

# Big League Deal Makers

Kristi Evans



courtesy of Zach Wagner

**Bill Hawker and Zach Wagner create winning partnerships for the Packers and Tigers (and get to go to every home game).**

By Kristi Evans

As a native of Bourbonnais, Ill.—less than an hour's drive from the Windy City—**Bill Hawker '95 BS** grew up a devout Bears fan. So how does he explain that anomaly in his parents' photo album? It's a shot of Hawker at about age seven on Christmas morning. He's eagerly opening a gift of Bears apparel, but he's decked out in green-and-gold pajamas emblazoned with the name of Chicago's longtime arch nemesis to the north. "I'm not really sure how that happened," he laughed. "All I can say is that they were probably the ones on sale." (His mother confirmed that was the case.)

The irony of the image isn't lost on Hawker. No one could have predicted then that the young Bears fan in the Packers PJs would end up working for both NFL franchises—back to back—during his career. Hawker became the manager of corporate sales in Green Bay last March after several years with the Bears.

"It was definitely a promotion for me," he said during an interview at Curly's Pub in the Lambeau Field atrium. "But personally it was the right thing to do, too, because my wife [**Sara nee Kamitz '94 BS**] and I had a young daughter and were expecting our second child. It was time to get out of the rat race. We own a cabin in the U.P. and my wife's from Gladstone. This is a much better situation for my family. And I don't mind the shorter commute."



While Hawker's main responsibility is to generate revenue for the club, he's involved in much more than sales. His typical game-day checklist reads like this: report to stadium for 8 a.m. production meeting; review status of atrium hospitality areas and private boxes for prospective and current clients; take lap around perimeter in search of prospective partners among companies throwing private parties; scan parking lot for "ambush marketers" trying to sidestep required fee for peddling goods to tailgaters; escort select clients onto field before kickoff; retreat to Packers tunnel, put on headset and assist with player introductions; direct partner halftime promotions; mingle while watching the game.

Hawker also is in charge of advertising signage in the stadium, which at this time is restricted to the scoreboards in each end zone. There are no promotional banners

encircling the “sacred ground” of Lambeau Field, unlike many other modern facilities. And no corporation has purchased exclusive naming rights to the stadium.

“I just don’t see that happening,” Hawker said. “The day we do that is the day we start losing credibility in terms of what we said we stand for: a statewide, publicly-owned franchise that cares for its fans—number one. There will be subtle ways you might see companies incorporated into themed advertising, but I don’t think it will ever be XYZ company at Lambeau Field or XYZ stadium at Lambeau. We have our gate partners on the exterior. That’s probably the biggest corporate branding you’ll see.

“Corporate sales has become a science because there are so many different aspects of a team that you can technically break off and pitch to an advertiser. The ‘less is more’ approach is definitely the higher perceived value. I think that’s what we’ve been successful with in Green Bay. The less you’re selling yourself out, the more it’s worth.”

Away from the field, Hawker works with clients to develop marketing plans that allow them to use the Packers name and logo in their promotional efforts. For example, Associated Bank sponsors the club level at Lambeau Field and

markets Packers checking accounts and debit cards. Johnsonville Brats sponsors the “Tailgater of the Game” in return for high-profile billing on the Web site and in print publications. In another partnership

Hawker inherited, American Family Insurance

joined with the team to sell ball caps with the familiar block “G” logo, but in distinct colors representing health-related issues: pink for breast cancer research in 2005 and red for heart disease

awareness this past season.

Hawker said the key to his profession is relationship development. It sometimes takes months or even a year to close a deal. Timing and connections also help. They’ve certainly worked to Hawker’s benefit—not only in sales, but in advancing his career.

The father of a hometown friend was a high school physical education teacher and moonlighted for the Atlanta Braves. Instead of going to study hall, Hawker would go to the man’s office and help him stuff envelopes to baseball prospects about upcoming clinics.

“I always wanted to work in sports and I asked him how I could get into marketing and game-day type of work,” Hawker recalled. “He said to find a school that offers recreation or sports administration programs and does it successfully. I

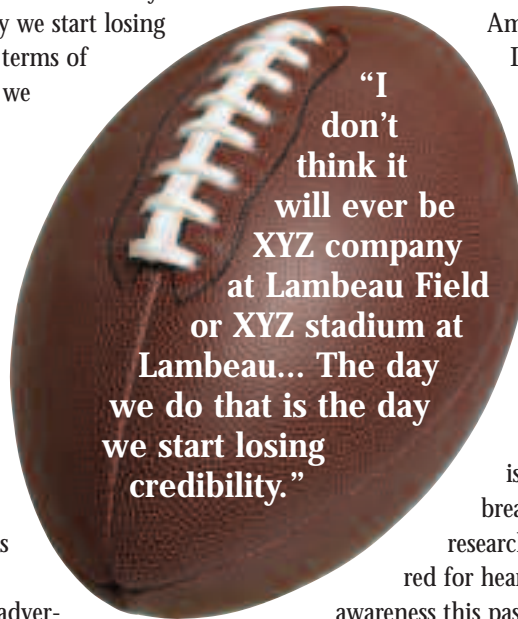
looked at Northern because my family vacationed in the area and it allowed me to do my own thing a nice distance from home. It was a good decision. I got involved in rec services and met lots of great people. Brian Gaudreau was a mentor. We formed a great friendship and have stayed in touch ever since.”

To fulfill an internship requirement, Hawker worked for a summer at the YMCA in his hometown. Administrators were so impressed with his performance that they hired him to fill a vacant sports program director position—despite the fact he had to complete his final semester at NMU before he could assume the full-time duties. Once settled, Hawker did a lot of special-events work with the NFL and became friends with the community relations director for the Bears.

“Over lunch one day I said, ‘Hey, if the janitor job comes open, let me know. I’ll sweep floors to work for the Bears. Two weeks later, he called to tell me the team’s special events and promotions manager was let go.”

Hawker sealed his dream job and later shifted to team sales. He spent more than seven years at Soldier Field before the Green Bay opening surfaced. Any regrets leaving a team that—as of press time—had catapulted to the top of the NFC North division, while the Packers struggled and missed the playoffs?

“You can’t look back and question it,” he said. “We’d be changing jobs every two years if we based our decisions on records alone. The phone rings a lot more when you’re winning, but thankfully we’re not in the business of selling wins and losses; we sell the affiliation with the



team. There are definitely challenges being based in Green Bay because it's a much smaller market than most. But the Packers' name, image and brand are an easy sell overall. There are 72,000-plus fans on the waiting list for season tickets. It's rare to have that level of built-in loyalty regardless of how the team's doing."

