**Forrest and Jeri Bone** didn’t set out to become icons of the RV and trailer industry. But set circumstances in motion—as with Newtonian physics and the rolling wheels of a burly tow vehicle—and that motion continues. And since many good things start with an Airstream, so it was with the Bones.

Jeri’s parents, long-time members of the Wally Byam Caravan Club International (WBCCI), had a ’64 Safari, wintering at the Port O’ Call trailer park in Florida. Forrest and Jeri came from Michigan during holiday times for several years to help with the trailer’s prettification. “It wasn’t a lot of restoration work. It was more cleaning up the inside and polishing and that sort of thing,” says Forrest. They had to have been fine polishers. The parents got them a tow vehicle and sent them back to Michigan with the trailer, all at a budget price.

“The spark really was their involvement with WBCCI and then us picking up a vintage trailer,” says Forrest. “Picking up the trailer corresponded with the formation of the Vintage Airstream Club (VAC). The VAC was formed in ’93 and everything kind of came together.”

The Bones were charter members of the VAC, and became good friends with its founder, Bud Cooper. Cooper was an RV and trailer historian, and many conversations with him sparked the Bones’ interests in all things RV, not just

**By Tom Bentley**

**Photos by Richard Squires**

**ABOVE:** This cobalt blue 1948 Chevrolet shimmers in front of a 1964 Airstream Bambi at a Tin Can Tourists rally. **LEFT:** Forrest and Jeri Bone in front of their 1949 Spartan trailer.
ABOVE: The awning on this 1965 Airstream Globetrotter encourages folks to sit awhile and visit. TCT was founded in 1919; members were known by a tin can on their tow vehicle’s radiator. BELOW: A vintage combo of Buick and Airstream seems to stop time.

Airstreams. “Bud was focused intently on Airstream history, but he also knew the history of trailer groups,” says Forrest. “He started talking about Tin Can Tourists and that stuck in our minds.”

Stuck long enough that when Forrest became president of the VAC in 1998, he also revived the celebrated Tin Can Tourists (TCT) organization, a trailer/RV enthusiasts group founded in 1919, but which had been dissolved for many years. The original TCT members were recognized by a tin can on their automobile radiators, as well as their secret handshake and password. By 1924, TCT had over 100,000 members in North America, but faded out sometime in the 1980s. The Bones secured the legal trademark for the club and had a Michigan renewal rally in May 1998, and not long after, Forrest presided as VAC president in July for the International meeting in Dayton.

That was a lot of reviving and presiding, and the Bones made a decision: “We had both of those groups and then afterwards we were so wrapped up in the Tin Can Tourists and getting it going that we didn’t get to make Internationals,” says Forrest. The Bones admired the ranging nature of their members’ rigs: “It was basically a vintage group, but the vintage part only came in really when we had concourses, which we did for a number of years,” Forrest says.

“We had quite a few members who would join and come in newer rigs, but when you had conversations with them, you found out they started out like everybody else: as tent campers and then popup campers and then hard-sided campers, and then in their older years went to the motorhomes—but they enjoyed seeing everything. It
created a camaraderie amongst all mix and models. Whatever you had, people were interested in it."

As with the WBCCI, the Tin Can Tourists traveled in caravans, including jaunts on the historic National Road, the Lincoln Highway, Route Six in Pennsylvania, another from Maryland to Illinois, and more. Interest grew, prompted by media coverage and from individuals like former Northeast Tin Can Tourist representative, Steven Hingtgen, who became the founder of Airstream Dreams, which then became Vintage Trailer Supply. "Steve was a big supporter of Tin Can Tourists all along," says Forrest. "He moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico because the West Coast was where most of the restorers were, and he got closer to them."

Restoration was always a hot topic among the Tin Can Tourists, and became one for the Bones as well, since they moved on from Airstreams to a '49 Spartan and a '49 Spartanette. "When we first started, in 1998 through 2000, our home base was in Michigan, and you'd hear all kinds of stories of people scouring northern Michigan for the hunting cabin camps that had trailers, as well as for the barn finds. But a lot of those have already been picked over," Forrest says. "I think there's still a lot out there, but I don't think vintage finds are going to be quite as explosive as they've been over the last 10, 15 years."

The Bones have seen many unusual rigs in their Tin Can Tourists time. A memorable one was a Curtiss Aerocar, found under a collapsed barn and restored by a TCT member. "It's stretched canvas over wire, and then it's got an original gooseneck that went into a coupler in the back of the tow vehicle," says Forrest. The owner found that the original Aerocar owners also had a custom International truck made to tow it, and he had that restored and brought both to events, one of the many vintage tow/trailer combinations that became a popular category at their rallies.

ABOVE: A 1957 Flying Cloud (top) and 1955 Commodore Vanderbilt (bottom), complete with antique flamingos. BELOW: Ready to travel through time: a 1962 Airstream Globetrotter towed by a spiffy GMC pickup.
The Bones were preeminent organizers and leaders at the Tin Can Tourists Centennial celebrations in Florida and Michigan in 2019, and then decided to retire to Florida at the height of their glory. But they left the now 2,500-member group (35,000 Facebook members) in the good hands of their son Terry and his wife Michelle, who are organizing the 104th Winter Convention, with 130 rigs—Airstreams, Curtiss Wrights, Spartanettes, Trotwoods, Zippers—signed up.

Retired or not, the Bones love to reflect on their long history with trailers and RVs, and their place in that history. “The Airstream is definitely the icon, because they’re the ones that have stood the test of time,” says Forrest. “Airstreams, along with Spartans and Avions, and a few other aluminum-riveted trailers.” That phrase “few other trailers” includes the one-offs and the outliers they’ve seen and enjoyed in their time. “I think that some of the success of Tin Can Tourists is being inclusive and open to all,” says Forrest.

That openness and inclusivity was well regarded by all: Forrest and Jeri Bone were recently voted into the Recreational Vehicle/Manufactured Housing Hall of Fame—a big surprise to them—and will be inducted in a ceremony in Elkhart, Indiana this summer. And that’s a tin cup made of gold.


LEFT: The cozy quarters of the 1955 Commodore Vanderbilt. 1950s lawn chairs grace the patio of this Airstream Caravel.