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Family hits road towing Prius and marketing plan

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April 2, 2009

By IRV LEAVITT ileavitt@pioneerlocal.com

Wendi and Michael Ezgur, seeing no good reason to stick around when business stinks, decided to take their kids out of school and hit the road for a few months.

But three kids are not enough company for them. They want you to come along, too.

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Wendi and Michael Ezgur departed Highland Park April 1 on a five-month road trip with their kids, Charlie, 8, (in red sleeves), Aidan, 11, and Rosie, 6. (Michelle LaVigne/Staff Photographer)

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Wendi and Michael Ezgur and their three children, Rosie, 6; Charlie, 8 and Aidan, 11, show off the living area Saturday of their new camper, four days before they take off on a five-month trip. (Michelle LaVigne/Staff Photographer)

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Wendi Ezgur, a corporate innovation consultant, plans to recount her family's five-month hegira on a Web site. She hired a public relations firm to induce various media outlets to note their April 1 departure from Highland Park, and suggests that readers and listeners travel vicariously at www.familyofftrack.com.

Well, there you go. It worked.

But why should you look?

"That's a good question," Wendi said last week.

"I don't know ... the overarching perspective is wanting people to look at it and be inspired by the 'what if' and 'why not.' I want to inspire them to look at change, and look for opportunity in change."

Opportunity is the key to the Ezgur trip. The Web site gives plenty of play to the Barrington dealer who gave them the heavenly deal on the new RV. The same goes for the insurance policy covering the camper that transports the Ezgurs and tows the family Toyota.

"I asked Geico if they wanted us to put a giant lizard on top of the RV," Wendi said.

"They said, 'No, just some magnetic signage on the Prius would be fine.'"

Geico has apparently gotten into the spirit of things, she said last week. "They called me today and said, 'We want you to be at certain campgrounds and give people lunch, on Geico.' We're going to be like grilling burgers all over the United States."

She and two of the kids have birthdays during the trip, so she's planning all three celebrations to occur "on Geico lunch days, so we can have a giant cake."

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Much of what is loaded into the camper is at the expense of sponsors, includ

"They have a high-tech wool liner with a 30-day no-stink guarantee," Wendi said. "That's a perfect sponsor because it will be difficult to do laundry."

She and her husband will home-school their kids, ages 6, 8 and 11, and she said they'll learn more visiting the American West, Midwest, southwest Canada and Louisiana than they would in public school. All the kids have over-the-road responsibilities, and their ability to come through will presumably be recounted on the Web site.

"When this first came up, people asked me, 'What the heck are you doing?'" property developer Michael Ezgur said.

But he said his wife had a good point: His business "really has been very stressful for a long time," and now might be an excellent opportunity to put some distance between him and it.

He has an understanding business partner, and all the work Michael needs to do over the next few months, as the firm is converted to a leasing operation, can probably be covered by a few telephone calls a day.

But why make the trip a public event?

"At first, I thought, no," Michael said.

"If we're going to do this, fine. But why a Web site, and what's the point of trying to promote it?"

He found his answer in the difference between his personality and his wife's.

"I've always done things that are concrete: You can see it and touch it. Wendi is very creative, a very good public speaker.

"This really is an opportunity for her to grow her business. This trip will give her things she can speak on (at corporate engagements), and we're doing things on this trip that can really provide her with a lot of content and material, I suppose."

Despite all the sponsorships and business links, the Ezgurs will still have to struggle as anyone else would who has never owned a big camper before.

"Who even knew there were signs for viaducts as to their heights, like two miles away? You have to look for these things. You can't just slam on the brakes," Wendi exclaimed.

"And when you click on the tow gear, you're no longer able to reverse. Ever!"

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tararoadtrip wrote:

Road trips are great and this seems like a perfect way to not only get away from things and get perspective, but to educate the children about the U.S. There is nothing like traveling to teach you about the world. If these folks need help, they should check out <http://www.planning-fun-road-trips.com> for lots of road trip tips and advice.

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