A similar reversal of fortunes—to a greater extent and in the opposite direction—greeted **Zach Wagner '99 BS**, a friend of Hawker's and a fellow corporate sales director. Wagner once worked for the hard-luck Lions in Detroit. He ultimately traded the turf at Ford Field for the literally greener grass at Comerica Park. Wagner joined the Tigers just in time to witness the team's remarkable run to the World Series in 2006.

"It was busy, but very exciting. I feel fortunate to have been a part of it," Wagner said. "Last year the team was going through a managerial change and didn't do so well. What I found this year is that people were reliving their childhoods or early adulthoods from when the Tigers were last in the Series in '84. People are very passionate and nostalgic about baseball.

"With success comes greater expectations, but at least now when I'm making phone calls and going out in the community, people are more willing to talk about the Tigers. It's fun. We'll try to strike while the iron is hot and capitalize on the success for the next couple of years."

During the season—extended to about eight months this year as the team played well into

October—Wagner said he focuses on "entertaining clients, executing their contracts and keeping them happy." He attends at least a portion of all 81 home games on the schedule, making sure sponsor promotions or giveaways go smoothly. He also helps coordinate player appearances and autograph sessions.

The most visible components of the corporate sales division's efforts are the promotional signs fans encounter on game day. Wagner cited a deal brokered with a major soft drink company as an example. Pepsi paid to be featured prominently on advertisements in the stadium. The company gets a return on that investment by being granted exclusive "pouring rights" at Comerica Park, which means that only Pepsi products are available at the concession stands.

"They're also given the right to use the Old English 'D' logo in their marketing materials," Wagner explained. "It's powerful to have that association. Many people who are huge Tigers fans see that 'D' on the packaging or see a chance to win a trip. It's intertwining the relationship between business and sports. We work with companies to develop a program that will maximize their expenditure here and give them the most bang for their buck."

In the offseason, Wagner shifts into full sales mode. He negotiates

with existing partners to renew and ideally expand their existing contracts while also prospecting for new sponsors. Such conversations are often held over late-night dinners or between swings on the golf course.

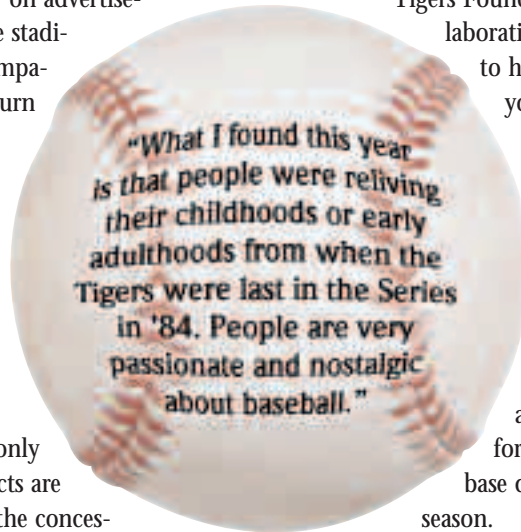
Wagner said one of his biggest challenges is fighting for dollars in the southeastern Michigan economy, which has struggled to recover from the rippling effect of problems plaguing the auto industry.

One of the highlights of his job is a partnership he spearheaded between Starbucks and the Detroit

Tigers Foundation. The collaboration is designed to help inner-city youth improve their lives through baseball. Starbucks donated \$10,000 up front and contributes an additional \$50 for every stolen base during the season.

"It's a very grassroots company that doesn't do sports sponsorships most of the time, but tying into the foundation made sense and complemented Starbucks' mission," Wagner said. To raise awareness for the youth program, three players were honorary baristas at Starbucks locations last season. "Getting them out there was good. We're hoping to expand it more this year. We try to do our best to give back to the community."

Wagner was destined for a career in sports. As the son of a high school football coach, the pigskin



was—and remains—his true passion. He played center and guard from 1994-98 for the NMU Wildcats while pursuing a degree in public relations.

“All along, I was always asking how I could get into sports,” Wagner said. “My intent was to work in marketing for a professional team or organization. I sent my resume to every sports team in the United States. I’m not kidding you—baseball, basketball, football, hockey. The Lions offered me a season-long internship. That’s kind of how most people get started: at the ground level.”

In his four years with the Lions, Wagner helped with on-field

promotions and coordinated fan activities at the spring training camp.

Professional golf was his next calling. He accepted a sales and marketing position with the PGA Ford Senior Players Championship in Dearborn. Wagner’s goal was to drive as much traffic to the event as possible. He handled advertising, ticket sales and the marketing of hospitality areas.

The PGA tour moved the championship to Baltimore, but Wagner wanted to stay in Detroit. He got his wish, thanks to a former Lions colleague who had made the switch to baseball and gave Wagner an inside track to a corporate sales

position with the Tigers organization.

“I enjoy being able to sit and talk to people from all facets of business,” Wagner said. “It might be a waste company, a beverage company and a lawn turf company all in one day. I try to listen to their needs and customize something that will benefit them. We all have excess inventory we’re trying to sell, but I make an effort to listen and create something that makes sense for them rather than pushing them into something that doesn’t. Many people love sports; it’s an escape from the rest of their lives. But for me, sports *is* my life.” ■

## Running with the Pack

By Kristi Evans

NMU senior Kiejuan Davis received a generous parting gift from some Green Bay Packers at the end of his second summer internship as an athletic trainer. But it came with two conditions: Davis had to run eight 100-yard sprints—each within an allotted time with brief rest periods in between; and he had to perform the feat sporting less-than-flattering spandex tights and a half-shirt supplied by wide receiver Robert Ferguson, who instigated the friendly wager.

“It started as a lot of training room banter,” said Bryan Engel, assistant trainer for the Packers. “Robert is always challenging interns to do something, but it never escalated to the point it did with Kiejuan because he was one of Robert’s favorites and vice versa. As other players walked by and heard what was going on, they got involved, saying they would add money to the pool if he could do it.”

The players issued the challenge all in good fun, not realizing that Davis, from Jackson, Mich., was struggling with serious financial concerns at the time. “I had to spend my [internship] check from the Packers on a summer class and I was trying to figure out how I was going to pay for school in the fall,” Davis said. “They had no idea how much I needed the money. I didn’t tell them

why I was doing it, but it made them feel good afterwards knowing how much they helped me.”

Fueled by the added motivation, Davis said he never considered backing out. He did confess to nervousness on the eve of the challenge as he replayed the ribbing from players and other student trainers about the prospect of not finishing or passing out from over-exertion. “They were cracking jokes about whether I could do it,” he said. “It was the same running test we would watch the players do, only they set different times for me.”

