

## OUT AND ABOUT:

*Recession aside I'm doing my best to keep the economy humming. Here's how...*

**Favorite New TV Show:** I practically have to watch this new spin on a crime drama twice; once for the story and once just watch star who plays **The Mentalist, CBS Tuesdays at 8:00.**

I used to think I was freakishly observant but not compared to this.

**Favorite New Sandal:** Shoes are my Achilles' heel and while last year I featured a shoe this year I will be more specific. **Chaco's** are the best way to treat feet after a day in heels. They feel so right on your foot it makes barefoot feel a little odd.

**Favorite New Bread:** I love a good sandwich and **Flax Roll-ups from Damascus Bakeries** (in the deli section of my local Cub Foods) offer a super tasty and high fiber twist.

**Favorite New Beer:** The Belgian import **Affligem** is great way to wash down the sandwich you now wish you had in hand.

**Favorite New Home Improvement:** My new **Heat-N-Glo** gas insert will likely top the mental list of my all time favorite home improvements. Cozy!

**New Favorite Website:** While not new to other social networkers this year I discovered, developed an addiction to and recovered from said addiction to **Facebook.** Are you out there? If so, can we be friends?

**Favorite New Restaurant:** Again, not 'new' but new to me and therefore qualifies is the site of my Chica and Posse General's Groom's Dinner, **Bar Lurcat.** Filled with the hip and beautiful this place served up one of the most amazing meals I've eaten.

**Favorite New Radio Station:** Video didn't kill the radio star...it was all the talky talky and inane commercials. No thanks. My new car came with a **Sirius Satellite Radio** component; I activated it and have since been ruined for regular radio.

**Favorite New Ice Cream:** Once the brain trust that runs Unilever/Breyers decided to change the recipe I needed a replacement. It took awhile to find but **Blue Bunny All Natural Vanilla** has become my new standby.

## THE YEAR DISTILLED

I'm beginning to think there are a few of you who only read this bit. But because I love you, sit still while I distill.

1. Drugs and alcohol sometimes do mix. Take a dose of Benadryl and two mimosas and call me in the morning.
2. If anyone ever asks you if you would like to see a purple Malagasy the answer is no. Always and emphatically NO.
3. On the next car you purchase, go for the seat warmers.
4. I wasn't sure it could, but my heart is capable of melting and it does so every time Sophie says "Kiki."
5. Riding a Segway is a surprising workout of sorts. You will learn about new ligaments and tendons in your feet that you never thought you had.
6. Based on your well wishes, if I ever get married, I think my husband and I will be receiving a lot of gravy boats—I hope he likes gravy.
7. When flying, if you want to be treated like a human by your flight provider you must travel internationally. Domestically we're all just cargo and baggage.
8. Weddings are so much fun. I am always so full of joy for the happy couple that I can always be counted on to cry and to dance.
9. No matter how clean you think your carpet is, a Dyson will always find enough dirt to make you want to gag.
10. A spectacular bruise makes for great storytelling.

## ...Continued from Page 1

With crisp leaves underfoot and a nip in the air my thoughts always turn to Thanksgiving (and all things pumpkin). This year brought the blended family fun to Horten Point but I think this was probably the last year that my little abode can hold all of the Byres, Maurices and Weingartzes and two turkeys—one slightly smoldering even. Regardless, as long as I have my family and a few secret recipes Thanksgiving is wherever they are on the fourth Thursday in November.

Some of you have followed my fumbling foray into blogging and while I'm not as faithful as I aspire to be I think we are off to a good start that I resolve to improve upon in 2009. So while this newsletter arrives at your door annually you can keep up with the life and times and misadventures—trust me there are a few gems on the blog that didn't make the printed newsletter—online at [perennial Examiner.blogspot.com](http://perennial Examiner.blogspot.com). Stop by to read or pile on with comments. The more the merrier you know.

Speaking of merrier, I am not sure how I could have a wider smile on my face as I recap the year. I feel incredibly blessed and immensely grateful for the opportunities and adventures that have come across my path, for my curiosity and observative nature to drink it all in (and hopefully glean a lesson or two) and for you my nearest and dearest (old and new) to sometimes wingman in the adventure and always share in the stories. I hope this note finds you happy and well and looking as forward to the next volume of your story as I am to mine. ❀

# THE HOLIDAY EXAMINER

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*Kristen Weingartz, Editor-in-Chief*



## Special Fifth Anniversary Double Issue

I can't believe that five short years ago a slow December and idle fingers published the first volume of what is now one of my favorite year-end activities. Thankfully, 2008 did not disappoint.

Minnesota has four distinctly different seasons and while I love them all, the winters do get a bit long. I have learned over the years that a warm weather respite in late February/early March is the key to kicking the cabin fever. My friend Kate and I jetted on just such a trip to sunny Cancun. Apparently in my old-age I am becoming a delicate flower and have developed a sensitivity to the sun. After our first day of frolicking in the surf I developed a hideous rash which banished me to the shade for the duration. Thankfully Kate is an excellent nurse and with her care and some Mexican Benadryl it was still all the relaxing warm weather getaway I could have hoped for.

As the weather warms, the ice goes out and the once frozen landscape turns green my thoughts turn to golf and fishing. I made two treks to Canada again this year. My guides, Dad and Davy, kept us on the fish and I broke in my new rod properly with a 20lb pike. I made it out to the links for a few rounds of golf but more oft than not found myself in quiet, content focus trying to improve my game at the driving range.

