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# Twinned cities



## Great outdoors? Not when in a tent

When people discover I like hiking, canoeing and consuming mass quantities of s'mores, they naturally assume I like camping, too. This couldn't be further from the truth.

Camping is a means to an end for me and I only do it when it's necessary to hike a particular trail or get my s'mores fix. The truth is, when I step off a trail, I want nothing more than to enter a bug-free, temperature-controlled environment where I can sink into a cushy bed just feet away from a hot shower and flush toilet.

But my friends, Sarah and Roy, don't know any of that — or, at least they didn't when they invited me to go camping with them. I didn't have the heart to say anything but yes... after the fourth declined invitation.

As we sat around the campfire eating chili and roasting marshmallows on a crisp autumn night, a cat meandered into the camp. For our daughters, it was love at first sight. They christened him "Stripes" and stalked him for the remainder of the evening. I would have felt sorry for him were it not for the girls feeding him graham crackers and shredded cheese.

For a brief time, as I listened to a pair of hoot owls answering Roy's calls ("Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?") with my daughter cuddled on my lap and a s'more in hand, I began to think I might like camping after all.

That thought lasted until I discovered the only thing worse than sleeping on the ground all night is lying awake on the ground all night in 38-degree weather listening to a cat named Stripes clawing at my tent. Fortunately, Abby slept through the clamor.

In retrospect, I should have let him in. I don't like cats, but I like sleeping more than I dislike cats. And I didn't get a wink of sleep that night.

Morning arrived slowly and with a surprise. My daughter and her pink camouflage sleeping bag were drenched. She claimed the liquid was sweat. I could see my breath in the (nearly) freezing air. I could see hers. That wasn't sweat.

I wasn't upset with her. Walking to the outhouse in the dark must have seemed daunting. Still, I wasn't thrilled about the cleaning "sweat" or transporting the soaked sleeping bag home. Thankfully, Sarah and Roy's camper was equipped with an operational shower.

Two years later, Abby still waxes poetic about Stripes. She describes each stripe on his coat in photographic detail and reminisces about his love of graham crackers. Then she tells me she misses him and asks if I miss him too. I say yes because, delusional though they may be, I see no reason to mar her memories of camping in general and Stripes in particular.

While at a recent chili cookout at Sarah and Roy's house, Roy issued another camping invitation. And I, no longer reserved with my feelings about camping, issued my now standard response — not for all the s'mores in the world.

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PHOTOS BY KYLE GRANTHAM / COURIER & PRESS

An old mill sits along the Leeds-Liverpool Canal just outside Newburgh, Lancashire, and has been converted to apartment buildings. The boats lining the canal are called "narrowboats" and were originally used as trade vessels throughout the United Kingdom. The boats are still used as houseboats by many people and were the main form of interstate commerce throughout the area. The term "legging it out," many locals say, comes from the times when narrowboat drivers would have to use their legs to push their boats through tunnels along canal routes instead of the traditional mule that normally would pull the boats down canals.

## ■ Newburghs in Indiana, U.K. enjoy special bond

By **Kyle Grantham**  
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A chance discovery of a road sign while on vacation in England led Anne Rust Aurand and her husband, Bernard Gene Aurand, of Newburgh to help establish a "twinning" relationship between communities 4,200 miles apart.

"Gene and I were in the Carnaby Street area of London and found a street called Newburgh

Road," Anne said. "We laughed at the idea of finding Newburgh Road in London and then wondered out loud if there was a Newburgh Road, was there also a Newburgh?"

The two looked at maps and found more than one Newburgh in the United Kingdom.

"We actually found several on the road map we had with us, one in Scotland and several others, but the Newburgh in Lancashire seemed to be the most like us," Anne said.

The two small towns have a lot in common. Those similarities are what led the Aurands to reach out to Newburgh, Lancashire, with the prospect of becoming sister cities, or "twinned."

The couple sent a letter to Newburgh and hoped it would fall into the right hands.

"It had been a blind send, just addressed to the town manager of Newburgh hoping someone at the post office would take pity and pass it on to the proper

person," Anne said. "That's just what happened."

About a year after the letter was sent, Brian Howard, then the town clerk of Newburgh, Lancashire, found the letter in a box and brought it to the attention of the Newburgh Parish Council. They agreed he should respond.

Nearly two years after the couple's trip, an official resolution was signed in Newburgh,

See **CITIES, 12D**



**Above:** A stone atop Parbold Hill just outside of Newburgh shows the various cities that can be seen on a rare clear day from the top of the hill, 394 feet above sea level. The cities of Ormskirk (6 miles away), Wigan (6 miles away) and Liverpool (15 miles away) all can be seen from the top of the hill, as can the Berwyn Mountains, which are 40 miles from the hilltop.

