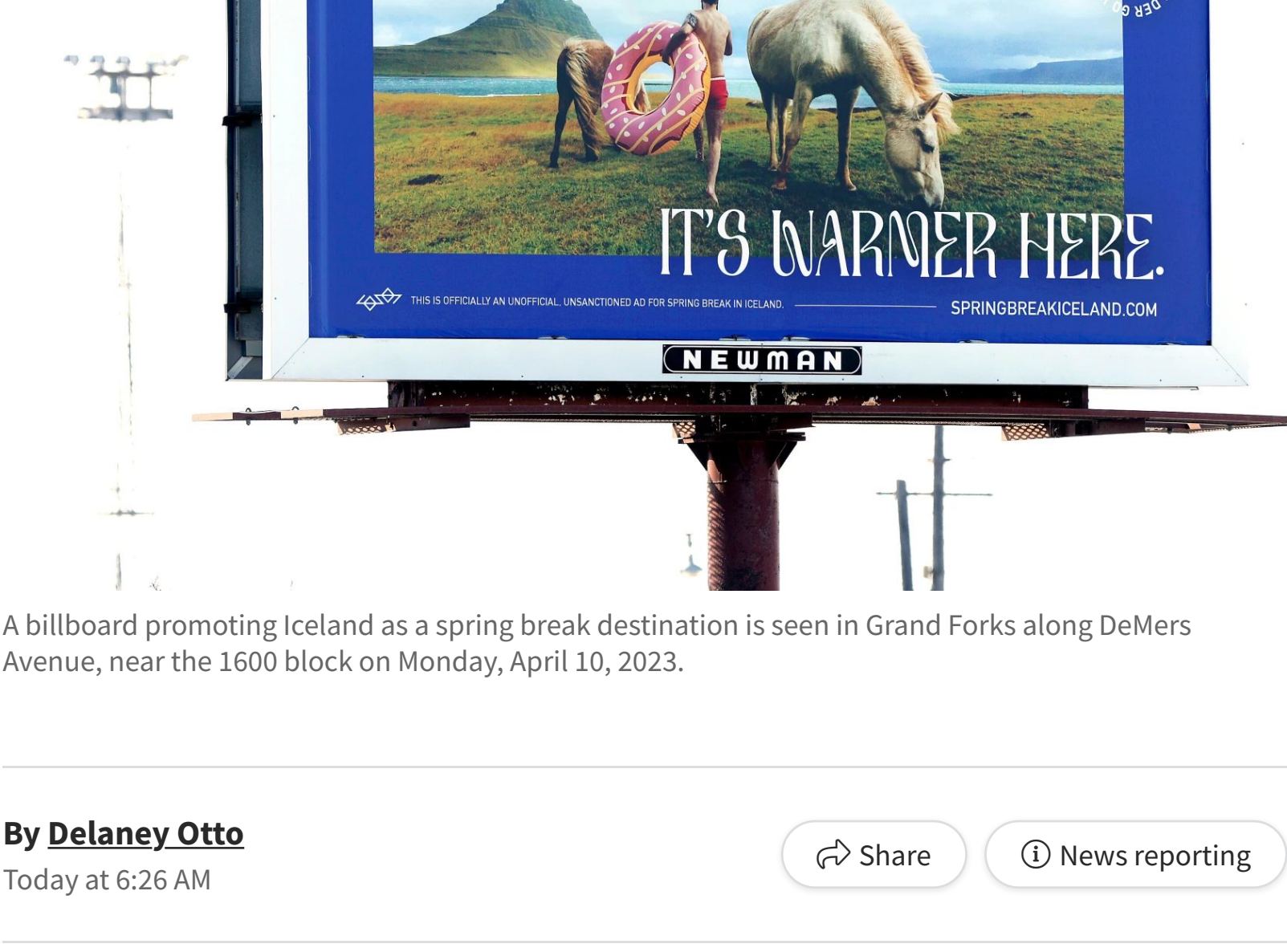


NEWS NORTH DAKOTA

# A 'quirky side project' — freelance advertisers tout 'Spring Break Iceland' in Grand Forks

The unofficial, unsanctioned Spring Break Iceland ad campaign was started by freelance advertisers Sara Becker and Peter Megler.



A billboard promoting Iceland as a spring break destination is seen in Grand Forks along DeMers Avenue, near the 1600 block on Monday, April 10, 2023.

By Delaney Otto

Today at 6:26 AM

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News reporting

GRAND FORKS — The billboard features a scenic view of Iceland — green grass, blue water, mountains visible in the distance.

Two wild horses graze, apparently paying no mind to a man in red swim shorts running toward the water, carrying a pool floatie that resembles a doughnut.