At the end of practice the next day, Davis stripped down to his spandex. He began the first of eight dashes down the middle of the field, with players lining both sides cheering him on.

“On the last sprint, they were very excited he was going to achieve it,” said Engel, who was also on the sideline. “Some of them started running with him and when they crossed the finish line, they tackled him and celebrated.”

Davis added: “Once I got going, I knew I could do it. Before practice, they said they’d give me \$2,000 if I made it. By the end of practice, it was up to about \$4,000. That was really nice. It really helped me out.”



# Shooting Stars

Sports photographer Tom Dahlin is one of the best in the field—and this is just his hobby.

By Rebecca Tavernini

When Brett Favre gets poised for a pass, watching intently on the sidelines **Tom Dahlin '79 BS** isn't necessarily hoping that Donald Driver is going to be open to receive it and run it in, or that, please, it doesn't get intercepted. What he's praying for is Favre to step into a little shaft of sunlight that's just broken through the clouds over Lambeau, pouring radiantly down onto the field, and for the football to sail there from his fingers, flinging off bits of ice and mud above the quarterback's fiercely focused face. What he's hoping for is the perfect sports photo. And if he gets it, there's a good chance that the three million readers of *Sports Illustrated* will see just what he saw in that magical instant.

As a freelance photographer working for *SI*, ESPN and the NCAA, covering such teams as the Green Bay Packers, Detroit Lions, Minnesota Vikings, Timberwolves, Twins and Wild, Chicago Bears, visiting teams, University of Minnesota

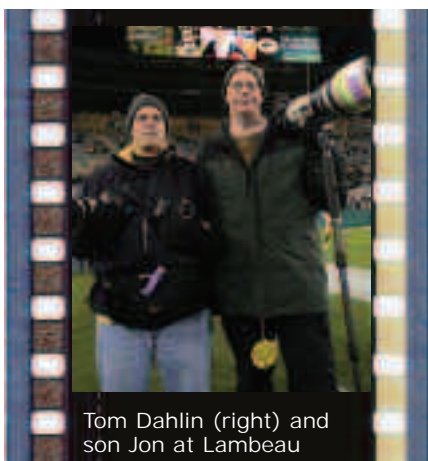
and Big Ten football, basketball and hockey and a number of other sports, Dahlin has the unique opportunity to get close to the action and the players. But usually the last thing he's thinking of is the excitement of the game. "I really enjoy going to the games, but I'm so busy concentrating on getting the shot, on anticipating where the action will be next, that I don't go as a fan at all," said Dahlin, who lives in Minneapolis. "I almost feel like a coach, always focused on what's going to happen in the next play. And like a coach, I find that a lot of times it doesn't work out that way."

On the sidelines, he does enjoy a certain amount of freedom of movement, although with three or four cameras strapped around his neck and lenses nearly the length of his arm, he tries to camp at a few key spots. However, the TV cameras rule. "Everyone has to work around the television crews," he explained. "They get to go where they want because they're paying the bills." Even with errant running backs, flying pucks and cascading clusters of seven-foot-tall basketball players, surprisingly, he and his equipment rarely get injured. "But I did get clocked real good last year at a Vikings game," he said.

Because of the amount and value of camera equipment he brings with him to each game, Dahlin prefers to cover games within driving distance of his home. He especially enjoys shooting at Lambeau Field and Soldier Field because of the natural light available, which during football season has a strong directional angle that makes for richer photographs, and for the real grass and dirt kicked up that provide authenticity. Other venues, like ice hockey arenas or the

Minneapolis Metrodome, are more challenging with their sterile indoor lighting and artificial turf or white ice.

Dahlin has found a way to get around that, however, by using remote-control or infrared photography. "I always try to get something different than other photographers," said Dahlin, whose work has also appeared in *TV Guide*, *USA Today* and *Sports Illustrated Kids*, and who has been awarded first place in the highly respected Nikon-sponsored Sports Shooter Workshop.



Tom Dahlin (right) and son Jon at Lambeau

Reasoning that a photographer can't be at all places at once, no matter how skilled at predicting plays, and that some places are too dangerous to be anyway, Dahlin sets up four to six prefocused remote control cameras in key action areas, such as on the top of a basketball backboard, inside a hockey goal, on a football goal post or arena ceiling. He then presses a button on a transmitter to take the picture. A photo he took of the Timberwolves' Kevin Garnett looking up through the rim with his arms outstretched was blown up to 10' x 20' and displayed in the Target Center Skyway for the season. With a remote camera behind the Milwaukee goal during last year's NCAA Frozen Four, Dahlin captured a frame seconds

after the winning moment—the Badgers' goalie and another player jubilantly leaping at each other in the air—a two-page spread in *ESPN Magazine*. A second camera, focused on the same goal, but mounted directly above, yielded a full-page shot in *Sports Illustrated*.

Infrared photography creates a surreal artistic quality in photographs. Dahlin had one of his cameras converted to an infrared model, which blocks visible light and lets infrared light pass through.

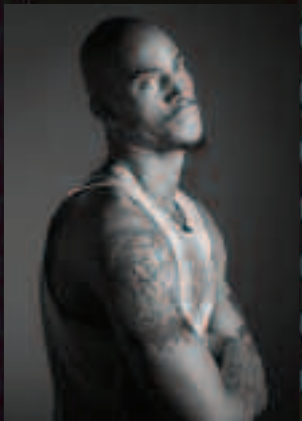
"The infrared and remote control ideas came to me directly from my science and engineering background," he explained. "I thought 'what if' and I tried it, knowing it would be very technical and difficult to do."

That background was honed at NMU, where Dahlin majored in engineering technology and minored in math/computer science. (His father, Gene, taught in NMU's industrial arts and vocational guidance departments from 1957-71.) As a student working in the sports information bureau, Dahlin was able to continue with his interest in photography that started in high school.

"I have to give kudos to Don Pavloski [former NMU photographer] for the great job he did teaching me sports photography, the opportunities he gave me to shoot Wildcat sports, and the trust he had in me," he said. In covering Wildcat football during the late '70s, Dahlin remarked, "Little did I know that I'd be seeing Steve Mariucci on the sidelines 20 years later."

"I also received invaluable hands-on experience as a work-study electronics technician at WNMU-TV under the supervision of Jerry Ely."

During his time at NMU, microprocessors were just emerging.



“Bill Rigby was one of the first guys to get on the bandwagon,” recalled Dahlin. “He had such great enthusiasm for what could be done with them.” Concurrent with the beginning of the microprocessor revolution, there was a great demand for graduates with software skills. Dahlin took an introductory course in programming from Terry Seethof and found he loved that discipline as much as electronics. Several courses later he had a minor in math/computer science.

