

Challenge of the Sea

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Physicist Quits Job to Make Odyssey Around the World

BP

By Debbie Griffith
Staff Reporter

Mike Van Doeren used to be a physicist. He juggled numbers and calculations for 10 years until he was sick to death of the things. What he really wanted was a sailboat and a nice stiff tradewind and maybe a moonlit night or two in the Caribbean.

But those things are expensive and it took him 10 years of being a physicist (figuring out how to put together nuclear reactors) before he could afford his "extended vacation."

Van Doeren, who lived here for 13 years with his mother, Mrs. Sally Van Doeren, while he was in grade school and high school, worked for Westinghouse in Pittsburgh until last spring. Then he quit his high-paying job, bought a 35-foot boat and set up housekeeping aboard it. Then he began to plan his adventure. . .

"I've always been anxious to be exposed to as

many different people and cultures as I could, and I'm just not into the aggressive, success trip that most people are. I don't need great amounts of money. I found myself locked into a career and getting more and more specialized, and I didn't like it."

Van Doeren has been visiting his mother and making use of the Wake Forest University Library to read as much as possible about his new career. Van Doeren did graduate work at Wake Forest in 1962.

Over the next few years, it is Van Doeren's dream to circumnavigate the globe — not an uncommon thing these days for serious sailors, he says, but challenging enough for him.

In the process, he says, he hopes to visit different people and different places — seeking mostly those places that have not been touched, or spoiled, by tourists.

"The first time I sailed to the Bahamas was

the spark, and from then on I knew I would be saving money until I could buy my own boat and go on an extended vacation."

The boat is bought and nearly fitted out with survival gear, extra medical supplies and other necessities for a long voyage. Several friends have volunteered for his three-person crew, but Van Doeren said he must choose them carefully because "the trip will be quite a comedown from the luxuries most people are used to."

Van Doeren plans to begin sailing this fall from Maryland, his home, to the Bahamas. Then it will be on to Puerto Rico, Colombia, the Panama Canal and the Galapagos Islands. Then he plans to sail across the Pacific and island-hop throughout the South Pacific, spending probably three-quarters of his time on land rather than at sea. He figures it will take him two years to reach the South Pacific. By then he'll be ready for a rest "to watch the seasons change," and

he plans to stay a while in New Zealand with friends.

Van Doeren gets a strange gleam in his eyes when he talks about the tradewinds he plans to follow, about the volcanic islands with wild goats and sheep. He's never been to them but he insists he knows where they are. He reads voraciously.

After New Zealand, if he is able to drag himself back to his boat, he plans to make for Indonesia, the Indian Ocean, the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean.

Then it will be across the Atlantic and home to visit his two children who live in Pittsburgh.

He doesn't know how long this voyage will take him — that's part of the adventure. "And maybe I'll find a place I really like and I'll just stay for a while.

Van Doeren's boat is appropriately named — Odysseus.



Staff Photo by Chuck Beckley

Mike Van Doeren