

# **Dells Freezes Over**

## **A Getaway Weekend & BMC Kickoff in Wisconsin Dells**

By Marcy Hotz

### **Friday**

It was a cold January day as we drove to the Wintergreen Resort in Lake Delton, near the Wisconsin Dells. We were anxious to see our fellow Miatans and have a hot time in the cold town again! Jane Schmidt found Jim and I (not surprisingly) in the motel's cocktail lounge getting a head start before dinner. We joined the group, which was already partying in Jane and Denny's room right next to ours.

Dinner was at Buffalo Phil's, a short walk from the Wintergreen, just across the parking lot. We chatted and imbibed at the bar while waiting for our table which turned out to be 2 back-to-back booths. Food at Phil's was plentiful and delicious, but the highlight of the evening was a little train that delivered food and beverages to the four booths along its route. Each time the train came, it had different passengers - a teddy bear, two dinosaurs, a bubble machine, little cars, etc. We started putting dollar bills or coins in various places on the train which went back to the kitchen area. Pretty soon the train would come to only one booth - ours - for more of our gifts.

Eventually it was time to leave, so we trudged back to our home base and turned in for the night.

### **Saturday**

At the Cracker Barrel, a short drive from the Wintergreen, we met for a delicious, leisurely breakfast. From there, we piled back into cars and headed to the Al Ringling Mansion in Baraboo. Our tour guide Jill revealed interesting facts and history as she led us through the many rooms of the mansion. The red stone building was built in 1905 as the home of legendary circus showman Al Ringling. He was the eldest of the five famous Ringling brothers. It is currently undergoing extensive restoration to bring it back to its former opulence. Soon be a bed and breakfast, it also houses the local Elks Club in the basement. We saw original furnishings, amazing woodwork, ornate murals and hand-painted ceilings. The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks owned the building for 78 years before selling it to three private individuals for around \$450,000. Read more information about the Al Ringling Mansion on line: <http://www.ringlingmansion.com>

Next on the schedule was lunch at Monk's Bar & Grill on the downtown Square of Baraboo. Monk's is famous for its burgers. We ate and socialized, and then it was time for our tour of the Ringling Theater, on the same block as Monk's.

The Al Ringling Theater ( <http://www.alringling.com/> ) proved to be as opulent as the mansion. Angels, cherubs and flowers in paint and frieze welcomed us to the theater lobby where we met the tour guide who bore a striking resemblance to the famed Al Ringling as he stood in front of a gigantic framed picture of the legendary circus man. Built in French Renaissance style, the Al Ringling Theatre is as ornate as any European opera house, complete with gilded plasterwork, frescoes, mosaics and antique tapestries. The theater was designed by the architectural firm of Ripp and Rapp, the same folks who designed the luxurious Chicago Theater. Ringling spared no expense on his gift to the town where he grew up and loved.

The guide told us about the large unfinished artwork painted on a screen at the front of the stage, then demonstrated the pipe organ. We were taken up to the stage where we looked out beyond the footlights at the red velvet seats and box seats on the upper level, and then looked above us to see ropes, cables, sandbags and pulleys. From there we went below to the very sparse dressing rooms of the actors (2 mirrors, one chair and a sink). We then toured the balcony level and viewed the stage from the box seats.

After this tour, we went down the street to the Cobblestone Corner, a small art and jewelry shop selling beautiful crafts made by local artists and artisans. From there we were free to go back to the Wintergreen (maybe for a swim or nap), or go shopping or to Ho-Chunk casino or do whatever until 5 PM. Jim and I joined Jane and Denny to walk through a large craft mall hunting for treasures. From there it was back to our rooms for a quick nap and clothes change before dinner.

Cocktails and appetizers were served at 5 PM, followed by a wonderful buffet dinner including chicken, fish and beef, along with carrots, broccoli, red potatoes, rolls and chocolate mousse with brownie bits in it. Jane's attention to detail was obvious with the little gift cartons filled with chocolate candies that each person received. The evening's entertainment was our traditional Great Gift Grab, where beer, an LED flashlight, a car duster, a 5-way safety tool and jam with chocolate were highly coveted and stolen several times.

## **Sunday**

Jim and I opted to skip breakfast Sunday morning, saying if we ate one more thing this weekend we would surely burst. We checked out and were greeted by a fresh 6 or 7 inches of newly fallen snow. A perfect cold, snowy end to a fun-filled wintery Wisconsin weekend!

Thanks so much to Jane and Dennis for giving us a chance to get away from home for a wonderful time with our Miata friends. I wish it could have lasted longer!

See photos here: <https://picasaweb.google.com/Mima.Pipa/BMCWinterGetaway2014?authkey=Gv1sRgClyEgey1qo2D3AE#>

## **Epilogue**

Jane and Dennis will not be doing the BMC Kickoff next year, saying it is time for someone else to take it over. If you are interested, let Toni Thomas (BMC President) know.