“I came out of Northern very well prepared to step right into work, and making more money than I ever imagined!” He stepped right into Honeywell in Minneapolis as an electronics engineer working on defense systems projects with microprocessor sensors. It was a job he enjoyed for 10 years, during which time he was named an NMU Outstanding Young Alumnus.

The next 10 he worked at 3M on new product design. He said 3M gave employees a lot of freedom, permission to take risks and permission to fail. He worked on several imaging-related projects utilizing research-quality digital cameras long before consumer-grade versions became available.

After that, he was one of the first employees to join a start-up company, Stratasy, making rapid prototype machines, which create plastic models from 3D computer images.

“Then I got the bug to go off on my own and do freelance engineering,” he said. Not one to burn bridges, he does consulting work for his past employers and others.

Dahlin holds four U.S. patents: two for rapid prototyping systems developed at Stratasy and two for a snowplow guidance system

developed at 3M, which uses conformable magnetic pavement marking tape to allow snowplow operators to sense the road edge while driving in white-out conditions.

He bought his first digital camera in 2000 for \$5,000. It was a one megapixel Nikon D1 SLR. While some photographers have been slow to convert to digital, Dahlin was sold from the start. “The beautiful thing is that you know immediately if you’ve got the shot,” he said. And at halftime or between quarters, he has images he took moments ago already streaming to magazines.

Ironically, after he graduated from Northern, Dahlin pretty much didn’t touch a camera for the purpose of simply taking photographs until his sons started playing sports in high school. “My first assignment came from *Sports Illustrated* to shoot the Vikings because of a photo I took at one of my son’s football games, where his team was playing the eventual NCAA Division 3 national champions, St. John’s University,” said Dahlin. “One thing led to another and I started shooting bigger venues and pro teams.”

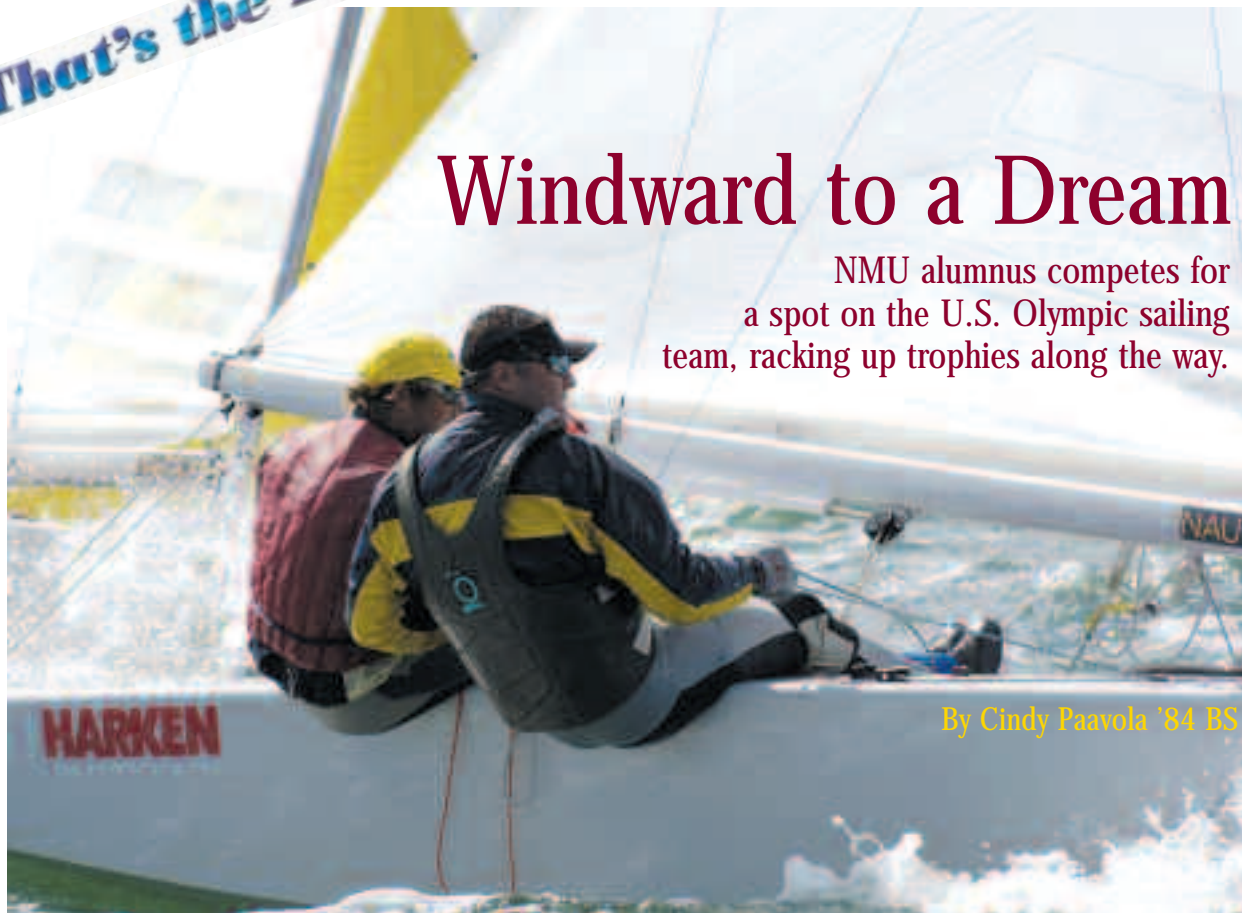
That same son, Jon, now assists his father at games and is following his interest in computer science, in addition to earning a history degree. His other son, Jayme, will be attending medical school. Tom and his wife, **Nanette (Luoma) ’77 BS**, are looking forward to moving back to the U.P., to a log cabin they’ve built near Ironwood, rather close to Tom’s hometown of Bessemer, and a handy location to continue combining his flair for invention with his skill for photography, capturing the defining moments of Midwest sports. ■

That's the Life!

# Windward to a Dream

NMU alumnus competes for a spot on the U.S. Olympic sailing team, racking up trophies along the way.

Walter Cooper/US SAILING



By Cindy Paavola '84 BS

Mark Strube, right, and Mark Mendelblatt competing in US Sailing's 2006 Rolex Miami Olympic Class Regatta.

As a business administration-management major at Northern, **Mark Strube '92 BS** had no intention of becoming a professional sailor. In fact, football and finances were what motivated his future plans.

