

Bethel plays host to "Guy in the Sky" fund-raiser

By: B.J. O'Brien

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Travelers driving along Interstate 84 might be asking themselves "Who is that guy in the sky?" just after passing Exit 8. The answer: WRKI-195 disc jockey Neil Hedley, half of the popular local radio team Ethan and Neil.

Since Monday, he has been camping out on scaffolding alongside a billboard that is owned by The Scalzo Group, which donated the space, for 19 days in an effort to raise money for The United Way of Northern Fairfield County.

Mr. Hedley's perch is 25 feet off the ground, which provides him with a great view of Stony Hill Road and Interstate 84.

That means that passersby can also get a good view of the place that will be his home for more than another week.

"I saw a lot of honking and waving," Mr. Hedley said this week.

This isn't the first time that the native of Canada has done something like this. The disc jockey started his career in Toronto, which is also where he started camping out to raise money for a cause. The idea later went with him to Hartford and then to this area, when he joined 195 two years ago.

Last year's fund-raiser took place at a location on North Street in Danbury.

One thing that makes it interesting is that Mr. Hedley still goes on the air from his tent while he is outside braving the weather that comes along with this time of year.

His show with Ethan Carey is on the air from 5:30 to 10 a.m. He also goes on the air once every hour while "Guy in the Sky" is going on.

"Every morning deejay has their signature thing that they do," Mr. Hedley said, noting that "Guy in the Sky" is his.

He pointed out that he is not a fan of heights, however. "I am terrified of falling from heights," the disc jockey noted, adding that he has experienced some windy conditions since his stay on the scaffolding began early this week.

"Once the wind gets whipping, it's an adventure," Mr. Hedley said.

Although he is alone on the scaffolding for the most part, there are 195 employees on site throughout the day in the station's RV down below to take donations and help in other ways. Other disc jockeys from the station also go on the air from there as well. Security has been hired to stay overnight.

Doing something like this in the summer would be easier for Mr. Hedley, but doing it at this time of year is what makes people sit up and take notice.

Although he's done this many times, one thing that he never gets used to is the cold weather. Mr. Hedley keeps a small heater in his tent but noted that it doesn't make much of a difference. The only chance he has to warm up is when he goes down to the RV to shower everyday. "That's the only time you get warm again," he said.

It might seem like it would be tough to sleep with all the traffic that passes by on Interstate 84 and Stony Hill Road, but Mr. Hedley said it's not a problem once he gets used to it.

"After a couple of nights, you don't notice it anymore," he said, comparing his situation to that of people who live near railroad tracks.

During the "Guy in the Sky" promotion, there will be many things going on to raise money for the United Way.

According to Mr. Hedley, 195 listeners will be able to take part in auctions where the winners will be able to join him and other station employees for dinners that will be cooked by local restaurants and chefs Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights during the time he is camping out. Opportunities to have lunches at the site with Mr. Hedley, other 195 employees and local celebrities will also be given away.

Last year, Danbury Mayor Mark Boughton attended one and Gov. M. Jodi Rell attended another. Mr. Hedley said that Gov. Rell would be taking part again this year. People can find out more about making donations by going to the United Way of Northern Fairfield County's Web site at www.uwnfc.org or by going to www.guyinthesky.com. Mr. Hedley, who resides in East Hartford, said that his wife, Kelley, and daughter, Olivia, come by often to visit him.

"My wife thinks I'm crazy, but she's behind this," said. Olivia is a 2-year-old "who also thinks her daddy is crazy," Mr. Hedley added.

Last year's "Guy in the Sky" raised \$142,000 for the United Way of Northern Fairfield County. The radio station's goal for this year is to raise \$200,000.

"My goal is different," Mr. Hedley said, adding that he didn't want to disclose exactly how much he's shooting for.