

Power struggle in Puerto Rico

After recent storms ravaged the island, donating generators was complicated enough. Then came the red tape.



Larry Dickenson (far left) of Roanoke delivers a solar power electric generator system to a home on the island municipality of Vieques, Puerto Rico. Dickenson was one of eight Roanoke-area Methodists who traveled to Vieques last week to help distribute 47 generator systems (on a truck, right) purchased with \$65,000 that Western Virginia Methodist churches raised earlier this year. Vieques was without power for seven months after 2017's Hurricane Maria, which destroyed Puerto Rico's electrical grid.

Photos courtesy of Rich McGimsey



The generator kits include solar panels, a battery to store electricity and an inverter. They can run a small refrigerator, a fan and a light or two.

Five months ago, this column told you about 69 Methodist churches from Western Virginia that combined efforts to help Puerto Ricans after the devastation wrought by Hurricane Maria in 2017.

That idea sparked from a 2018 mission trip by Raleigh Court United Methodist Church members, who spent a week in Puerto Rico rebuilding a home destroyed in the storm.

While the Roanokers were on the island, they met a woman who had cobbled together a solar generator from an array of parts she'd been able to scavenge. Maria destroyed the island's electrical grid. Much of it remained down for months, hampering recovery efforts.

The Roanokers returned home, determined to figure out a way to raise money for the purchase of solar generator kits for distribution on the island. They estimated they'd need at least \$50,000 for 50 solar generators, which would cost \$1,000 to \$1,500 apiece.

Western Virginia's Methodists ended up raising \$65,000. That resulted in the purchase of 47 generators. Monday, eight church members returned from Puerto Rico after assembling and delivering battery-backed-up gizmos to residents on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques.

But as happens with the best laid plans, the recent trip went anything but smoothly for the Virginians — Eric Anderson, Larry Dickenson, Michelle Home, Scott McCoy, Joe Downing, Rich McGimsey, Howard Evans and Greg Huffman.

I learned this Wednesday from a slightly panicked email by McGimsey, who also went to



Dan Casey

dan.casey
@roanoke.com
981-3423

CASEY: Situation resolved with patience and an explanation

FROM 1

Puerto Rico on last year's mission trip.

"We have a team of 8 from Roanoke waiting since Monday in the community of Vieques to distribute the generators to 47 families," he wrote me. "Our time here to do what we came to do runs out on Sunday."

The solar generating equipment arrived Sept. 27 in Puerto Rico, McGimsey said. The Roanokers arrived three days later, on Sept. 30. Shortly afterward, the group ran into a hitch known worldwide as bureaucratic inertia, which, in human history, is probably responsible for stymieing more progress than any other single item.

First, the Roanokers were told they had to pay tax on the generators before Puerto Rican authorities would allow the equipment's release from the port. So long as

it was tied up there, the group couldn't get the goods to Vieques.

That wasn't the only you-can't-do-this tale the Virginians heard. The utility responsible for Puerto Rico's electricity didn't want the generator kits distributed because officials feared that would cost the power company 47 otherwise paying customers, McGimsey said.

The Roanokers initially expected the generators to be released Sept. 30, McGimsey told me by phone Monday from San Juan. Next, they thought Oct. 1. Another day passed and still no generators.

Under normal circumstances, such hiccups can be cured with a wad of cash strategically slipped into the right pocket of a key person.

Worldwide, this solution is so famous that just about every language on Earth has its own euphemism for it. Forbes magazine has

published a list of 129 different terms used round the world for something that in the United States goes by the slang "greasing the palm."

(In the Czech Republic, the term translates into "little carp." In Azerbaijan, "respect." In Hungary, oddly, it's known as "Nokia box." The infamous story behind that involves a deputy mayor of Budapest caught with some cellphone packaging stuffed with cash.)

Alas, the Roanokers felt reluctant to stoop to such a level — after all, they are church people.

Not that it didn't occur to them in an idle moment or two, McGimsey said. But bribery "is on the list of forbidden things to do on a mission," he added.

Eventually, they got it worked out with reason, patience and a few prayers.

The Virginians were able to explain to the right Puerto Rican officials that they were work-

ing with ReHace, a Puerto Rican group of 100 Methodist congregations. Because ReHace is a tax-exempt outfit and the generator equipment had been consigned to it, no tax was owed.

To overcome the electric company's objections, families that received the generators had to sign a form stating they would not use them except in the case of a prolonged power outage.

After 11 p.m. Thursday, McGimsey emailed me again.

"The solar panels were released from the port in San Juan and arrived in Vieques late this afternoon," he wrote.