After graduating, the former Wildcat gridder (1987-91) moved to Florida, where he played as the 1994 Orlando Predators' backup quarterback in the Arena Football League while working on his master's degree in business management at the University of Miami. He then went on to become a stockbroker, and it was in that position that a supervisor provided the impetus for a life-changing career switch.

"I was working as a stockbroker in West Palm Beach and taking a lot

of time off to sail. My boss wasn't happy with that and called me in his office one day. He said I needed to make a decision: stop sailing and make more cold calls or go sailing and stop working with the firm. I had to follow my dream. In 1997, I quit the firm to go sailing," said Strube.

"That summer I met one of the greatest sailors of all time, Buddy Melges. I told him that I was interested in getting involved with the America's Cup. He had ties with a team and told me to give him my resume, which he forwarded to the America True team with his recommendation. Not long after that, I went to San Francisco to try out and made the team. Since then, I have been involved with three other Cup teams: Aloha Challenge in 1999-

2000, One World Challenge in 2001-2003 and currently, the Victory Challenge."

Sailing was a new career but not a new experience for the Milwaukee, Wis., native. His dad, Roger, was an avid sailor, and Strube basically grew up on the water at the South Shore (Milwaukee) Yacht Club.

Today, he participates in three types of racing: match, big boat and Star.

"I enjoy the team aspect of sailing and I get something different from each of these races. Much like playing football, sailors take different positions and perform different sequential maneuvers on the boat. The boat slows down if one person is late."

In match racing, teams compete two at a time in a one-on-one



format. Typically, 10 to 12 teams race in a round robin, which leads to a semifinal, and a final race determines the winner. The most widely known big boat match race is the America's Cup. Strube rates participating in three America's Cups as his most satisfying sailing accomplishment "because of the prestige of the event.

"In match racing, prize money is usually involved, but in the America's Cup there is no prize money. However, crews are well paid and I get to see many old friends in different locations around the world," said Strube, who today calls West Palm Beach home.

In match racing, Strube's teams have won the 1998 New Zealand Match Racing Championships, the 1999 Australia Cup and the 2006 Ficker Cup.

In January, the NMU alumnus traveled to Dubai, United Arab Emirates, where he will train into February. Then he'll return to Valencia, Spain, where he trained last year, to complete his training for April's Louis Vuitton Cup, the qualifying race of the America's Cup. The America's Cup is held June 23 through July 2 ([www.americascup.com](http://www.americascup.com)).

In the Star class, Strube is currently fourth in the world rankings with George Szabo and seventh with Mark Mendelblatt. The latter was named US Sailing's 2006 SportsMan of the Year. Strube has been a part of the Star-class crew that won the 1997 North American Championships, the 2005 Bacardi Cup, the 2006 Kiel Week and the 2006 European Championships.

In this category, Strube has his sites set on Beijing, China, and the 2008 Summer Olympic Games. The

United States will send one team for each qualified Olympic Class. A 16-race regatta will be held in Los Angeles next fall to determine the Star Class representative.

"Sailing the Star is fun for me because all boats are on a level playing field with only a skipper and one crew. In 2000, I was ranked fourth and in 2004, I was third. I am hoping that in 2008, I skip second and get right to the top."

To do so, Strube said he will need to do his "homework."



Strube (right) being awarded the 1st place crew trophy and a navigator watch for the 2006 Rolex Baltic Race.

"There is no substitute for time on the water. You need to study the sails and the rig, and you need to get the best possible equipment to give your team a chance. In addition to knowing the boat inside and out, we study the wind and current information for each racing location. Physical training is intense. I lift weights and do a lot of aerobic exercise. The approach to training and discipline I experienced as part of the Wildcats has served me well in sailing."

Fundraising is also a homework assignment.

"Although small grants are awarded to defray costs, the Olympic Sailing Team is not paid. I will need to make a serious fundraising effort to support my voyage to the Olympics."

What's great about being a professional sailor?

"Sailing in big breezes and big waves is very cool. I've also been able to travel around the world and meet a lot of interesting people, such as Bill Clinton, James Caan, and the King and Queen of Norway."

But Strube said that sailing has its frustrating and frightening moments, too.

"The most challenging thing is sailing in light air. You need to have a lot of patience then. The scariest sailing situation I experienced occurred during a race from St. Petersburg, Fla., to Isla Mujeres, Mexico. We were off the coast of Cuba and a white squall came through. It was blowing over 40 knots and the seas were building to over 14 feet. I was sailing on a 70-footer and, after the squall blew over, the boat crashed through the huge seas that remained. About 30 feet of the bow—nearly half the boat—was coming off the front side of the waves and then crashing down the backside. I thought the boat was going to break in two because it was banging against the waves so hard!"

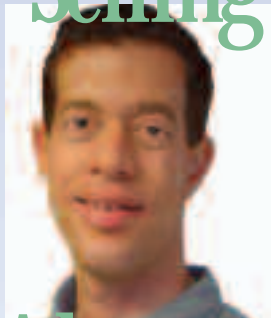
Regardless of the weather conditions, the water is where Strube knows he was meant to be. He followed his dream and has never looked back.

"It's easy to be motivated when you do something you love and get a paycheck doing it!"

It also doesn't hurt that no daily necktie is required. ■

That's the Life!

## Selling



## Adventure

By Rebecca Tavernini

Love of the outdoors is something that either brings students to Northern or inevitably gets ingrained in them while they're here. For many, it's a dream to find a job that combines their passion for outdoor activities with a life-sustaining wage. For a lucky few, it's a reality. Among the lucky ones is **Paul Conwell '95 BS**, supervisor of an L.L. Bean Outdoor Discovery School.

His day-to-day job involves conducting in-store clinics for customers interested in learning cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, fly-tying, cycling, camping and hiking and using global positioning systems (GPS) devices. This spring, he'll be responsible for hiring, training and supervising a team of instructors who will conduct Walk-On Adventures in kayaking and fly casting—a one- to two-hour experience with all equipment provided.

"At this point, I have only been with L.L. Bean for four months," Conwell said. "The entire time has been a wonderful learning experience for me. I have had the added challenge of being the first person to hold the Outdoor Discovery School supervisor position in the company. This has allowed me to have extra

creative freedom to help define my daily responsibilities, and in blending the Outdoor Discovery Center into the store."

Sometimes his activities take him beyond his Burlington, Mass., retail store, to teaching local boy scouts GPS, map and compass skills or conducting outreach events in the community. And in the store, there's all that cool gear he gets to learn about, train employees on and explain to customers. His favorite part of the job? "All of it!" he enthusiastically said. "I truly love what I do.

