

## Personal tribute

Written by Deb Egenberger

Wednesday, 28 July 2010 21:07 - Last Updated Wednesday, 28 July 2010 21:09

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### **One life, one flag, one mile.**

It's not about the 4,500 miles Mike Ehredt will travel on foot in the scorching sun.

Or the eight pairs of shoes he's already thrown away.

Or the 20 gallons of chocolate milk he has consumed to replenish his body.

It's not even about the American flags he plants at each mile marker along his journey across the country.

It's all about the U.S. soldiers who have lost their lives in Iraq.

Three years ago Ehredt, a retired postal worker and Army veteran, decided he wanted to do his own personal tribute to the fallen soldiers.

"It's never been my intent to stir up feelings or bring politics into the picture," Ehredt said when

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he finished his 30-mile daily run outside of Gothenburg Monday afternoon. "It's a personal journey flag to flag, coast to coast."



The planning and logistics took the Illinois native and a friend three years to complete. The trip from Astoria, OR, to Rockland, ME, will last just over five months.

"I wanted to do something across the country," said the avid cyclist and accomplished marathon runner, "like build an invisible wall."

Fewer than 50 people have run from coast to coast, Ehredt said. Many who have accomplished the feat have employed a support crew.

But for Ehredt it's just him, his three-wheeled stroller and his electronic devices that include a cellular phone, a Global Positioning Unit and a computer.

He runs a steady pace for 30 miles a day, stopping at each mile marker to ceremoniously place a small American flag complete with a yellow ribbon containing a fallen soldier's name, age, military unit and home town.

Ehredt takes a solemn moment to stand in salute before he runs to the next marker.

Each stop, each flag, each soldier's name is noted on Ehredt's GPS device, complete with a photo of the position.

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All flags and soldier names can be tracked on Ehredt's website [www.projectamericarun.com](http://www.projectamericarun.com).

Ehredt's flags have many Internet followers.

One of the most touching moments in Ehredt's journey so far was when he met Violet Kaylor on a lonely stretch of Highway 13 north of Craig, CO, early in the morning on June 27.

Kaylor's son Jon-Eric Loney was a 21-year-old Army corporal who died Nov. 28, 2006, in Iraq.

Kaylor had driven from Hartselle, AL, to see her son's flag planted at mile marker 114.

"Life often brings us circumstances and people who change our lives, that somehow enrich it in a way we can't explain," he said.

It's experiences like meeting Kaylor that keep Ehredt moving forward.

"It's not about me," he said. "If it was, I could have gotten to Nebraska and said, 'I've seen enough,' and gone home."

So Ehredt keeps running. Thanks to gracious hosts like Gary and Cathy Reynolds of Gothenburg, who stepped in at the last minute when another local host backed out, Ehredt is able to soak his tired feet, fill his stomach and get a good night's rest.

Most nightly hosts, he said, are friends of friends or someone suggested by the local Chamber of Commerce.

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The Reynolds couple are friends of the folks who hosted Ehredt Sunday night.

“We’ve kept people on church trips and kids traveling through but never a complete stranger,” Gary said. “We based our decision on the trust of our friends. Looks like it will work out just fine.”

The two men share a military and postal background.

“Hosts don’t realize how important they are in my journey,” Ehredt said. “Knowing there will be someone there at the end of the day to take me in helps me know I can make it another day.”

After visiting some historical sites in Gothenburg Monday evening, Ehredt hit the road again at 6 a.m. Tuesday en route to Lexington.

Ehredt said he can’t comprehend the miles or the number of flags.

“But I know I will make it to the next stop,” he said. “ I knew once I planted that first flag, there was no Plan B. I can’t not finish now.”