

## **The Coolest Drive Ever**    March 25, 2018, Neenah/Appleton

Yes, on Saturday, March 25, five adventure-ready, cozy warm Miatas, one Toyota, and their owners braved the cold (33 degrees) and met in Germantown to trek to Neenah by way of country roads. Going through 4 roundabouts in a row, we then swept past Little Switzerland in Slinger, skirted Big Cedar Lake with lovely forested lanes, zoomed past Sun Burst in Kewaskum, crossed the Milwaukee River three times, discovered Waucousta and Eden and toured around North Fond du Lac. There we saw the sign for the Yellowstone Trail which covers a route from Maine to California. On the way, the homes, farms and soft hills reminded us that Wisconsin is gorgeous.

After a good lunch break at McD's and/or Subway in Neenah, we toured the exquisite Bergstrom.Mahler Museum of Glass, with a great docent who taught us the techniques of glass blowing and paperweight production. The museum showcases the largest collection of glass paperweights in the world. Also, included are Germanic glass, contemporary glass and even some Victorian pieces, all shockingly beautiful. In addition, they were exhibiting student-created Fox Valley Area High School glass pieces that were so impressive they appeared to be made by professionals. The museum, housed in a lovely lakeside mansion, was definitely impressive.

Then a short drive took us into Appleton where we enjoyed shopping and marveling at the goodies at the Wilmar Candy Shop. This yummy, festive place was packed with loyal customers and, though passing up the \$210. chocolate bunny, we did our part to support the delicious destination by picking out Easter treats galore. They even have a kitchen in back that you can use to make your own candy, if you plan to go with the kids.

From there, a few blocks got us to the History Museum at the Castle (otherwise known as the Houdini Museum) adjacent to the beautiful Lawrence University Campus. This unique building resembles a castle, originally the Masonic Temple, and houses three large attractions and one small collection of old time toys. On the first floor we viewed authentic pictures and details of life in an asylum for the chronically insane. This was a very serious and moving exhibit. Next, on the second floor, we learned about the famous career of Eric Weiss, otherwise known as Harry Houdini, the great escape artist who lived in Appleton for four years during his youth. This exhibit contained some of Houdini's artifacts such as a large milk can that he was submersed in, an iron maiden, a coffin, a full body straight jacket, manacles, and other paraphernalia. There were hands-on opportunities to test breath control, strength, balance, etc. which some of our braver members tried. After watching a short video about Houdini, we ventured down to the basement level which showed aspects of life in 19th and 20th century Appleton. We viewed an authentic doctor's office, a newspaper printing room, an industrial sized loom for weaving, and a number of other displays. All those nostalgic scenes were fun to see and a great tribute to the past.

After our cultural excursions, we headed to The Stone Arch Brew Pub in town and what a cool place that was! The restaurant is underground and has brick and mortar walls and "romantic" lighting with a fabulous, varied menu from mac and cheese to New Zealand Red Deer with spaetzle. There was a bounty of beers featured as well as many other drinks. We loved our meal and conversation, leaving Appleton with good memories. Our day was truly fun and we thank Mary Lynn and Tom Cinealis for planning and leading this "cool" tour.