

## COME FLY WITH ME....

...and with BW and Fonzi and The White Paper Bird

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Submitted by Ginger Carney



We gathered on the “flight deck” behind the Shell station in Antigo in a light drizzle. Conditions were safe for take-off, so we began our journey in the Northwoods. A couple of us trusted the elements enough to put tops down, but most of us waited until after the first break at REGI (*Raptor Education Group Incorporated*).

Although REGI usually is closed at this time of year, our “flight captains” arranged for a special tour of this amazing facility. We really were impressed with the place – and we learned so much! It’s a sanctuary for injured and sick birds, primarily raptors (*owls, hawks, falcons, and eagles*); however, ducks and geese and turkeys and swans as well as small songbirds are cared for there. Most are healed then reintroduced into the wild, but some cannot be, so they become part of the education programs and/or become “foster parents”. A foster parent is a bird that really does take care of chicks and other young birds, teaching them how to be – well, a bird. That practice prevents birds from imprinting on humans and thus not able survive in their natural habitats. BW is such a bird; a turkey vulture, actually, who was rescued by humans who thought they were doing a good thing, but it prevented BW from surviving in the wild. She lives now at REGI and helps educators Abbey and Joe tell the story of the sanctuary, etc. along with Fonzi, a beautiful owl. (*BW is also a bit of a show-off*).



Another resident is a 40-ish year old bald eagle that, because of a previous wing injury, got caught in the oil from the Exxon Valdez oil spill 20 years ago in Alaska. She is healed but unable to fly. Still she is a majestic bird, the largest bald eagle in captivity in the USA and one of the oldest.

There’s so much I could write about all that we learned at REGI, but that would take pages. It really is a wonderful place. Abbey and Joe were excellent teachers and connected well with our group. Also, Joe has a fun sense of humor.



Time to drop the tops and “fly” to lunch. We had a beautiful drive through forest and valley. Orders were called in earlier, so when we arrived at *Nancy’s Jamar’s Restaurant*. The food was good and the service quick and friendly. (I really liked the fries!) After a group photo it was time to fly again to Wausau and the *Woodson Art Museum*.



Have you been there for its “Birds in Art Exhibit”? Such beautiful pieces – including the white paper bird. Looks like a painting, but it is actually a bird in flight made from hundreds of intricately cut & shaped pieces of white paper then mounted in a white frame. There are other stunning pieces as well, along with the outdoor sculpture garden. We really enjoyed our visit there.

Mark arranged for a police escort as we left Wausau, then we “took wing” through the Harrison Hills and back along the Wisconsin River to Merrill and *Ballyhoos*. We had a room to ourselves where we could spend time relaxing and eating and chatting with each other. As at lunch, the service was very good and the food delicious.

The weather goddess smiled on the day, so the “flying” was pleasant and dry. No need for us to be piqued about not seeing the peak of autumn color in the Northwoods because we had a good peek at what is to come: several patches of brilliant reds, golds, oranges and purples could be enjoyed along the way.

Four couples collaborated on this event; three are relatively new to the BMC. They divided the tasks of choosing the roads/route sections, arranging for the dining options, and finding the two venues to visit. VP Toni Thomas could not have been more impressed with her co-captains, Mark and Dawn, Greg and Joy, and John and Tanya. The collaboration and teamwork were outstanding. John worked up some excellent route directions, too.

Many thanks to our flight captains for a perfect end to our 2016 driving season: tops down, cool temps, and sometimes-sunny skies and no rain; gorgeous scenery, really interesting and beautiful paces to visit; meeting new Miata friends and spending time with “old” ones..... and flying through the Northwoods on an autumn day – how can it get any better for a Miata driver?