That left the Virginians three days to assemble and distribute the generators to 47 homes, something they had planned to spend six days doing.

"Once we got to the homes, it was just a matter of explaining to the owner how to use it," McGimsey said.

Electricity has been restored to Vieques. Many of its residents went for seven months without power after Maria, McGimsey told me. About 30 percent left their homes and moved to Puerto Rico's main island rather than live with no electricity.

The generator kits include solar panels, a battery to store electricity and an inverter. They can run a small refrigerator, a fan and a light or two. Residents will store the generators until they're needed, McGimsey said.

Hopefully, that'll be never. But if the generators are needed, life should be a bit more bearable the next time the power goes out.

Bravo to the Methodists.



Join the discussion with columnist Dan Casey at roanoke.com



Photos by HEATHER ROUSSEAU | The Roanoke Times

When Dan Casey saw a 1972 BMW 2002 Tii for sale by Dominic Marletta (right), he reminisced 40 years back to the first car he ever owned. Casey paid about \$300 for a light blue, boxy little 1967 BMW 1600 coupe, which looked almost identical to Marletta's car.

'72 BMW: Ultimate memory machine

An old Beamer for sale online sends Dan on a trip down memory lane.

An inventory of Dominic Marletta's life reveals a number of intriguing facets:

One, he's of Italian descent and still has scads of cousins on the island of Sicily.

Two, he obtained his college degree in finance and used to work in that industry in Miami. That city's a rotten place for single guys in their 20s who want to live long and healthy lives, he advised.

Three, for the past dozen or so years he's owned and operated Mamma Maria's, the well-known (four stars on Yelp!) Italian restaurant in Salem.

Four, he's a husband.

Five, he's a cancer survivor.



Dan Casey

dan.casey@roanoke.com
981-3423

Beyond all that, the 39-year-old is a car freak. It's a sickness, he admits.

"My wife [Nicole] says, 'Why do you keep buying cars? It's just a hunk of metal,' Marletta told me. "She'll never understand."

How many vehicles does Marletta own? He seemed reluctant to answer the question. His large garage holds four, not counting Nicole's Subaru Outback. Another's in the shop. More are stored elsewhere.

"My dad's a car guy," he explained. "But he's into Italian cars."

Marletta's particular fetish is for BMWs, the German vehicle known as "the ultimate driving machine." That's what brought us together. Recently, on Craigslist and Facebook, he put up for sale a beautifully restored 1972 fjord blue BMW 2002 Tii.

In color and many other respects, it's nearly identical to my very first car, a 1967 BMW 1600 coupe. I paid \$300 for that miniscule boxy beauty in 1978, named him "Wolfgang" and drove it until 1980, when the transmission crapped out.

By far, Wolfgang was the luckiest car I ever owned. In two years

CASEY: Car evokes memory of muddy night in Md.

FROM 1

driving him, I talked myself out of three arrests, and the car starred in many other non-police-related adventures. Though Wolfgang's 6-volt battery wouldn't turn over the engine when temps were under 50, the four-speed manual was so light, a simple shove could get him going every time.

Anyway, as soon as I saw Marletta's ad, I contacted him. I wanted a ride in that car, a trip down memory lane, so to speak. But there were a couple hitches.

First, Marletta works long hours six days a week, and the ad indicated he has little tolerance for time wasters and tire kickers.

Second, his asking price was \$27,000, cash or cashier's check. To put it mildly, that's a huge stretch for an ink-stained wretch. Nor did I have \$25,000, which is what Marletta says he'll take. He said he's in no rush to sell.

But I had a proposition: Give me a spin in your car, and I'll write about it with a nice spread in the paper. "You can't buy that kind of advertising," I pitched. He agreed.

Sunday afternoon I went out to Glenvar with a friend, Harry Schwarz, who owned a 2002 sedan back in the early '80s. Two of the other cars in Marletta's garage are also BMWs (including another 2002). We poked around for awhile, talked about Beemers. Marletta didn't have time to take us for a spin, though.

Tuesday morning, I was back at his place with photographer Heather Rousseau. Marletta took us out on Poor Mountain and Harborwood roads, two of the windiest in the Glenvar area. Only a couple times did I feel the need to grab a handle on the car's ceiling.

Marletta's BMW is different from Wolfgang in a few respects. It's five years younger and has a 2.0 liter, fuel-injected four-cylinder engine (Wolfgang's was 1.6 liters and sported a carburetor). Like my old car, Marletta's 2002 has no air conditioning, and its oversized steering wheel compensates for



Photos by HEATHER ROUSSEAU | The Roanoke Times

This 1972 BMW 2002 Tii is for sale by Dominic Marletta, who has what one might call a BMW addiction. The car has a four-cylinder fuel-injected 2.0 engine at 140 horsepower.



the lack of power steering.

