to the rally waitlist if you do not make the initial count. We hope to see you at a rally one day soon!

Why Join the Tiffin Allegro Club?

by Sally Moore

The Tiffin Allegro Club is for owners of all motorized Tiffin-built coaches! The first year is free with the purchase of a new, untitled coach. After the initial year, the yearly membership fee is very reasonable and even less when joining for multiple years. After a while, members may forget some of the benefits associated with membership so we wanted to refresh your memory! If you have allowed your membership to lapse or if you purchased a new-to-you coach, consider joining the Tiffin Allegro Club and taking advantage of these benefits. You can join the Club by visiting the website,

tiffinmotorhomes.com, going to the OWNERS page, and clicking on Tiffin Allegro Club. There is a JOIN/RENEW link on the upper right side of the page.

Some people ask why Allegro is in our name; Allegro is the first model that Tiffin built beginning in 1972 and we pay homage to that heritage! Below is a recap of membership benefits available to you with a current membership.

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

Tiffin Allegro Club rallies are hosted throughout the nation with factory

trained service technicians, informative seminars, entertainment, and fellowship! Members have the opportunity to attend several rallies throughout the year. The rally fee includes your camping fee, entertainment, games, prizes, various planned activities, seminars, Tiffin technicians (when available) who do minor repairs for rally attendees, new display units, sales representatives from Tiffin Motorhomes to answer questions about your motorhome, and much more. We also schedule free time at our rallies for shopping or exploring on your own.

The Tiffin Allegro Club online newsletter, "Tiffin Side Roads," is updated frequently to keep our members informed about rallies, chapter news, safety information, technical tips, factory news, and other informative and helpful information. Find it at tiffinsideroads.com, scroll to the bottom of the homepage and enter your email address in the box to automatically receive updates.

Michelin Advantage Tire Program: Substantial discount on the purchase of Michelin tires for your Tiffin RV or passenger car/light truck. Go to tiffinmotorhomes.com and look under the Tiffin Allegro Club Benefits page for procedures information. **Link #1:** michelintruck.com. Locate a participating dealer. **Link #2:** call (888) 532-6435 and select Option 1 to register your credit card. If the dealer asks for a PO; it will be a 9-digit entry: your membership number plus adding zeros to make 9 digits (ex: 123456000)

Fantasy RV Caravans and Rallies offers discounts to current Tiffin Allegro Club members. Discounts: \$100 off caravans and \$50 off rallies!

Insurances at Discounted Rates: Emergency Road Service through SafeRide RV. Visit tiffin.vehicleadminservices.com for more details. (877) 483-0379

Long-term care, trip cancellation, motorhome replacement coverage, and motorhome and other vehicle liability, through **Overland Insurance Services** at (800) 677-4027. Go to tiffinmotorhomes.com for information.

Transportation in case of medical emergency for you and your spouse with medical personnel through **Sky-Med** at (800) 475-9633. rvins.com/sky-med Check here for more detailed information. **Sky-Med Travel Program** – see skymedtravel.com/register for more information.

The Tiffin Allegro Store carries a selection of shirts, caps, and jackets with an embroidered Tiffin logo at discounted prices. Stainless steel mugs and all-weather carpets are also available. Call (256) 356-8522 for our catalog or email allegroclub@tiffinmotorhomes.com. You can also visit our website at tiffinmotorhomes.com. Free shipping for all orders over \$75.00 shipped inside USA! Shipping outside USA incurs shipping fee.

Tiffin Allegro Club members can join **Passport America** for 18 months for the cost of only 12 (six months FREE). Call (800) 681-6810 for more information. Use code word Allegro. Renewals: Renew your Passport membership and receive 3 months free. Use code word TAC.

Discounted auto rentals through **Enterprise Rent-A-Car and National**. Go to tiffinmotorhomes.com, select OWNERS, click Tiffin Allegro Club, BENEFITS and click on the Enterprise or National link. When you enter your info the discount code is automatically added.

Nomad Glass offers discounted service for Tiffin Allegro Club members with windshield damage. Nomad Glass offers mobile service to approximately 90% of the USA. Call (800) 808-9762 or visit nomadglass.com for more information.