Life at Thrivent continues to provide adventure, challenges and rewards. This spring I was awarded my Lean Six Sigma Black Belt which is a pretty exciting designation for process/metrics dorks like yours truly. And after a few short-term stints on a number of projects I found a new home in our Strategic Marketing Department as a Senior Marketing Strategist for our

go-to-market strategy, Meaningful Contact. Essentially, in cocktail party speak, I work with people throughout the company to analyze, package and get out the door the right offer for the right people at the right time. But before that new work would begin I was off to Madagascar. (See page 2)

Upon returning home I embarked on a quick hunt for a dress and a gravy boat of her own as I married off one my very best girlfriends Michele. It was a wedding and party unlike any other, it was beautiful and perfection. From there it was a quick walk of shame (sans shame, I merely forgot to pack an overnight bag) still in my party dress to one of my favorite events of the year, the Cole Fantasy Football League draft party. I have been remiss in the last five years not paying the proper homage to this treasured and riotous annual event. And as if this single weekend wasn't busy enough, the very next day I was trussed up in a bodice for the annual Ren Faire rounds joined by one Miss Sophie Joy.

Ah my little Sophie, pardon me while I gush a tish. She turned one in July and has been wobbling and jabbering up a storm ever since. I've been called up from the minor leagues a few times to fill in as fourth string day care and our time together is such a treat. She is as sweet as her Mommy and as smart as her Daddy and has her Aunt Kiki in her pocket.

Beach buddy Kate moved to Chicago in the spring and October would bring a much anticipated visit. I've been on project in the burbs of Chi-town but never really spent much time in the actual windy city. Nicknames aside, with Kate as my guide we girl talked over many \$2.50 Guinness, Segwayed our way along the waterfront and cheered the Vikings on to a near victory at Soldier Field. I fell in love with Chicago, a beautiful city with a great energy.



## PLATINUM SPONSORS

As they say on public TV, this program was made possible by viewers like you. Your support and generosity truly humbled me. It was doing right by your contributions that got me out of bed several mornings when muscles I had long since forgotten reminded me exactly where they are located and how displeased they were.

While I dropped the ball on proper and timely thank you notes upon my return I wanted to recognize your contribution to the journey. Platinum sponsors include:

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I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your support (financial, logistical, and emotional), you made this opportunity a reality.

## K-Dub's Excellent Adventure

It started with shots, several shots, the kinds that come in a needle and it ended with a family in a new home of their own. Many of you know that this year I had the opportunity slash privilege to travel with Thrivent Builds, a partnership with Habitat for Humanity, halfway around the world to exotic Madagascar. As I flip through my travel journal there are pages and pages of observations and stories so I've done my best to summarize a taste of the experience in itinerary form.

**Three days to get there:** We left on a Thursday morning and after an overnight layover in South Africa arrived in Madagascar on a rainy Saturday evening. South Africa did not feel foreign but in the light of day in Antananarivo I felt the unsettling exhilaration of being a stranger in a strange land.

**Sunday in the city:** Managing our jetlag we took it easy and took a tour of the city, had our orientation with the local Habitat affiliate, bonded as a team and prepared for the work week ahead.

**Monday through Friday we build:** Biriky, reiche, rano... More bricks, mortar and water, these would be our chief instructions for the week. The red clay dirt covered every inch of me. There were times I never thought I would be clean again yet at the end of every day I sat with the sore satisfaction that can only be achieved after a long day of real labor.

**Saturday & Sunday we visit:** The hospitality of the Malagasy people amazed my heart. We had in-home visits with the families for which we were building the new homes and while they don't have much, they offer everything they have.

**Monday we dedicate:** Family members and village elders turned out to bless and dedicate the nearly completed home. Our team received hero-type treatment that was truly humbling.

**Tuesday & Wednesday we hike:** Off to the jungle to see the lemurs, flowers and lizards—80% of the species indigenous to the country can only be found on that island. In the evenings it would be card games and Trois Cheval (Three Horses Beer—THB—the national beer of Madagascar).

**Thursday & Friday:** We wrap up our trip with lunch at a Lutheran mission compound, debrief with local Habitat leadership and some semi-shrewd bargaining at the local market for vanilla beans, wood carvings, and textiles.

**Saturday we depart:** Hours upon hours in a small airplane seat with a healthy dousing of mystery World Health Organization spray lies ahead. It was with the sweet smiling (and teary-eyed) face of my Mother waiting for me in baggage claim that I knew I was home on Sunday.



## MADAGASCAR IN FIVE

There were dozens of experiences and hundreds of pictures to share but with ruthless efficiency and editing I narrowed (distilled if you will) it down to five key elements. From the top...

**The Work:** All work like this is meaningful but we were able to roll up our sleeves and do more than just dig trenches and move bricks. Our masons did the difficult work of corners, windows and rafters and we were allowed to work on everything else.

**The Children:** We had an audience of 15-50 children on the worksite. Adorable, well behaved and intensely curious they shouted "Kristen, Kristen, Kristen!" incessantly. I volleyed with a simple "OUI" and their laughter ensued. This adorable little muffin on the left climbed up a tree and was practically perched on my shoulder on the sidelines of our afternoon pick-up futbol game.

**The Team:** I had the pleasure of meeting and working with some truly amazing people. Heads down hard working and hands down a joy to share the adventure with. I learned much and laughed even more, there were times I thought I would never be able to catch my breath from the laughter. In case you were wondering, Elie Wiesel did not invent the cotton gin. (poor Petah)

**The Lemurs:** We had a couple of days of R&R and spent them on Lemur hikes in the Andasibe National Park. Beyond just a light trail hike it at times felt like we were cutting fresh trail through the rainforest stalking them. They are interesting animals—somewhere between a cat and a monkey—and their howls in the night from my bungalow on the forest edge is a sound and an experience I will not soon forget.

**The Lesson:** After a squabbling childhood and sometimes contentious 20's my brother has become one of my very best friends but I didn't know it until I went two and a half weeks without talking with him. I knew I would miss much about home but I wasn't prepared to miss him as much as I did.