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## Travel

### Local men in their 60s get their kicks on Route 66

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By Virginia Linn, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

What happens when three friends turn 60 during the same month and decide to have a mid-life crisis?

They hit the road to get their kicks on Route 66.

On Wednesday, sexagenarians Merle McGee of Richland, John Stolze of Cross Creek, Jere Cowden of Sewickley and Mr. Cowden's 67-year-old brother Van Cowden, also of Cross Creek, left on a 4,000-mile cross-country car trip that will take them westward down the famed Route 66 to Southern California and then north to Seattle.

The trip also is a fund-raiser for KidsVoice, a full-service advocacy program for 5,000 abused and neglected children in Allegheny County.

"The issue is not about the trip," said Mr. McGee, vice president of client services for Cowden Associates Inc., a Downtown consulting and actuarial firm. "It's about the adventure and hopefully raising money for the kids."

Jere Cowden, president and CEO of Cowden Associates -- the first of the three to turn 60 in April -- bought a '87 white Corvette (a two seater) for the trip. The friends also had reserved a Mustang convertible rental for the other two travelers but, much to their disappointment, ended up with a blue PT Cruiser convertible instead.

Mr. McGee, who directed the planning for the venture, said the group will go as far as San Bernardino, Calif., on Route 66 and then proceed north on either Route 1 or Route 101 to Seattle by Sept. 16.

The Cowdens and Mr. Stolze knew each other at Avella Area High School in Washington County and Mr. McGee became acquainted with them through Cowden Associates, where he has worked for 11 years.

On the trip, the friends are posting photos on their Web site of "Carnie," a 20-inch-tall dinosaur (from Carnegie Museum of Natural History's dinosaur exhibit) with many of the sights they see, much like people have done with gnomes.

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#### On the Internet

Follow a blog of the men's travels and find out how to donate to KidsVoice at [www.kicksforthekids.net](http://www.kicksforthekids.net).

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