

## **PRESS RELEASE: Parkinson's Won't Ground Pair from Sailing Great Lakes**

One year after Steve Van Vlaenderen realized his dream of owning a sailboat, he was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. If that news wasn't enough, doctors also recommended he give up sailing.

That was seven years ago. The Winnipegger didn't listen to his doctors, and he certainly didn't give up on his dream. On June 18, the 68-year-old yachtsman heads out on the first leg on a trip through the Great Lakes to raise awareness about Parkinson's.

"I'm hoping that Sail on with Parkinson's and our adventure will encourage people to look at what Parkinson's is - because it isn't one thing — it's multiple conditions at the same time," Van Vlaenderen said. "Parkinson's is like an iceberg; 10 percent is above the surface that people can see, like the tremors, and 90 percent is below the water level."

Joining Van Vlaenderen on the cruise is his partner Darlene Hildebrand, 65. Launching from Barker's Marina in Superior, Wisconsin, the couple will sail Lakes Superior and Lake Huron this summer. The trip will take about 75 days, and they'll cover approximately 1,450 kilometres (900 miles). They'll then dry-dock the boat at Bridgeview Marina in Sarnia, Ontario, and continue the journey in 2019 through Lake Erie, Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River.

On their voyage, they'll encounter unfamiliar waters, long distances, and nasty weather. Van Vlaenderen and Hildebrand are ready. They're used to challenges in their life.

"It's a terrific adventure. Very few people do something like this; even if they are completely healthy and much younger. So for us to do this at our age, and with Steve's condition, it's exciting," Hildebrand said. "What we're trying to do is give people hope."

Van Vlaenderen and Hildebrand will be available to speak to media and support groups along the route, and those interested can also come aboard to talk.

### **CONTACT:**

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### **FACT SHEET**

Voyage name: Sail On With Parkinson's

Sailors: Steve Van Vlaenderen and Darlene Hildebrand

Boat name: Cloud

Boat type: 1981 Niagara 31, a sailing cruiser built by Hinterhoeller Yachts

Length of boat: 31-feet

Launch date: June 18, 2018

Length of trip: 75 days, covering approximately 1,450 kilometres (900 miles).

Route stops (subject to change):

- Barker's Marina, Superior, WI
- Siskiwit Bay, WI
- Bayfield, WI
- Saxon Harbor, WI
- Black River, MI
- Ontonagon, MI
- Houghton, MI
- Big Bay, MI
- Marquette, MI
- Munising, MI
- Grand Marais, MI
- Little Lake Harbor, MI
- Sault Ste. Marie, ON
- De Tour Village, MI
- Rogers City Marina, MI
- Hammond Bay Refuge Harbor, MI
- Presque Isle, MI
- Alpena, MI
- Harrisville, MI
- Oscoda, MI
- Port Austin, MI
- Harbor Beach, MI
- Port Sanilac, MI
- Lexington, MI
- Bridgeview Marina, Sarnia, ON

About Parkinson's:

Parkinson's disease (PD) is a chronic and progressive movement disorder, meaning that the symptoms continue and worsen over time. Over one million people in Canada and the US are living with Parkinson's disease. The cause is unknown, and there is presently no cure. There are treatment options such as medication and surgery to manage its symptoms.

Parkinson's involves the malfunction and death of vital nerve cells in the brain called neurons. Parkinson's primarily affects neurons in an area of the brain called substantia nigra. Some of these neurons produce dopamine, a chemical that sends messages to the part of the brain that controls movement and coordination. As PD progresses, the amount of dopamine produced in the brain decreases, leaving a person unable to control movement normally.