The message of the billboard: “Spring Break Iceland ’23. It’s warmer here.”

The unofficial, unsanctioned Spring Break Iceland ad campaign was started by freelance advertisers Sara Becker and Peter Megler. Used to working as copywriters, this is the first time Becker and Megler were able to work together on a project. Both have worked with big brands — Becker with Target and Amazon, Megler with Disney and Honda — but the freedom of a personal project like this is something they welcome.

“It’s not often that, in the advertising industry or as a freelancer, we all get to work on things that are this fun,” Becker, who is from Illinois, said. “A lot of the time you’re working on things that are more straightforward.”

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“Sometimes you might have a really cool campaign for a big brand, and in the early rounds it’s looking great, but by the time it goes out to the public it’s been changed,” Megler, who is from Michigan, added. “It’s not the same thing as when you first thought it up, so having kind of the purity of this with your friends and putting it out as we’re working on it together is really nice.”



“It’s not often that, in the advertising industry or as a freelancer, we all get to work on things that are this fun,” Becker said. “A lot of the time you’re working on things that are more straightforward.” Photo provided by Sara Becker

Importantly, the campaign is not official, nor is it backed or approved by Iceland’s government, tourism industry or businesses there.

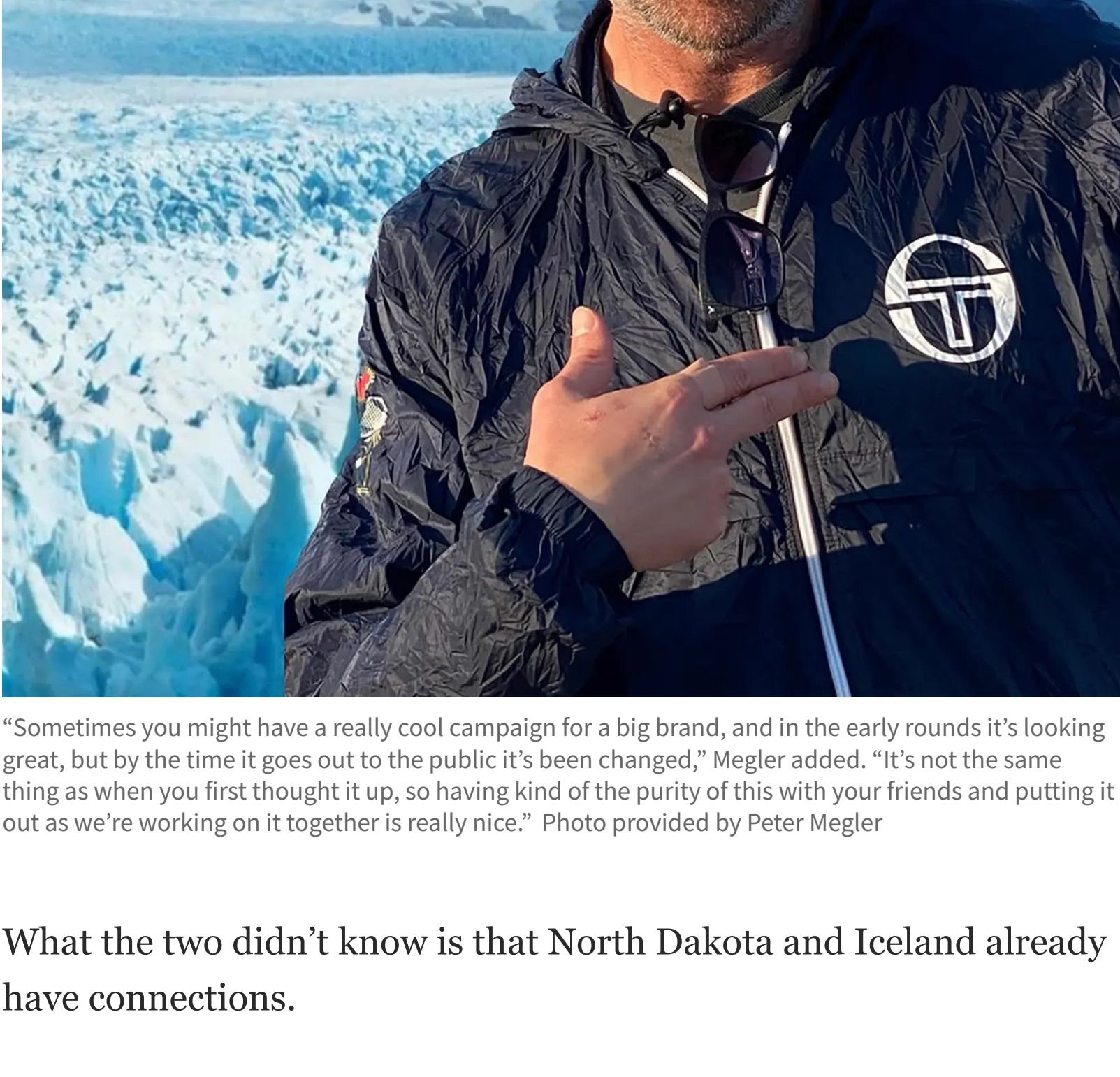
“Let’s be honest. No one from Iceland signed off on this,” the project’s website notes. “It’s just a quirky side project made by a group of advertising freelancers. We’ve never seen a spring break campaign for Iceland before. So we thought, why not?”