Local Chapters! The Tiffin Allegro Club has approximately 70 local chapters throughout the US and Canada. There may be one in your area. Go to tiffinmotorhomes.com for info on local chapters. A map of North America will appear, enter your state in the search box, and if there is a chapter, the information will appear. Our local chapters generally have camp-outs on a monthly basis. "What a great way to meet new friends!"

Name badges and membership cards are included with membership.

Mark Your Calendars!

Make plans to join us at one of the following 2023 Tiffin Allegro Club rallies! Our rallies provide you the opportunity for comradery with other Tiffin owners, minor repairs/service by Tiffin Service Techs & factory representatives, entertainment, seminars, and other fun activities. The newest and latest Tiffin coaches will be on display! Each year our rallies sell out (often within minutes on the first day!) so don't delay in getting your registration completed. Give us a call at 256-356-8522 if you have any questions about the following rallies. Registration links will be published prior to each registration date. Watch for more information on TiffinSideroads.com, Tiffin Allegro Club Facebook page, and *Roughing It Smoothly* magazine.

Rally dates and locations are subject to change. For up-to-date rally information, refer to tiffinmotorhomes.com.

2023 Rally Schedule

Golden Village Palms RV Resort Hemet, California

Arrive Monday, April 3, 2023

Depart Friday, April 7, 2023

**Registration opens at 11:00 AM
CST November 8, 2022**

Amana RV Park & Event Center Amana, Iowa

Arrive Monday, June 12, 2023

Depart Friday, June 16, 2023

**Registration opens at 11:00 AM
CST January 24, 2023**

Champlain Valley Exposition Essex Junction, Vermont

Arrive Monday, October 2, 2023

Depart Friday, October 6, 2023

**Registration opens at 11:00 AM
CDT June 27, 2023**

Tiffin Allegro Club Expands Monogrammed Sportswear Lines



The Torrent rain jacket (1) is available in cobalt blue, red, black or fuchsia (ladies only). This comfortable waterproof jacket comes with a convenient carry pouch for easy storage. \$40, Small to X-Large; \$44, Plus sizes. Available in men's or ladies' sizes.

Everyone's favorite polo shirts (2) are available in a poly/cotton blend, 100% cotton, or Dri-Fit polyester. Men's and ladies' sizes from Small to 4XL. Available in many colors, long or short sleeve. \$20-\$28.

Denim shirts (3) are spot-on for a comfortable light-weight jacket on cool evenings. 100% cotton, pre-washed. \$24-\$28. Available in long or short sleeve, Small to 4XL.

Core soft-shell vests or jackets (4) in black, marshmallow, navy, or grey are comfortable and stylish. Small to 4XL, \$40-\$44 in ladies' or men's sizes.



Jackets ranging from light weight windbreakers to heavy-duty all-season coats are available. Rain jackets

in a variety of beautiful colors are always great to have in the coach! Jackets range in price from \$30 to \$66. The

new puffer style jackets are very popular and are available in jackets or vests, men's and ladies' styles.

Monogrammed Water Bottles, Tumblers, Umbrellas, and More



Top Shelf: Stainless steel water bottles for hot or cold beverages, \$18. Stainless steel tumblers with base that fits most cup holders, 16 oz. \$20. Insulated coolers, \$10.

Middle Shelf: Stainless steel coozie, \$8. Black and white golf umbrella, - 58" arc with vented canopy, automatic open, \$20. Tiffin notebooks, great for travel memories, \$8. Seat belt safety cover with medical alert personal information form inside, \$10.

Bottom shelf: Vehicle tags, metal tag in black with silver design, \$5. Metal license plate frame in silver and black, \$15. Foam can cozies in assorted colors, \$1. Ceramic coffee cups, \$10.

New merchandise is continually being added. If there is something you would like to see added to the store, please let us know. To place an order, call (256) 356-8522.

A Wide Selection of Polo and Denim Shirts

Visit our Tiffin Allegro Club in Red Bay for a great selection of men's and ladies' polo shirts and denim shirts. Shirts are priced from \$20 to \$28. Available in sizes Small to 4XL, short or long sleeve.

