SAXOPHONE IN THE MOONLIGHT OF THE SONORA

Taking a break from the road, and plotting the next 28,000 miles

Banker turned sax man Larry Marik warms up for his evening musical tuck-in for the neighborhoods in an Arizona RV park.

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New to this blog? After he hung up his president hat, bank chairman Larry and Mary Ann decided to sell their house, buy a Winnebago, and see more of America. They are now blogging about what they see about banking for ABA Banking Journal. Read more about the Mariks in “Chairman of the Open Road.”

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By Steve Cocheo, executive editor and digital content manager

If fate should take you to the Palm Creek Golf and RV Resort in Casa Grande, Ariz., and you should be stretching your legs near a friend’s motor home while sipping your libation of choice, and you hear a saxophone wailing somewhere in the darkness, it’s not your imagination nor the whistling of the wind over the surround Sonora Desert.

It’s Larry Marik, blowing “jazz taps” at one of the many crossroads in the 2,000-unit wintering spot for motor-home nomads like our “Winnebago Banker” and his wife, Mary Ann.

The Mariks—a retired banking couple who sold their home and are traveling the country in a Winnebago Journey—have put 28,000 miles on their home-vehicle since they hit the road. Since they were first profiled in ABA Banking Journal’s April 2011 “First Person” column, they started blogging about the community banks and community bankers they met on their travels in the “Banker on Wheels” blog. At this point they’ve filed 11 blog reports from multiple states.

Larry and Mary Ann Marik, the Winnebago banking couple, have visited with community bankers in several states in their travels so far. They always find a friendly face or two, and a story behind the bank or banks that welcome them in.

As you may recall from our original article, “Chairman of the Open Road,” Larry is a retired banker with musical roots. Now that he and Mary Ann are free to roam, he’s played gigs here and there. Some of these you’ve read about, perhaps, in the Mariks’ dispatches.

RV park larger than some towns

Once the Mariks were ensconced in their winter hookups, Larry and his sax needed an outlet, and one evening he went to the crossroads of their block and blew a salute to the evening.

No one threw an old boot or so much as an angry glance at the sunset serenader. Instead, Larry’s evening interlude has become something of an evening tradition, with folks gathering at the intersection, awaiting his arrival.

Palm Creek is more than just your average trailer park complete with saxophone lullabies. There’s golf, swimming, and more right on the premises, and lots of neighbors to get to know. Mary Ann says about 65% of the seasonal residents of the park are Canadians, come south to escape the northern cold.

“Everyone here is a snow-bird of some type or other,” Mary Ann says. When the temporarily anchored travelers feel the need for a change of scenery, they can explore in their secondary vehicles. The Mariks have already put in a couple of side trips in the car that they usually tow back of the Winnebago Journey, since settling in during the fall. For those thirsting for a southwestern city, Phoenix sits only 35 miles away.

Using the car instead of the Journey, plus the towed car and the couple’s racked bicycles, makes a big change. Their car gets much better mileage than the 8 mile per gallon RV. Fuel is somewhat cheaper in Arizona than the couple had seen in their travels, at $3.02 for a gallon of gas and $3.75 for diesel, but at that much for diesel, it’s good to get the RV off the road and the engine turned off for a spell. All power and utilities come from the vehicle’s park hookups for now.

In something of a “busman’s holiday,” the couple took some time out in late January for a major RV rally in Quartzsite, Ariz., where thousands gather to compare notes, meet new faces, view free live entertainment, and pick up the latest in RV equipment and gadgets.

Where the Mariks are heading…

Being parked for the season has given the couple some time to plot out their next season’s itineraries.

There will be a stop in the spring in Colorado, where the couple plans to greet their second grandchild, due around then. There will be at least one stop in Omaha, back in the Mariks’ home state of Nebraska. There will be stops in Minneapolis and Iowa and the Mariks hope to get as far north as North Dakota in the coming season. A stop at the RV rally held annually at Winnebago’s home, Forest City, Iowa, is also planned.

That’s not all. The Mariks will explore further afield, including jaunts that will take in Wyoming, Montana, Idaho. A trip by Winnebago to Tennessee remains a possibility.

And then there’s a run through California that Larry especially wants to try in the Winnebago: the coastal route in California, either using the breathtaking—and breathtakingly narrow—Highway 1 Pacific Coast Highway or the wider, but more inland Highway 101.

That trip he’s saving for the fall, because he wants to time it so the couple can arrive, in their Winnebago, at the ABA Annual Convention for 2012. That’s where Larry’s fellow Nebraska banker Matthew Williams, chairman and president of Gothenburg State Bank steps up to the ABA Chairman’s position.

All along the way, the Mariks will keep their eyes open for good community bank stories. Keep your eyes open for a very large RV with the poster the couple is holding in the photograph up top. They just might be dropping in on you.

Now here’s something you don’t see every day—a gold Rolls Royce. One of the Mariks’ trailer park neighbors owns the collector’s item. You can just make out the emblematic Nebraska State flag on the Mariks’ RV.

Keep your eyes peeled, should you see a huge black, tan, and steel Winnebago Journey roll through town or pass you on the highway. The Mariks will be displaying this poster as they search for stories for their blog.