



Good Country Livin'

(with a taste of the city)

Sharon Minnieh gathers fresh peaches at Tree-Mendous Fruit Farm in Eau Claire, Michigan.

Photos courtesy Kenny Heavrin



The Grand Indiana Auto Tour began its 19th outing at the luxurious Knollwood Country Club in Granger, Indiana, on Wednesday evening, August 3, 2013. After our delicious buffet dinner served by the friendly country club staff, hosts Mike and Mary Jo Siney, and Jim and Cathy Dinger relayed tour information for the following three days of fun. We also conducted our short annual business meeting which always includes introductions of new and past participants plus a well-deserved recognition of our men and women who have served/are serving in the military. Afterwards, the group headed to our base hotel, the Comfort Suites Inn of South Bend, Indiana, for further camaraderie.

Thursday, August 1

Driving a scenic, two-lane route towards our first destination (lovely St. Joseph, Michigan), GIAT participants were apt to spy a good number of interesting points of interest along the way including a beautiful beach, restored, historic carousel (rides available for a fee), Curious Kids Museum, The Old Box Factory (with artists at work), along with a walking pier to the local lighthouse. Once arriving in St. Joe, their quaint



downtown offered lots of diversions including the South Bend Chocolate Shop, Antique and Art Galleries, an old 5 & Dime Store (that place really brought back memories!) and, a great ice cream shop called Kilwin's. After a relaxing lunch and dose of Kilwin's, GIAT set off for our next stop—Tree-Mendous Fruit Farm in Eau Claire, Michigan. Family-owned and operated on a 450 acre working farm, the Tree-Mendous people lived up to their name by treating us to a laid-back guided tour aboard their “folks wagen.” As we wound our way through the groves of fruit trees our hosts explained the fascinating details involved with running a u-pick farm operation, and stopped along the way to allow us a chance to pick some delicious peaches right off the tree. After our ride the family catered a down-home open-air dinner with all the fixins that was (you knew I was going to say it) Tree-Mendous! After a relaxing drive back to South Bend, day one of GIAT 2013 was complete.

Friday, August 2

A little rain greeted GIAT as we headed out for our second day. Undaunted, we wove our way to Middlebury, Indiana, stopping at the Guggiberg Deutch Kase Hause Cheese Factory to sample (and purchase) some of their fine offerings. Begun in 1979 by local Amish gentleman Ralph Bontrager, they are noted for gaining the 2000 World Cheese Maker's award for world's Greatest Colby! From there we received some schooling from the folks at “B” Honey in Shipshewana, Indiana, on the beekeeper trade. Also family owned-operated, they offer pure and flavored honey, along with beekeeping supplies, beeswax, soy candles, and natural skin care products. After enjoying “B” Honey's hospitality, we headed to the Hostetler's Hudson Car Museum. To our great delight, we were given a personal tour of the facility by it's founder, Eldon Yoder, who shared a good number of personal stories about acquiring his collection, plus answering a few questions from our group. The facility



1. 450 acres of land offer GIAT plenty of parking space while visiting Tree-Mendous Fruit Farm. **2.** Jerry & Sonja Hook proudly display the “fruits” of their peach-picking labors. **3.** First-time GIAT participant Kevin Kolar displays his no-fear policy when it comes to ladders. **4.** What do farmers do after a hard day's work in the field? They eat! If you went away hungry from this spread it was your own fault!

sports a large number of beautiful and rare Hudsons, Essex, Dover, Terraplane and other Hudson-produced cars, trucks, and utility vehicles. After lunch in town, our next destination was the RV Hall of Fame in Elkhart, Indiana. The RV Founders Hall displays trailers, photos, and memorabilia reaching back to the 1920s and 1930s and presents chronological and technological advancements in the industry from before WWI to the present, including Mae West's 1931 Chevrolet Housecar and a GMC Motorhome Classic. To cap off the day was a delicious dinner at the Windsor Park Conference Center featuring a traditional Polish wedding reception menu. Tasty!

Saturday, August 3

Rain greeted us again Saturday morning but did not manage to douse the fun of visiting South Bend's Farmer's Market (the rain stopped by mid-morning anyway). Incorporated in 1924, the Market has become one of the largest and most diverse indoor markets in the Midwest. It was easy to see why as the large, indoor venue offered everything you could think of and was staffed with friendly vendors ready to answer questions. My wife found some pastries that reminded her of ones her Aunt Peg used to make. After leisurely exploring the market it was time to head for our final GIAT destination: Frog's Restaurant in Syracuse, Indiana, where we would board the S.S. Lillypad for our closing banquet and lake cruise. Mid-day Saturday saw sunny skies and mild temperatures—perfect for a cruise around Lake Wawasee in the two story, 110-passenger cruiser. We enjoyed a delicious buffet lunch while moving along the shoreline. With GIAT 2013 coming to an end, disembarking passengers again offered their thank yous to tour hosts Mike and Mary Jo Siney, and Jim and Cathy Dininger.

It is always sad to see the tour come to an end, but as we say our goodbyes it is with the happy thought that we will plan to be together again on the 2014 Grand Indiana Auto Tour! See you down the road!



5. Those tending the RV/MH Hall of Fame had no worries of their vintage RV's being hauled away—no hitches on any of the classics parked out front (but wouldn't it be great to see a '58 Airstream behind that '56 Continental?). **6.** What's "good country livin'" without a little nap? Bill Johnson catches some respite during GIAT. **7.** Bill Johnson's '70 Dodge Thomas 5-passenger bus waits patiently for its driver to rest up. **8.** A perfect day on the lake (Lake Wawasee, that is) as GIAT cruises the shoreline of Syracuse, Indiana, on the S.S. Lillypad at the closing of the 2013 tour.