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A house, Corbin Bernsen, snow globes – and one red paper clip

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Taking a paper clip and turning it into a house sounds like a cheesy magic trick or a phony instance of resourcefulness on the 1980s TV show “MacGyver.”

Kyle MacDonald, however, has pulled it off.

One year ago, the 26-year-old blogger from Montreal set out to barter one red paper clip for something and that thing for something else, over and over again until he had a house.

Tomorrow, the quest is ending as envisioned: MacDonald is due to become the proud owner of a three-bedroom, 1,100-square-foot home provided by the town of Kipling, Saskatchewan. MacDonald and his girlfriend, Dominique Dupuis, expect to move there in early September.

“This is such a cool community project. It feels right,” MacDonald said. “And now that I think about it, I can't believe that another small town didn't think of it. It will literally put them on the map.”

What's in it for the town? The answer requires a quick MacDonald recap, featuring a menagerie of friendly folks, radio talk show hosts and aging celebrities, all bound together by the Internet.

It began when MacDonald, an aspiring writer, doer of odd jobs and apartment dweller, advertised in the barter section of the Craigslist Web site that he wanted something bigger or better for one red paper clip. He traded it for a fish-shaped pen, and posted on Craigslist again and again.

Roaming Canada and the United States, he exchanged the pen for a ceramic knob, and in turn: a camping stove, a generator, a beer keg and Budweiser sign, a snowmobile, a trip to the Canadian Rockies, a supply truck and a recording contract. Next, in April, he got himself really close, obtaining a year's rent in Phoenix.

His adventure became an Internet blockbuster. He did Canadian and Japanese TV and “Good Morning America.” He made dozens of local radio appearances – one of which, in Los Angeles, was heard by a man who ended up as a pivotal figure.

That man is Corbin Bernsen. You may remember him from his roles in “L.A. Law” and “Major League.”

Hip to the publicity-generating machine that is Kyle MacDonald, Bernsen contacted him to say he was writing and directing a movie and would offer a paid speaking role as an item available for trade.

MacDonald was thrilled. But he feared the integrity of his journey would be compromised if he accepted the role without trading Bernsen something he really could use. Say what you want about “Major League 3,” but

Bernsen has done well enough that he doesn't need a free apartment in Phoenix.

So MacDonald kept Bernsen's offer off his blog, but plowed ahead with an eye to finding something Bernsen would legitimately want.

Seemingly disregarding good economic sense, MacDonald traded the year's rent for an afternoon with rocker Alice Cooper. (MacDonald's response: "Alice Cooper is a gold mine of awesomeness and fun.") Then in a move that really confused his blog readers, MacDonald bartered time with Cooper for a snow globe depicting the band Kiss.

Re-enter Corbin Bernsen.

You see, since the days when he'd get free stuff on promotional tours for "L.A. Law," Bernsen has amassed a collection of 6,500 snow globes. Seen one at a time, "they look sort of goofy," Bernsen said. "Put them all together and they sort of look like pop art."

So MacDonald gave Bernsen the Kiss model and encouraged his blog readers to send the actor even more globes in exchange for autographed pictures.

All this delighted the elders in Kipling, a town of 1,140 believed to have been named in honor of author Rudyard Kipling.

Like many rural towns, Kipling is eager to stave off the perils of dwindling population by attracting new businesses, tourism and above all, attention. When the local development coordinator, Bert Roach, heard about MacDonald's odyssey, he suggested at the next council meeting that Kipling lure him.

Quickly, the town purchased an unoccupied rental house on Main Street and offered it to MacDonald. Roach won't disclose the price because MacDonald says he doesn't want to know. But Roach says it was well under the going rate in Kipling, which is about \$45,000 U.S.

The town also pledged to put a giant red paper clip at a highway rest stop and hold an "American Idol"-style competition for the movie role. Participants will have to make a donation to the town's parks department and a charity.

Bernsen says that if the right person emerges in the talent show, he'd be willing to cast him or her as a lead. "Maybe a career is going to get started. Maybe it's going to be huge. Maybe that's the magic of Kyle."

MacDonald doesn't expect to live in Kipling forever. But he says he'll make it home at least while he settles down to write a book.

Of course, even if the house came free, he'll have the usual homeowner headaches: taxes, utilities, upkeep. It should come as no surprise that MacDonald isn't worried.

"I'll figure something out," he said. "I can get a job. There's three grocery stores in town."

MacDonald's blog is at oneredpaperclip.blogspot.com.

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