It's got circular taillights known as "roundies," a hotly sought-after attribute among addicts for antique BMWs. (The taillights on later versions were rectangular, which are much less desirable.)

He's the third owner. He bought it a little more than a year ago from the second owners, a couple of brothers in Vermont who had it for 40 years, he said. They're the ones who restored it, Marletta said.

"I have the receipts," he told me. "They spent \$26,000 to \$28,000 to restore it in 2006."

BMW started making the 1600 in 1966. It was the first model in what became known as the "02

Series," a line of mostly two-door compacts. The most famous version in the series was the 2002. All of them were tiny and boxy. When Car & Driver reviewed the 1600 in 1967, the magazine called it "the best \$2,500 car we've ever driven." (Marletta said his later model sold for about \$4,500 when it was new.)

"This is the car that made BMW in the United States," Marletta said.

Through 1977, the company ended up producing slightly less than 144,000 of the 02 Series cars worldwide. In their early days, the list price was roughly \$1,000 more than a new Volkswagon Beetle. But not too long ago, I saw a cherry 1600 coupe model advertised for \$80,000.

In more than a few respects, Tuesday's ride felt like stepping into a time machine and taking a too-brief jump back 40 years. The engine's low-throated hum was hypnotizing. Marletta and Heather sat in the front seat talking; I was in the rear, reminiscing 1979.

Here's a non felonious Wolfgang story.

One night up in Maryland I went on a date with a nice young woman named Hope Hayes. She was a couple years younger; we knew each other from high school. Hope was bright and pretty and she had a great sense of humor. I think we went out to dinner or something. We had a good time.

After we left downtown Annapolis, I drove Hope and Wolfgang to a dark, out-of-the-way lane that dead-ended at a Franciscan friary just outside Annapolis. She voiced no objections, and I got the impression we were both looking forward to a bit of PG-rated fun. (The car would comfortably seat four midgets, so any real hanky-panky was out of the question.)

Anyway, it had rained hard that day, and, unfortunately, the dark spot where I chose to park was more or less a mud bog. It seemed like Wolfgang's tires were sink-

ing deeper by the minute. So the first order of business was to get unstuck.

Hope jumped into the driver's seat and took the wheel as I climbed out and planted my hands on Wolfgang's trunk. Fortunately, she knew how to drive a clutch. As she alternated between first gear and reverse, I heaved hard. Together, we successfully rocked Wolfgang out of the bog. But that took at least 20 minutes.

For the entirety of that, Wolfgang's rear wheels sprayed globs of dirt backward — on me. By the time I got back in the driver's seat, Hope was giggling madly. Mud dripped from my hair, my beard and covered my front from head to toe.

"I've never seen anyone so dirty!" she said, laughing. Of course, she was still spotless. And she stayed that way.

Half-an-hour later, I dropped Hope off at her parents' house. And then I spent days cleaning the interior on Wolfgang's driver's side. Our first date was our last one, too.

In my case, that spin in Marletta's car served as the ultimate memory machine. If you want to buy it, email him at pazzoforbimmer@gmail.com.

HOOFBEATS & HEARTBEATS

Veterans and mustangs find renewal at New Freedom Farm in Buchanan.



By Mike Gangloff

mike.gangloff@roanoke.com
381-1669

BUCHANAN — Andrew Kintgen was spending Veterans Day as he spends most days now — working at New Freedom Farm with other former warriors and the horses that bring them a measure of peace.

“I kind of consider this my new life, a restart,” Kintgen said.

Once a U.S. Army cavalry scout — with duties that involved armored vehicles, not horses, he is quick to note — Kintgen, 35, said his nine years of military service ended with a medical retirement due to injuries sustained during three tours in Iraq. After that, Kintgen said, he went through a period of personal turmoil that included a divorce and a relocation last summer from Lynchburg to Buchanan.

MORE INSIDE

At 101, Danville veteran shares his story.

Virginia 3

The move was to be closer to New Freedom Farm, which Kintgen had first visited in March.

At the farm, Kintgen discovered that interacting with horses, especially with wild mustangs obtained from federal roundups, restored a sense of

See **VETERANS, 5**

Trump, Democratic candidates tout efforts for veterans

By Hope Yen and Hunter Woodall
Associated Press

ROCHESTER, N.H. — On Veterans Day, President Donald Trump paid tribute to America’s troops at a New York City parade as top 2020 Democratic candidates outlined their plans for the Department of Veterans Affairs, such as naming a woman to run the agency for the first time.