Caps and Visors are available in a wide assortment of styles and colors, \$15.



THE FIRST 15 YEARS *Continued from page 31*

By 1981, Tiffin Motorhomes began to really take off. Our motorhomes were all aluminum and steel. The only fiberglass in the camper was the shower stall and a little later on the front cap. Our first front caps were aluminum, and then aluminum below the windshield. We didn't have TVs or leveling jacks and steps were manual. It was a very simple machine.

In the early 80s, we added awnings and leveling jacks as options and then in the late 80s offered back-up cameras. There were no inverters. Generators were a big option and we built many units without generators, something that would be unthinkable today. However, you still had to be sure the microwave was off before you turned on the air conditioner.

If an owner had a problem, the dealer could usually fix it. Before dealers became accustomed to working on our campers, owners often brought their units to Red Bay. Since we did not have a service center, employees working on the line would stay over after the shift ended and work on an owner's camper.


As units got more complex, we started a service department. Two service employees soon went to five. We started repairing sidewalls and roofs. Our guys could change out a damaged aluminum sidewall in a couple of hours and get the owner back on the road the same day he arrived. The service team went to eight, and we still needed more. We made an addition to the cotton warehouse where we started the company. We put in the first

campground with hook-ups along the railroad tracks.

I moved into the office in 1983 to work in parts, handle service questions, and then finally into sales. But with my background in production, even though I had moved into sales I never got away from answering service questions. That continued until I retired two years ago.


In the early 80s, Tiffin built its first rear engine diesel pusher. It was a non-basement style motorhome on an Oshkosh chassis. The floor frame went down flat on the chassis rails. It had a recessed well with steps. All of the storage was under the bed or in the cabinets. The first basement-style diesels were built in 1986-87.

In the early 80s, we began selling units in Arizona and California with split baths. The 27-ft. floorplan with the split bath was so successful that we started building 15/day. We began working 10-hour days, six days a week.

This was when the campus began to expand. In 1987, we built the new administration building and the assembly plant across the road. The new plant was dedicated to building fiberglass motorhomes since the industry and recreational RVs were headed in that direction. In the early days of fiberglass, delamination was a problem. We could fix the aluminum damaged in a hailstorm in one day, but fiberglass was another story. We hated to say good-bye to aluminum, but 1995 was the last year we built an aluminum-sided coach. 

AUSTIN *Continued from page 84*

incredibly complex—a thrill to taste. They were the best Texas wines I've ever had, and I completely forgot about the crackers. For an exclusive wine tasting, go to calaiswinery.com/cabernet-sauvignon-experience

If you find a bottle or two you like, take them with you to enjoy with dinner or just a sunset at your campground. We did, but we took so much more from our time in Austin and the Hill Country. I'm sure you will, too. We left Austin, a city poised to leap into the future, with a long, long look backwards. 

ON THE ROAD WITH CAROLYN *Continued from page 85*

to have her home," Jim stated. However, they do enjoy touring the country and even took their grandchildren to the Grand Canyon and Disney World.

"We love seeing the sights. I love that I am the passenger, so I get to see things as we are driving down the road. It's great find-

ing the small towns with the museums," Debra said. They have enjoyed visiting the Henry Ford Museum and Village in Dearborn, Michigan; the Wisconsin State Fair; Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin; Washington Island; and New England.

"We have been a lot of places, but there are still a million more things to see," Jim said.

DESTINATION: BONITA SPRINGS *Continued from page 114*

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(239) 495-9700

Modern, gated RV resort offering 185 sites, plus a casual cafe, pool & clubhouse with activities. sanctuaryrvresort.com

BONITA LAKE RV RESORT
26325 Old 41 Rd. (239) 992-2481
Pet-friendly RV resort featuring laundry

facilities, a heated pool, shuffleboard & free Wi-Fi. bonitalake.com

GULF COAST CAMPING RESORT
24020 Production Cir. (239) 992-3808
gulfoastcampingresort.com

IMPERIAL BONITA ESTATES 55+
27700 Bourbonniere Dr. (800) 690-6619
A hidden gem. The Imperial River runs

beside the park with kayak launching and fishing. imperialbonitaestates.com

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