**Right:** The original schoolhouse in Newburgh, Lancashire, was built in the 1700s as an all-boys school and would have taught all ages. The building now is used as apartments.



Christ Church Newburgh, of the Diocese of Liverpool, was built in 1858 and had an original capacity of 256 parishioners. Originally the church served as a chapel-of-ease (a satellite place of worship for parishioners who can't reach the main church) for the Ormskirk parish church, but in 1871 became its own independent parish. Ormskirk is the closest city to Newburgh, Lancashire, and would be what Evansville is to Newburgh, Ind.



The Newburgh Post Office in Newburgh, Lancashire, also is a village store that sells bread, groceries, specialty cakes and cookies, stationery and newspapers. It also has a tearoom that serves teas, coffees and cakes.



JARRETT GAZA PHOTOGRAPHY / SPECIAL TO THE COURIER & PRESS  
The Oak Ridge Boys

## Cracker Barrel alliance 'only natural' for Oak Ridge Boys

### ■ Grammy winners bring Christmas show to Centre

By **Sean McDevitt**  
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There was a time when Richard Sterban stood at quite a career crossroads. The year was 1972, and the New Jersey-born Ster-

ban, then 29 years old and blessed with a bass voice capable of reaching almost unimaginable depths, had a gig that most backing vocalists would have kept for a lifetime: He was touring and recording with Elvis Presley as a member of J.D.

Sumner and the Stamps Quartet.

But another possibility appeared on the horizon.

"It was a major decision that I had to make in my life," recalls Sterban, now 68. "I was singing with Elvis as part of the biggest tour in the country — in the world, at that point. Elvis was huge back then.

See **GROUP, 12D**

## LIFE

GROUP  
from 1D

And to have what was basically a nonentity call me up ... It was a major decision.”

That “nonentity” was a group called the Oak Ridge Boys. They were looking for a bass singer.

Sterban accepted the offer. And in the ensuing four decades, the Grammy-winning group — Sterban, lead vocalist Duane Allen, baritone William Lee Golden and tenor Joe Bonsall — ran with the top dogs of country music, selling millions of albums, recording scores of country hits, and even striking pop gold in 1981 with a Billboard Top 10 single, “Elvira.”

That long musical journey continues at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at The Centre, where the Oak Ridge Boys bring their enduring Christmas show to Evansville. The Christmas tour has been an annual holiday event for the group since 1989.

Sterban says fans can expect to hear a mix of everything at the family-friendly show, including the group’s classic hits, new songs from their latest album, “It’s Only Natural,” and an array of Christmas songs that range from sacred to secular, fun to romantic.

Before Wednesday’s performance, the group will appear from noon to 1 p.m. at the Evansville Cracker Barrel Old Country Store, 8215 Eagle Lake Drive, to meet fans and sign autographs. The event is free and open to the public.

## A NEW APPROACH

As it turns out, Cracker Barrel looms large in the Oak Ridge Boys’ current affairs. The restaurant chain is sponsoring the group’s tour and is the exclusive retailer of “It’s Only Natural.”

In an era where digital music sales are surging, traditional record stores are dying and the nation’s top music retailer is Walmart, stores like Cracker Barrel may offer new hope for groups like the Oak Ridge Boys, who, despite having a solid fan base, are no longer in the plans of the major Nash-

## IF YOU GO

**What:** The Oak Ridge Boys annual Christmas tour

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Wednesday

**Where:** The Centre

**Tickets:** \$32.50-\$42.50, available at The Centre Box Office, 715 Locust St., all Ticketmaster locations and [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com) (additional Ticketmaster service charges apply)

**Meet and greet:** The Oak Ridge Boys will meet fans and sign copies of their latest CD, “It’s Only Natural,” at the Evansville Cracker Barrel Old Country Store, 8215 Eagle Lake Drive, from noon to 1 p.m. on Wednesday. The event is free and open to the public.

ville record labels.

“Things have really changed in the music industry,” Sterban says. “There are not very many places where you can physically go and buy a CD. Even at Walmart, they don’t carry the product that they used to. So the retailers have almost gone by the wayside. In recent years, Cracker Barrel has done a great job of picking up that slack, so to speak ... They’ve made country music a big part of what they do.”

Cracker Barrel can offer a distribution network that most groups would be more than happy to have. It boasts 603 stores in 42 states — all of which are currently pushing “It’s Only Natural,” which was released Sept. 19. Each year, more than 225 million customers walk into a Cracker Barrel.