"I was able to confirm my passion for the outdoors at NMU," he recalled. Even though he grew up in East Lansing, his mom, Marge Forslin, who now lives in Marquette, encouraged him to go away to school. "He always yearned for friends who loved the out-of-doors as much as he did, so coming to NMU was just right for him," she said.

"I was fortunate enough to have wonderful guidance and opportunities with Jean Kinnear and the outdoor recreation program," he said.

He put his outdoor rec degree to work at DownWind Sports in Marquette and then he moved to Boston and began working for Eastern Mountain Sports, climbing his way up to store manager. Last year, a former co-worker recruited him to L.L. Bean. He and his wife, **Barbara (Pavegio) '97 BS**, an optician, enjoy the active life out east.

"At this point I see the outdoor retail field as one that I will hopefully spend a long time in," he said. "I have had a great time for the last 10 years, and can't think of anything else I would enjoy as much." With more than 500 people having already participated in his recreation clinics, it's clear that his sense of fun is contagious. ■

# Fl a



"I dipped my feet in and said, 'forget this.' As I went in farther, my lips started swelling up and I felt a major head rush."

So begins **Mickey Gopigian's '94 BS** vivid recollection of his first dive in frigid Lake Superior as part of a basic scuba class at Northern. "Once you got underwater it wasn't so bad because you were looking around and not thinking about it," he added. "But we all raced back to the locker room afterwards and took hot showers to warm up."

Gopigian laughs at the memory now. It's easy to have a sense of humor when you're sharing such details over the phone while basking in a sun-drenched, 85-degree afternoon from an enviable perch overlooking the Atlantic. Gopigian lives on the island of Providenciales—Provo, for short—in Turks and Caicos. He leads tourists on scuba sightseeing adventures as the

# Flamingo Divers

By Kristi Evans



operator of Flamingo Divers.

The fact he's turned a favorite hobby into a business proves that Lake Superior's chilly reception during that first scuba outing did not deter Gopigian. He signed up for the advanced class and earned his dive master certification while at NMU, training in the campus pool and in the open water by the ore docks and Presque Isle.

"Superior is awesome for [ship]wreck diving," he said. "Cold water is a great preservative, so once ships go down, they pretty much stay in the same condition. In warm water, coral starts growing on the wreckage and Toredo worms eat the wood. There's nothing left after a while. I did plenty of diving in Munising, which is like an underwater sanctuary for shipwrecks."

Gopigian was a broadcasting major and film minor. A native of the Detroit area, he worked at some television stations in that vicinity after graduation. But he missed diving and preferred filming in a natural environment. He enrolled in the Florida Institute of Technology's

"sport diving operations" program before accepting a job as an underwater videographer in Tortola, British Virgin Islands. Gopigian transitioned to a scuba trainer and guide during his nine-year stay there. He served in a similar capacity in Grand Cayman before moving to Provo.

**A typical Flamingo Divers tour leaves the dock at 8:30 a.m. After traversing the Provo Bank, a wide expanse of shallow water stretching about 18 miles, the boat reaches the drop-off point—known as "the wall."**

"This is the most populated island and the main tourist destination in Turks and Caicos. Back in the '60s, a development company came here and built an airport. Residents here used to rake for salt or grow cotton. Now tourism is the main source of revenue."

Flamingo Divers targets those who want a small-group experience, with no more than eight participants per expedition. Gopigian said diving has evolved from a "military style of instruction" that intimidated some people to a more family-oriented activity that is gaining popularity.

The equipment is safer, too. Instead of only an air regulator hooked to a tank propped on a diver's back, there are pressure gauges and an "octopus" alternate air source to replace the desperation buddy-breathing technique. "But divers should still know how to use the recreational dive tables to know how deep they can go for how long without getting the bends," Gopigian added. "The recreational dive tables have evolved from the Navy's decompression tables. Dive computers are also being used more commonly now, allowing divers to safely extend their bottom time."

A typical Flamingo Divers tour leaves the dock at 8:30 a.m. After traversing the Provo Bank, a wide expanse of shallow water stretching

# That's the Life!



All photographs by Mickey Gopigian

about 18 miles, the boat reaches the drop-off point—known as “the wall.” Instructors typically give a dive briefing before leading their customers to depths of 80-100 feet.

“We have to keep a pretty close eye on people who are diving in an ocean for the first time,” Gopigian explained. “In a lake, you can go down 15 feet and know you’re getting deeper because the temperature starts dropping and it turns pretty dark. In an ocean, where you have 100-200 feet of visibility, you could go down about 150 feet without having a clue unless you’re looking at your depth gauge. That’s one thing about wall diving. The wall starts between 30 and 60 feet, but drops off to 1,000 to 7,000 feet, depending on where you are. Here and in Cayman, it’s all about wall diving. In the Virgin Islands, there aren’t any walls; mainly rock pinnacles and spur and groove coral formations.”

Gopigian’s company offers excursions to three different locations, each with numerous underwater sites to explore. Some have unique or interesting names. At West Caicos—known for its dramatic walls and the chance to spot bigger marine life—there’s “Becky’s Beautiful Bottom,” a site lined with

“This past summer, we saw a lot of big stuff: a whale shark, a hammer head, some manta rays. We also see a number of humpback whales come around here from January through April.”

huge coral heads and barrel sponges inhabited by fish and other creatures. At Northwest Point, the “Thunderdome” wreck site features a partial steel structure covered with scallops, clams and Christmas tree worms. And at French Cay, there’s

Mickey Gopigian in his business attire.



the “G Spot,” named for the large amounts of gorgonian coral growing on the wall.

Taking advantage of his expertise in photography, Gopigian updates the Flamingo Divers Web site ([www.flamingodivers.com](http://www.flamingodivers.com)) daily with shots of impressive marine-life encounters. These range from spotted eagle rays, reef sharks and dolphins to smaller critters like moray eels and spiny lobsters to a vibrant array of tropical fish. “This past summer, we saw a lot of big stuff: a whale shark, a hammerhead, some manta rays,” he said. “We also see a number of humpback whales come around here from January through April.”

Gopigian has found a way to make a living doing what he loves. And he’s working in an environment where wetsuits are optional—not necessities to ward off hypothermia. “I had a lot of fun diving in Lake Superior while I was up there. Once you get a taste of warm-water diving, though, it’s hard to go back.” ■

# Ultra Runner

By Cindy Paavola '84 BS

He doesn't mean to, but **Jim Dawson '91 BS** puts to shame those of us who view leaving the couch for the gym as a major sacrifice.

About seven years ago, Dawson decided to take up running again, something he had done a lot of at Northern.

"I had always been an athlete, but once I got out into my career, I got away from athletic-competitive physical activity. A while back, I decided I wanted to train again, get back to being more athletic, so I started running," said Dawson.

