

LAGUNA BEACH
COASTLINE PILOT

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ON THE WEB: WWW.COASTLINEPILOT.COM



Road Trip Nation is the brainchild of Nathan Gebhard of Laguna Beach, left, Brian McAllister of Newport Beach and Mike Marriner of Laguna Beach, not pictured.

PHOTOS BY DOUGLAS ZIMMERMAN / DAILY PILE

Roadtrip redux



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Roadtrip redux

Three fresh college graduates' uncertainty in 2001 produced a documentary that aired on PBS. This week, they hit the highway with nine new travelers.

By Marisa O'Neil
Coastline Pilot

Like many recent college graduates, Nathan Gebhard, Mike Marriner and Brian McAllister, still didn't know what they wanted to be when they grew up.

Fresh out of Pepperdine University in 2001, Laguna Beach residents Gebhard and Marriner, both 27, and 29-year-old McAllister of Newport Beach, decided to buy a 15-year-old RV and drive across the country, talking to people about their possible career paths. In the process, they found out what they wanted to do — and realized they were already doing it.

Their uncertainty and wanderlust produced a documentary, "Roadtrip Nation," which aired on PBS. It also led to two books and a second road trip with a group of three students and recent graduates. This week, three RVs loaded with nine students selected from colleges across the country will hit the road for three more adventures.

And the three friends will be along



A map in an RV marks where home is for the show's creators.

for the ride again.

"So many people at the beach sit

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Cristina Barajas of Sacramento and Bernardo Pantoja of Brentwood prepare for their road trip by washing the windows of their RV.

ROADTRIP

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there and wonder: 'What are we going to do with our lives?' McAllister said. "We decided to do something about it."

It was 2001 when they bought their first RV, the Legend, from McAllister's parents for \$8,000 and lined up as many interviews as they could on a 15,000-mile, meandering coast-to-coast route. Then they went to a local electronics store and "filled out credit card applications like candy" to finance video cameras to film their experience, Gebhard said.

They returned with 460 hours of raw footage of interviews with people including the chairman of Starbucks, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, and "Manny the Lobsterman" from Maine.

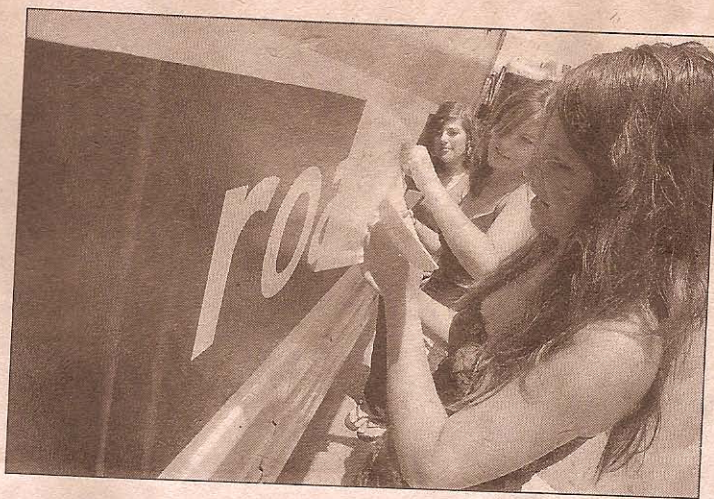
"It was such a tough thing to book interviews," Gebhard said. "It was kind of a self-selecting process. If they couldn't find the time for us, it wasn't worth doing the interview."

What had started as a journey of self-discovery took on a life of its own, generating media buzz, a book deal and the PBS show.

And they were surprised to discover that many successful people, such as Dell Computers founder Michael Dell, hadn't always known what they wanted to do with their lives, either.

"It's not just us," McAllister said. "This issue affects an entire generation."

Earlier this year, the three friends hit college campuses to recruit the next generation of road trippers for this summer's three cross-country excursions. Each time, they brought the



DOUGLAS ZIMMERMAN / DAILY PILOT

Road Trip Nation team members Candace Elliott of Cincinnati, Ohio, (closest) Diana Dravis of Sacramento and Erica Cerulop of Peoria, Ill. reveal the decal spelling "roadtrip" on their RV in which they will travel across the country beginning in July.

green-and-blue Legend and their stories.

"I was graduating soon and not sure what I wanted to do," 21-year-old Sacramento State student Gloria Pantoja said. "I saw their presentation and thought: 'They're speaking to me.'"

Pantoja, her 19-year-old brother Bernardo and her 23-year-old sorority sister, Cristina Barajas, worked on readying their RV on a Laguna Beach street Wednesday, putting signature "Roadtrip Nation" stickers on it, cleaning the kitchenette and getting driving lessons in the behemoth vehicle.

They will leave Laguna Beach today and head up to San Francisco, where they will officially start their five-week trip across the center of the country, finishing in New York. Two other RVs, carrying students from the University of Chicago and New York's Pratt

Institute, will take southern and northern routes before meeting up in New York.

All the students have lined up their own interviews along the way, including ones with a pyrotechnics expert, child psychologist, Native American leader and a ghost hunter in New Jersey.

"I may never do [ghost hunting], but obviously they found something they like," Bernardo Pantoja said.

Each of the three motor homes will house three students and one cameraman. Gebhard, Marriner and McAllister, will tag along, cameras in tow.

"As long as there's fuel in the tanks, we're out there," McAllister said.

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