The Democratic proposals, coming two days before historic impeachment hearings, sought to highlight policy differences with the embattled president before a key bloc of voters.

“The president has let veterans down,” said Democrat Pete Buttigieg, the 37-year-old mayor of South Bend, Indiana.



Photos by NATALEE WATERS | Special to The Roanoke Times

Sgt. Andrew Kintgen (top) gives some affection to Bleistein at the New Freedom Farm in Buchanan on Monday. He has been training the mustang since September.

See **POLITICS, 5**

VETERANS: Horses provide veterans break from their troubles

FROM 1

ease that he said he'd lost after a traumatic brain injury and neck damage from a roadside bomb, and after seeing comrades die violently around him. He felt a bond with the wild horses, who had "been through severely traumatic events of their own," Kintgen said.

In September, farm founder Lois Fritz, a Navy veteran and forensic nurse, surprised Kintgen with the gift of a 2-year-old mustang he named Bleistein, after a horse that Theodore Roosevelt owned. In just two months, Bleistein had gone from wild and wary to letting Kintgen sit on his back, although Kintgen did not yet ride him because the horse was too young.

On Monday, Kintgen stood in a pasture with Bleistein, murmuring to him and petting him, then lifting his left forefoot to "shake hands."

"It's a perfect match," Kintgen said.

Since 2016, Fritz has paired rescued equines with veterans who sometimes could use a rescue themselves. The nonprofit that she and husband Mitchell Fritz operate on 13 acres just inside town limits is home to the Fritzes and 19 horses and burros, including seven mustangs.

In a statement tracing the New Freedom Farm's history, Lois Fritz said that after her own experience of renewal from working with horses, she set up the farm to be a "safe and healing environment" for veterans "who are hurting souls like me and who need a break from their troubled worlds."

On Monday, the flags of the Armed Services flew along a pasture fence as veterans and their families visited with horses. More than a dozen veterans and friends had begun the day with a breakfast at the farm's community cen-



Navy veteran Nick Moldovan (top) works with Watson at New Freedom Farm in Buchanan on Monday. "It's a process from wild to mild," Moldovan said of working with the mustang. **Above left:** Army veteran Lisa Oliphant. **Above right:** Sgt. Andrew Kintgen and Bleistein.

Photos by NATALEE WATERS | Special to The Roanoke Times

ter, a renovated stable, prepared by community volunteers. "We call them the New Freedom Farm family," said Mitchell Fritz, known as "Mr. Budget" on the farm's website.

Nick Moldovan — "Navy Nick," as he introduced himself — stood in a pasture petting Watson, a 7-year-old mustang who came to the farm a year and a half ago

and, for months, would allow no one near him.

"He had a 3-foot bubble surrounding him that no one could penetrate," Moldovan recalled.

After a winter of "proximity training," Watson allowed people near and eventually let Moldovan's wife, Ally Wolf, ride him.

"Working with a wild mustang just takes time and patience. ...

You don't break a mustang; you gentle them," Moldovan said.

Moldovan said that his military service included two deployments during the Gulf War, but he had sustained no service-related trauma. But Moldovan said that in his work with Watson, he realized how much stress he carried from what he witnessed in his non-military work as an emergency room

nurse — and found relief.

"It's weird how a horse can bring these things out in you and make you feel better about them when you're with the horse," Moldovan said.

Monday also marked a formalization of a new role for Kintgen. Grinning, the former sergeant handed over a newly printed business card that declared him to be the farm's volunteer barn manager, and also its veteran mentor.

"Working with a wild mustang just takes time and patience. ... You don't break a mustang; you gentle them."

Nick Moldovan

Navy veteran who works with mustang Watson at New Freedom Farm

Kintgen said he takes the mentorship seriously. Veterans drop by the farm daily and many carry hurts that may be as damaging as wounds sustained in battle.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 6,139 veterans killed themselves in 2017, the most recent year for which data was available.

Kintgen said he had lost friends to suicide after their time in the military. While every veteran's situation is different, Kintgen said the transition back to civilian life can itself be a trauma that's hard to recover from.

"It's going from a high to a low super fast," he said.

At New Freedom Farm, veterans are free to visit the horses, join in the work of keeping the farm going, or just rest and enjoy the scenery.

"There is no 'must' out here. ... You can sit under that awning up there all day long and it's completely OK," Kintgen said.

As for himself, Kintgen said he has found a new purpose.

"I am all about this mission," Kintgen said, "of saving one veteran at a time."