



Special to The Forum

**Ray Ehly Jr. of Alpine, Calif.,** visited his old high school in Moorhead during his trip across all 50 states in his new Corvette. Both Ehly and the Corvette turn 50 years old in 2003, so he celebrated with his 63-day and nearly 23,000-mile journey.

# Cross-country Corvette

Moorhead grad heads out on the highway to celebrate 50th birthdays

**R**ay Ehly Jr. hung out a lot with his Grandpa **Jacob (Jake) Kiefer** when he was growing up in Moorhead.

Jake owned Kiefer Motors in Moorhead; his father, also named **Jacob**, had founded it in 1907.

Young Ray got to drive a lot of cars, and he became hooked on them. Especially Corvettes, partially because the first one was built the year he was born: 1953.

The first one he owned was a 1970 model. He's driven it a lot in California (he now lives in Alpine, outside of San Diego) and elsewhere.

Last year, Ray came up with an idea. He'd turn 50 in 2003. So would Corvettes. How about this for an off-the-wall plan? He'd order a 2003 Corvette, then drive it through all 50 states in honor of both birthdays.

His daughter **Amanda** summarized people's reactions well. "Are you crazy?" she asked her dad.

Maybe. But he did it.

## First: Kentucky

Ray placed his order for a custom-built 2003 Z06 Corvette last March 3.

On April 22, he flew to Bowling Green, Ky., to pick up the car and, three days later, began his epic trip.

Ray established a Web page and wrote a daily journal on it. Through it, you can hop into the Corvette beside Ray and travel with him.

He heads to Illinois. To Missouri for a visit to the Harry Truman Museum in Independence. To Kansas and then Oklahoma City for a visit to the Federal Building memorial site and the National Cowboy Museum.

On famous Route 66 through "flat and windy" Texas, New Mexico, Arizona.

Then back to California, where the car is loaded aboard a plane and flown to Hawaii.

On Oahu, a visit to the Arizona Memorial, then back to California, where Ray's car is put on display during Corvette Day at Peterson's Automotive Museum in Los Angeles.

"Beautiful Coast Highway 101," Ray writes, heading up the coast to Oregon and Washington, where the car is



**BOB LIND**

*Neighbors*

loaded on a cargo ship and shipped to Alaska.

Fairbanks. Anchorage. Then, a ship back to Seattle.

On across the western United States, with both "breathtaking scenery" and lonely roads.

South Dakota - Mount Rushmore. Sturgis. Then south to Nebraska.

## Birthday with Mom

On to Iowa. John Wayne's birthplace. Back to South Dakota. Sioux Falls, Pierre.

May 30. North Dakota. Minot Air Force Base, Garrison Dam, Bismarck, Sitting Bull's grave, Bottineau.

May 31. Fargo, and a visit with **Paul** and **Mary Kloster**; Paul and Ray were on the North Dakota State University swim team together.

Then, his hometown of Moorhead, with a stop at Moorhead High School, from which he had graduated and for which he was a top member of the swim team.

Now, a highlight of a trip of highlights. Ray pulls into Perham, Minn., stays at his mother's home, which features both Mom and her marvelous breakfast of bacon, eggs, coffee and walleye pike, and celebrates his 50th birthday.

Then, back on the road to Itasca State Park. Bemidji. Duluth.

Wisconsin. Illinois - both Wrigley and Soldier fields in Chicago. Missouri and Tennessee, Arkansas and Texas - the Alamo and the Johnson Space Center. Louisiana - New Orleans' Bourbon Street. Mississippi. Alabama - Hank Williams' Museum in Montgomery. Florida - Kennedy Space Center, Daytona Beach.

Georgia. South Carolina and North Carolina. Great Smoky Mountains. Virginia - Richmond, Roanoke.

Maryland - shipyards.

D.C. - White House, Capitol building. Delaware, where the captain of a ferry says the seas would be "moderate," but the ferry bounces around in 3-foot waves with swells up to 6 feet at times, and the wind is so strong it makes Ray's eyes water.

Pennsylvania, New Jersey.

New York City - Empire State Building, Brooklyn Bridge and, of course, ground zero.

Connecticut - Colt Firearms plant in Hartford. Manchester, N.H., where everyone in Ray's hotel is evacuated when clothing in a dryer catches fire.

Massachusetts - Plymouth Rock, Boston. Maine - President Bush's retreat in Kennebunkport. Montpelier, Vt. Niagara Falls, N.Y. West Virginia, Ohio, Michigan.

And then, Indiana, the last of the 50 states.

## The statistics

Total mileage clocked by Ray and his Corvette: 22,796 miles.

Total elapsed time for the trip: 63 days, four hours, 21 minutes.

His only passengers: his daughter, **Amanda**, his new wife, **Karen**, and a friend each of whom traveled briefly with him, and those who rode with him vicariously by following his journal on his Web page: rayjr@all50corvette.com.

Back home and riding the crest of the thrill of his trip, he was brought back to earth - the scorched earth - by the San Diego-area forest fires which threatened his house. He and Karen were evacuated, but they were fortunate; they lost electricity and phone service for a time, but their house wasn't damaged.

"It is indescribable, what a firestorm it was," Ray says. "It is best put that the area looked like the apocalypse."

While getting back to real life from his cross-country trip, Ray probably hasn't considered what he'll do for his 75th birthday.

One suggestion, Ray: How about a trip down U.S. Highway 75?

If you have an item of interest for this column, mail it to Neighbors, The Forum, Box 2020, Fargo, ND 58107; fax it to (701) 241-5487; or e-mail rllind@forumcomm.com