First he trained for shorter competitive races, then marathons, then adventure racing, triathlons, ironman triathlons, multi-sport races involving mountain biking, kayaking and orienteering, then ultra runs.

In November, Dawson finished seventh and was the top American in the Sahara Race, a seven-day, 150-mile ultra run across the White Desert in Egypt. The race was televised on NBC as part of the "Racing the Planet" series. It was a self-supported competition, meaning the 60 competitors from 17 different countries were required to carry all their own food, gear and clothing and do their own cooking at the base camp each night. The only tasks not done by the racers were carrying water and putting up tents.

Dawson said completing the Sahara Race so successfully ranks as his top athletic accomplishment.

"I remember the feeling I had when I finished my first-ever marathon. When I crossed that finish line I felt like I could do anything, there was no goal too big. Finishing this race, which we did at the foot of the Great Pyramids (and that was pretty cool) was just like that. It was a complete rush."

Additionally, he said experiencing the Sahara

Desert is something he'll never forget. "A lot of the Sahara looked just like you'd expect it to. But I was really surprised at how many formations there are out there—just miles of them.

Having been an ocean at one point, it also had big stretches where we were running on carbonized coral, fossils and shellfish—sort of a gravel texture—and then there were other stretches of hard-packed lava surface. But regardless of the surface, it was all very hot."

The Plymouth, Mich., resident who has worked in manufacturing quality control with small automotive supply companies for the past 16 years said the most critical tasks were managing one's feet—"blistering was inevitable"—recovery time and sleep, as well as hydration.

During the run he found himself "thinking about everything and nothing at all" simultaneously. And he had a movie-like moment when a sandstorm blew up during one of the stages. "When the storm was over, I looked down at my shoes and they looked as if they were brand new. The storm had sandblasted the dirt right off."

The 39-year-old grew up competing in several of what he calls the Midwestern mainstream sports: football, track, baseball and wrestling. But now he wishes more kids were exposed to some of the other sports that are less well known, like biking, rock climbing and, naturally, cross country running.

Dawson, who often carries his NMU flag during his competitions, admits his family and friends thought he was "kind of crazy" when he started doing adventure racing, but said they have come to respect his athletic endeavors because they understand it's his way of challenging his limits.

"One of the things I've learned through this is that everyone should keep challenging themselves. Figure out what you're passionate about, what brings you joy and pushes you to another level, and then, no matter what that is, keep doing it. Make time in your life for something like that. It will change you for the better." ■



# Calling the Shots

Two pro announcers share their views from the booth



## Mike Gleason

by Kristi Evans

**M**any former athletes and coaches have parlayed their success and name recognition into second careers as sports broadcasters. ESPN's **Mike Gleason '78 BS** took the direct route to announcing, but it wasn't entirely by choice.

"If I had my druthers, I would have been a professional baseball player," he said. "My dream was to play for the Tigers. I was scouted by them when I was 18, but didn't make it. I realized very few actually get to that level."

A Negaunee native, Gleason also excelled at prep basketball and football. He played the latter for one season at Central Michigan University before transferring to Northern. When Gleason learned from a professor that he could earn college credit doing play-by-play for Wildcat football, he decided to trade his helmet for headphones.

"Northern won the national championship the year I quit. The year after I left CMU, they won it,

too," Gleason laughed. "You know that comic strip 'Born Loser'? That's me. My timing wasn't the greatest, but it turned out to be the right decision."

He was studying to be a high school history teacher and football coach at the time, but Gleason's brief stint in the broadcast booth convinced him to change his major. After graduating from Northern, he worked at television stations in Michigan, California and Ohio before joining ESPN-Plus in Charlotte, N.C.

Gleason calls Big Ten college football and basketball games. He also serves as a studio host for syndicated pre-game, half-time and post-game shows on both ESPN-Plus and ESPNU.

"By doing both, you don't get burned out as fast," he explained. "Hosting in the studio can make for a long day because you have to prep

**One of his biggest challenges is trying to maintain his energy and enthusiasm—not to mention the audience's attention—during a blowout.**

on so many different things. With play-by-play, you just prep on two teams and you get to be at the game, feeling the emotion of the crowd. When the game's over, you're done except for the travel. If push came to shove, I'd rather be out doing the games.

"I really like interacting with the players and getting to know the coaches on a personal level. It's hard to pull against a Tom Izzo because

you know him. But it's hard to pull against the Northwestern coach because he's a nice guy. You just have to be objective on the air and not make your personal feelings obvious."

Whether in an East Coast studio or at a Midwest venue, Gleason's schedule is demanding. He puts in six or seven days per week—particularly when the two seasons overlap. The pace slows down during the summer, when he becomes a "utility" announcer for ESPN. In that capacity, he calls everything from the NCAA men's gymnastics championships with former U.S. Olympian Bart Conner to the Junior League World Series of baseball and girl's softball.

While radio play-by-play announcers have to describe the action in detail to help listeners visualize what's happening, television broadcasters have more flexibility to supplement their game commentary with other content.

"ESPN is really big on storytelling. Every player on a roster has a story. It might be someone who was injured his junior year in high school and didn't get recruited like some expected. Or it might be

someone like Colt McCoy, the freshman quarterback at Texas. He heard someone scream for help across a lake at night, jumped in and swam across the pitch-black water and saved the guy's life."

One of his biggest challenges is trying to maintain his energy and enthusiasm—not to mention the audience's attention—during a blowout. Gleason recalls a Clemson-Temple football game that ended

63-9. The wide scoring margin was compounded by another hurdle: Clemson's jerseys. They were bright orange with white lettering. Gleason had trouble distinguishing the numbers to identify the players.

"I've had great eyesight, but that day my vision just tweaked. It was a surreal feeling being on live TV and trying not to make it obvious. But the guy upstairs must have been looking down because no one at the office noticed."

Gleason said it's rewarding to know that his efforts on grueling football Saturdays are being viewed by friends and family in the Upper Peninsula. His mom watches the games on a Green Bay station. Gleason and his wife, **Lynn '80 BS**—who also hails from Negaunee—visit their hometown regularly, but not as often as they'd like.

While he was not able to fulfill his childhood goal of wearing a Tigers uniform, Gleason did follow the path of one of his favorite idols affiliated with the team: Ernie Harwell. He had grown up listening to the Radio Hall of Fame broadcaster and had his first opportunity to meet him in 1980.

Gleason was working at WLUC-TV in Marquette that year. He had arranged an interview with Milwaukee Brewers manager George Bamberger. While waiting in line with his camera and microphone, Gleason turned around and spotted Harwell. He decided to interview the legendary broadcaster as well and politely requested an opportunity to shoot some additional video in the press box.