“If you go into a Cracker Barrel right now, you really cannot escape the Oak Ridge Boys,” Sterban explains. “We’re all over. They’re playing our music over the speaker system. Even in the restroom you’re going to hear our music being played. Our pictures are on every table. You’re eating your food, and we’re looking at you. And of course, you can’t pay your bill at the cash register without almost literally stumbling over our CD. So we are there.”

## ‘A GOD-GIVEN TALENT’

Sterban is acutely aware that his voice, by any standard, is highly unique. Among the group’s fans, he’s widely known for the “oom-pop-a-mow-mow” vocal hook in “Elvira,” which marks its 30th anniversary this year and is included on “It’s Only Natural.”

“It’s a God-given talent, no question about it,” Sterban says. “I’ve joking-

ly told people from time to time that if it wasn’t for this voice, I’d probably have to get a real job. But it is a unique-sounding voice. And I think I’ve found the perfect place for it. I’ve been very blessed and very fortunate.”

Sterban grew up in New Jersey and still remembers his first public singing, a performance in Sunday school at age 6 — as a boy soprano. By the time he was in seventh grade and singing in the glee club, he was a tenor.

“Over the summer, between seventh and eighth grade, is when the big change happened,” he recalls with a laugh. “It almost seemed like it happened overnight. It certainly happened over a two- to three-month period. I went back to school that fall, and I’ve been singing bass ever since.

“One advantage to getting older and being a bass singer is that, I think, the bass voice gets better,” he says. “I think right now I’m probably doing some of the best bass singing I’ve done all my life, and I think the aging process has been kind to me in that respect.”

Sterban acknowledges that his voice, for all its remarkable qualities, would likely never afford him a solo career. But in the context of the Oak Ridge Boys’ four-part harmony, it’s a perfect fit.

“We’re all so different, but we come together as one and pull together as a team,” he says. “I’m one-fourth of that. My voice is a part of our sound, but it takes a combination of all four of us to make that sound. I think all of us realized a long time ago that we need each other. We have a respect for each other, and I think that’s contributed to our longevity over the years.”



PHOTOS BY KYLE GRANTHAM / COURIER & PRESS

A public park area used for markets in warmer weather, caroling in the holiday season and general public use, sits in the middle of Newburgh, Lancashire’s town center.

CITIES  
from 1D

Ind., on Jan. 26, 1994, declaring Newburgh, Lancashire, a sister community and naming all residents there honorary residents of Newburgh, Ind.

Across the pond, a similar signing took place, but with much more pomp and circumstance. The Aurands were the guests of honor.

“The evening of the actual signing was amazing,” Anne said. “We were announced ‘Counselor Bernard Aurand and His Lady, Anne, from Newbra-uh ... Burgh, Indiana, United States of America,’” Anne recalled, noting the pronunciation differences between the names of the two towns. While in the American Newburgh, the “g” is heard, in the U.K., it’s silent and pronounced “Newbra.”

While the two Newburghs have much in common, those differences such as the pronunciation are what make the exchange fun.

“One visitor, when touring Ireland on his way to Newburgh, U.K., could not find any of his ‘relatives,’ because no one spelled their name the same way as he did,” said Reginald Porter, Newburgh Parish Council chairman.

The trip also gives visitors a chance to see much deeper into history than America can offer. While Newburgh, Ind., is only just over 200 years old, Newburgh, Lancashire, is more than 700



The lock system along the Leeds-Liverpool Canal is manually operated and narrowboat drivers must get out of their boats and swing gates open and closed as they attempt to navigate up and down the canal.



Bernard Gene Aurand



Anne Rust Aurand

Porter and his wife, Shirley, visited Newburgh, Ind., one summer for July Fourth, surprising their hosts.

“They were all full of giggles and whispers before we dressed to go to the fireworks and town festivities,” Anne said. “When they

years old.

“When the visitors came for our 700th anniversary, there was a marquee dinner and dance in medieval costume,” Porter said. “All the Newburgh USA visitors were in costume.”

Porter and his wife, Shirley, visited Newburgh, Ind., one summer for July Fourth, surprising their hosts.

“They were all full of giggles and whispers before we dressed to go to the fireworks and town festivities,” Anne said. “When they

came out they were wearing Union Jack T-shirts and Union Jack wigs, those big-hair, fuzzy kind!”

The relationship between the two towns has gone strong for nearly 20 years, even as those who forged it passed on.

“Many of our original friends have passed and on my last visit in 2009, I walked through the cemetery of the Parish Church and saw familiar names mingled with stones that are hundreds of years old,” Anne said.

Gene, too, passed away in 2001, and in 2006, Anne bought an old red English phone booth and donated it to the town with the provision a plaque be placed with it to pay tribute to Gene for his role in securing and nurturing the twinning.

“I have always said that if I could drive to London, I’d be there every weekend,” Anne said. “That goes double for Newburgh.”