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Bernie chucks it all for kayak adventure

By Tom Gavey

The Intelligencer

Bernie Gray's wife and friends are unanimous.

"They think I'm crazy," he laughs.

The well known Belleville salesman and community volunteer is chucking it all to kayak for at least six months — maybe longer.

"Actually, Betty (his wife) has been very supportive. She kayaks herself, but this trip is a little much," Gray says, in the Scottish brogue familiar to clients and friends.

The 56-year-old left his job in sales with Quinte Broadcasting recently in anticipation of the trek.

"Bill Morton (station manager) said not to bother coming back," Gray chuckles.

His first goal is the Florida Keys

down the intercoastal waterway and he hopes to leave from Prince Edward Point in early July.

"After that, I don't know. If everything feels fine I'll head down into the Caribbean. I know a few people going to the Bahamas in big boats and I might just hitch a ride," says Gray.

He expects it to take more than three months to get from here to Florida and he says he'll limit himself to six or seven hours each day in the kayak.

Gray kayaked as a youngster and then rediscovered the sport seven years ago. This will be his third kayaking venture and by far the most ambitious.

"I've been around the County (Prince Edward) a few times and through Central America and our West Coast. I see this as 25 times around the County," he says.

Gray says what he enjoys about kayaking is the simplicity.

"Mechanically, I'm stone deaf. When I've had boats they've spent more time with the mechanics."

And, Gray likes the fact he can take a kayak where other vessels can't go.

His vessel is an 18-foot Sealution XL, manufactured in Nova Scotia.

"They (kayaks) are very seaworthy. I've been out in rough weather on Lake Ontario and it's performed very well," he says.

Why drop everything now?

"I've always wanted to do a trip like this. I'm physically capable of doing it now and I think it's something most people have in the back of their minds — a challenge."

Gray says whether it was with Quinte Broadcasting or owning his own business (Uniglobe Tartan Travel) he's always enjoyed dealing

with people and this venture will offer more of that. He's also been president of the Belleville and District Chamber of Commerce and chair of the Corporate Challenge.

Gray says his two daughters, Janise who's an RCMP officer in Vancouver and Pauline, with Metro Toronto Police, have told him they'll meet him wherever he is next Christmas.

He adds he's done a lot of reading to prepare himself for the rigors of the journey and to learn what essentials he'll need along the way.

Gray's named his kayak "Hagar Twa" after the cartoon character (twa is two in Scottish).

And, for those who'll miss his unique sense of humor, Gray says there are plans for him to call CJBQ's John Henderson each Sunday morning with on-air updates on his voyage.



Bernie Gray with his kayak.

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GRAY, Bernie