"I was a pest for three innings and thanked him for his time. He told me to put the camera down and pull up a chair. During the broad-

cast he announces, 'A friend of mine from the U.P. is here. Mike, what's that restaurant in Marquette...?' I knew the one he meant but I drew a total blank on the name. I was haunted for years and felt like an idiot. When I went to a station in Flint, I saw Ernie at Tigers Stadium all the time. He is one of the finest human beings I've ever encountered in the business. It's a thrill to meet someone famous who's a genuinely nice person and still has his feet firmly planted on the ground."

Harwell proved that if there's one consolation to being a broadcaster instead of an athlete, it's career longevity. He worked into his 80s and two other "old-school" favorites of Gleason's are still in the business at around 70: Dick Enberg and Brent Musburger. Gleason does not attempt to imitate these influences behind the microphone—he said it's important for broadcasters to develop their own announcing style. But one thing he would like to emulate is their staying power. ■



## Bob Chase

by Cindy Paavola '84 BS

**B**ob Wallenstein '52 BS of Ft. Wayne, Ind., wishes legendary Los Angeles Dodgers radio play-by-play announcer Vin Scully would retire, not because he doesn't like

Scully—he's a big fan, actually—but because Wallenstein, a.k.a "Bob Chase" in the radio industry, is only one year behind Scully as the longest active play-by-play announcer in sports.

**Chase estimates he's probably called close to 4,000 Komets games in his career. "Why the heck would I want to retire when I'm having so much fun?" he said.**

Chase, who turned 81 in January, has been covering amateur and professional sports for 54 years, all for the powerful 50,000-watt talk radio station WOWO-AM 1190 of Ft. Wayne.

"I think Vin is a few years older than me, but I'm right behind him in broadcasting years," said Chase. "I jokingly tell people that he may hold the current record for consecutive years of play-by-play, but I hold the record for play-by-play with one team in one city."

To say Chase's career has been vast is an understatement. He's covered everything from high school sports to NASCAR to some NHL games for the St. Louis Blues, Detroit Red Wings and Boston Bruins. He's turned down NHL announcing jobs several times. He's received numerous honors, ranging from the most prominent citizen award in Indiana to induction into various sports halls of fame. He had the number 40 jersey retired in his honor by the U.S. Hockey League Komets as part of the celebration of his 40th year with the team—14 years ago. At one point, he was even the Komets' general manager.

One of Chase's least known but most historically significant accomplishments is that he was the first-ever radio disc jockey selected to try out the Westinghouse System at WOWO, a revolutionary new radio format in the 1950s that introduced DJs to the airwaves in an attempt to boost the medium's popularity when threatened by the advent of television. During the early portion of his career, Chase was ranked one of the top 10 DJs in the country.

**He still wakes at 3 a.m. and heads to work by 4 a.m.  
Monday through Friday to do the station's  
morning sports show.**

Born in Negaunee and reared in Marquette, Chase was a multi-sport athlete, which included playing hockey, one of his favorites. After high school he joined the Navy. When he was discharged from the military, he enrolled at Northern.

At six-foot-six and nearly 200 pounds, he was noticed one day by a guy who came up to him and told him that he was going to play on Northern's basketball team. "It turned out to be Coach C.V. Money and he didn't really give me a choice about it," Chase said with a laugh. "Then one year, he told me I had to go out for football if I wanted to play basketball, so I went out for football for a year. Again, he didn't ask; it wasn't up for discussion."

Chase got his start with WOWO when an aunt of a Northern classmate heard him broadcasting for WDMJ radio in Marquette. The aunt was a friend of the WOWO station manager and recommended he check out Wallenstein.

"Back then, I never thought of radio as a career; I was in the busi-

ness program. The radio job was just a way to help pay for school," said Chase, who met his wife, Muriel, when she was a student at St. Luke's School of Nursing, taking classes at Northern.

The station manager requested a tape, liked what he heard and offered him a job, but told him he'd have to change his name. "He was ready to pick one out for me, but I had one—Bob Chase, Chase being my wife's maiden name," he said.

"Of course, my father-in-law, who had five daughters, loved that."

Shortly after he started at WOWO he was promoted to sports director, a position he has held ever since. He still wakes at 3 a.m. and heads to work by 4 a.m. Monday through Friday to do the station's morning sports show. His friends, many who retired decades ago, think he's crazy. But Chase isn't looking to retire anytime soon; he's having way too much fun.

"It's the best. I've been having the time of my life for more than 50 years. People say I should retire and I say, 'Retire? Why the heck would I want to retire when I'm having so much fun!' I'm thankful to be healthy, which enables me to be able to continue to do what I love."

Chase estimates he's probably called close to 4,000 Komets games in his career, missing only about 20 games in 1998 when he had open-heart surgery due to a rare heart infection. He loves everything about covering hockey: preparing for the games, covering the games, traveling on the bus with the team.

"People can't understand why I like the bus trips, especially at my age, but they're great. It's a time when I'm away from the phone and I get to read, do crossword puzzles, watch movies and hang out with the guys.

"There's something about the personality of hockey players that never really changes from decade to decade. I love their game and they know it, and I think they appreciate the history I can provide them about hockey. The guys are very respectful, but more importantly, they let me just be one of the boys and that helps to keep me young."

While some may look down on bus travel, it's a drastic improvement from the earliest days of Chase's career when "we all piled into about four cars and drove. Of course, there were only 13 players on each roster back then."

Mode of travel isn't the only thing that changed since Chase started in sports broadcasting. Technology has contributed significant improvements to broadcasting equipment, which is now smaller and lighter.


"Back then, I would haul two huge suitcases to carry everything that was needed to broadcast a game," said Chase. "Now, I can almost fit it all in my briefcase."

While Chase, who still calls Marquette "home" and returns to the area each summer, doesn't know when he'll retire, he does know the exact sign that will tell him to do so.

"The day my wife, Muriel, doesn't like the show is when I'll know to stop. She wouldn't lie and tell me I was doing a good job if I wasn't."

Until then, look out Vin Scully, Bob Wallenstein/Chase is right behind you. ■





ACTUAL PROPERTY PHOTO

# SEE WHAT YOU'RE MISSING

**Premier Homesites on Lake Superior  
30 minutes from Marquette**

*1-32 acres*

*130-330 feet of sandy frontage*

*Starting at \$164,900*



**800-514-8041**

**[www.NaterraLand.com/Marquette](http://www.NaterraLand.com/Marquette)**

Naterra Land | 2250 US Hwy 41 South | Marquette, MI 49855