Spring Break Iceland started with a photo Becker posted to her Instagram account, featuring a beach she photographed while visiting Iceland. Megler saw the photo and started talking with her about it, which got the ball rolling on the idea of Iceland as a spring break destination.

“I think one of the ideas for the campaign itself was, there’s this cliché dumb American version of spring break of, like, beer bongs or going down to Miami or Cancun or something like that and kind of running wild,” Megler said. “And we kind of wanted to lean into that because you can also get wild in Iceland. Iceland is the wildest place on Earth.”

The reason the campaign was targeted at North Dakota, specifically Grand Forks, was simple: It’s cold here.

“We’re like, ‘what’s the coldest place in America?’” Megler said. “So we’re like, ‘oh, Grand Forks,’ and then we Googled it and made sure and it was indeed four degrees warmer in Iceland. It worked and a campaign was born.”



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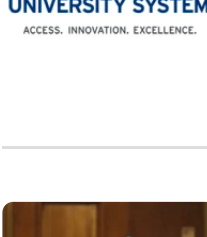
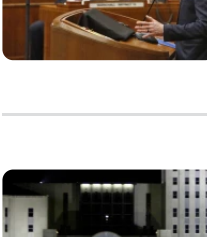
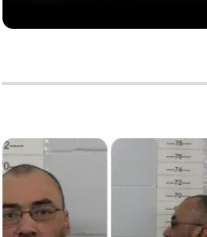
What the two didn’t know is that North Dakota and Iceland already have connections.

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Icelanders came to North Dakota in the late 1800s, settling in Pembina County. Today, the Icelandic Communities Association of Northeast North Dakota, a nonprofit organization, acts to preserve the state’s Icelandic heritage and culture. Every year on or around Aug. 2, Mountain, North Dakota — one of the towns founded by Icelandic settlers — hosts the Deuce of August, or August the Deuce. This year will be the 124th anniversary of the celebration, which further acts to promote North Dakota’s Icelandic heritage.

The ad campaign isn’t just a fun side project; Becker and Megler, who are now professionally based in Los Angeles, have set up a change.org petition for a direct flight from Grand Forks to Iceland, which currently has more than 60 signatures. They hope to catch the attention of airlines in the area, or in Iceland, and perhaps set up an actual flight.

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When it comes to the campaign team’s own experiences, everyone in the group but Megler has been to Iceland; Megler had a journey to the country lined up, but it was canceled due to COVID. Becker talked about her visit with a level of awe that showed the passion behind the silliness of the project, estimating she saw about 40 rainbows in one week.

“It was amazing,” Becker said. “It really is incredibly wild and stunning. ... It’s just so naturally gorgeous.”

Becker and Megler decided to bring their friends Quinn Lindgren and Christian Laniosz onto the project as art direction. Lindgren is responsible for the look of the billboard, which Becker and Megler decided to place near the Diamond Lounge in Grand Forks with the idea that college students and other bar customers would find humor in it.

“People are going to be walking around and seeing it and ideally also be in a humorous or more open-minded mood,” Becker said. “It felt like a really good spot for it.”

Spring Break Iceland’s website, <https://springbreakiceland.com/iceland-welcomes-you> , has more ads for the campaign, such as a viking relaxing in a hot spring and a unicorn resting in front of the northern lights. There’s also a video showcasing some of Iceland’s features, narrated by an Icelandic man voiced by Alex May, a writer, voiceover artist and Becker’s husband.

As for the future of Spring Break Iceland, that depends on the reception. Becker and Megler are funding the project themselves and are excited to do more if the project receives more positive attention.

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“We’re still ironing out pieces, but we’re playing with a lot of ideas still, and we still have more to come if this keeps going,” Megler said.

The billboard will be up until May 14.

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News reporting

By Delaney Otto

Otto is a recent University of North Dakota graduate and intern at the Herald.

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