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Mickey Harris, a world-renowned airbrush artist, does detail work on a sign for Modern Body Shop in Yankton this past May. Harris, who also painted the mural at The Walnut Tavern in Yankton, is in the process of making Menno his home. He and his wife, Laura, currently live in Tennessee, but the couple has grown fond of the area and, in particular, Menno.

After Working In Region, Harris Ready To Make His Home In Hutchinson Co.

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MENNO — When world-renowned airbrush artist Mickey Harris previously visited Menno, he came for work reasons. Now, he's coming back for good to make the town his home.

Harris and his wife, Laura, currently live in Tennessee. But after repeated lengthy stays for work in Menno, they have grown to love the Hutchinson County town of about 600 residents so much that they are moving there for good.

When are they making the move?

"Today, if I could. Seriously. We are really looking forward to it," he told the *Press & Dakotan* in a phone interview. "We are anxious to be there now. There are great people there. There's people like Darrell Livingston (in Yankton). I met him while I was doing the (80-foot-long mural) for the Walnut Tavern in Yankton."

The Harrises are looking for housing in Menno while at the same time finding renters for most of their Tennessee property. However, they aren't cutting all ties with the Volunteer State.

"I have some property, a couple of small houses, a large house and an apartment above my studio," he said. "We will rent out the large house and apartment and one of the (small) houses. We will keep the other (small) house if we want to come back to Tennessee in January and February, if we decide we would like a little change. We have that option, especially if the weather turns bad."

So what about those bitter South Dakota winters? Actually, Harris jokes that he enjoys them. "Honest, I look forward to the wintertime. I like the idea of snowmobile riding. I have never ice fished," he said. "I was there once in February, it was cold and there were 15-foot drifts. People would plow through it, and I would walk through drifts 12 to 15 feet high. That was cool, and (the drifts) didn't collapse. For me, it was interesting."

For Harris, the warm hearts of Menno residents far outweigh any cold winters in South Dakota.

Harris' first visit to Menno came after he was approached by two Menno residents attending one of his airbrushing seminars in Niobrara, Neb. Harris accepted the men's invitation to work in their body shop to illustrate the hood of an Olivet resident's classic car.

"These guys asked if I could come up to Menno. I said, 'It's not that far away, so I wouldn't mind it at all,'" he said. "I really didn't have any ideas of staying (in Menno), but I fell in love with the place."

And, as they say, the rest was history.

"I guess I was a bit of a celebrity for the town. Everybody came by and said hello," he said. "They introduced themselves and just hung out. They were really friendly. People asked if I would paint for them. I started coming back up here (to Menno) every year and got to be friends with people."

Harris soon realized he and his wife were considered one of the locals.

"I'm kind of like the Prodigal Son," he said, referring to the Biblical wayward son who returned home. "When we came to town and they first met us, that first year, it was like, 'Wow!' They talked about you and pointed you out. Now, you come into town, and it's like, 'Mickey, you're back!' Everybody is used to seeing me."

Making The Move

The Harrises decided to move to Menno when Laura joined Mickey on his visits.

"Laura fell in love with the area," he said. "She also has allergy problems, and we think South Dakota would be better for her than Tennessee."

Harris said he and his wife love the small-town South Dakota lifestyle.

"That's what I love the most about South Dakota — the people," he said. "They are good, hard-working, honest people."

Harris appreciates the relatively safe and crime-free atmosphere in Menno.



Harris' finished sign at Modern Body Shop.

KELLY HERTZ/P&D

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