



Citizen photo/Hope Strong

Mike Ehredt of Driggs can close his eyes and still see this route across the nation in his mind's eye. Ehredt has run ultra marathons all over the world, but his greatest achievement is planned for May 2010, when he will retire from the Post Office and embark on a journey that will take him from sea to shining sea, honoring and remembering those who lost their lives so that others may enjoy freedom.

One patriotic pedestrian

Local veteran will place one flag for each fallen soldier of the Iraq War along every mile of a cross-continental route

By Hope Strong

In a world filled with pomp and circumstance, it is not often you run into a person that has equal parts humility

and ambition.

Mike Ehredt is such a man.

As of Tuesday, June 30, 2009, the United States had lost 4,321 troops in the Iraq War. In the spring of 2010, Mike will begin a journey across the nation to honor every fallen soldier who lost their life in the Middle East. His route is currently planned to cover 4,362 miles from Astoria, Oregon to Rockland, Maine, but he hopes it will be fewer miles, or, at least, no more.

An Army veteran and a seasoned long distance runner, Mike served the

nation with five years of military duty from 1979 to 1983, but he never felt he did enough.

"It always kind of ate at me," Mike said. "I did my time in the service, but I didn't feel fulfilled. I always thought I should have contributed more."

From a 250-mile, self-supported, trans-Himalayan trek to crossing the Sahara Desert twice on foot, Mike is well versed in the poetry of pedestrian power. Last spring he achieved the Rocky Mountain Slam by completing

the four most difficult 100-mile races in America. In a period of only four months, Mike ran the Hardrock Endurance Run in Colorado, the Bighorn Mountain Run in Wyoming, as well as the Wasatch and Bear 100, both at elevation in Utah.

"As I ran those races in the middle of the night, feeling like crap," Mike said, "I thought to myself, 'What would one of those fallen soldiers give just to feel like crap right now?'"

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Patriotic

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That served as a great inspiration for me at those times, and then the idea just popped into my head like a lightbulb as I was running along Stateline Road...I will run across the country to honor those that have given their lives."

And as simple as that, Mike's commitment was made. He had originally wanted to have the journey supported, but later decided that the purity of crossing the country on foot was best accomplished alone, though a satellite support team will be crucial to the success of his endeavor.

So from coast to coast, on a route that crosses 16 states, Mike will push a stroller that carries a phone, some food, and enough miniature American flags for ten days. He will stoop to remember a fallen soldier every mile by planting Old Glory in the ground. To each flag a handwritten nametag will be attached.

"You've just got to go telephone pole to telephone pole, and eventually you'll get to the other side"

Mike Ehredt

"It's a little overwhelming at times, but I try to keep it simple," Mike said. "I totally believe it will be successful. Physically, if you can't run, you walk, but they say a snail can devour a continent."

In addition to his ultra marathon history, Mike was a mail carrier for 19 years, so his feet are no stranger to foot traffic. One month before his cross-country trek begins, Mike will retire from the United States Postal Service, leaving behind decades at the post office to embark on what he hopes to be a 22-week trek, running close to 30 miles per day.

"I don't know what I'll do when I'm finished, but I'll have six months to think about it. I'll have time enough to answer every question I've ever asked myself," Mike said. "You can't just wait around for the time to be right. I'm 48-years-old. I've got to go with this now."

So ten short months from now, Mike will take to the back roads with the two-fold aspiration of paying tribute while also touching lives, experiencing America intimately by meeting with people along the way to share in the greatness of a nation. From Oregon

to Washington, Idaho to Montana, Wyoming to Colorado, Nebraska onto Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, New Hampshire and finally Maine, Mike will put one foot in front on the other to do what only a few others can claim.

"There's no way to train for this," Mike said. "You've just got to go telephone pole to telephone pole, and eventually you'll get to the other side. I think I'll end up with some good stories. And if it makes people stop and think, then it'll all be worthwhile. This is not a political statement at all. It's just my way to honor and remember."

After Mike made up his mind to take this journey, he enlisted the help of his friend, Wally Thrall, a man he knew from the post office.

"I knew what I wanted to do, but I knew I needed help," Mike said. "I told Wally I wanted to get from point A to Point B, but I didn't know how to do it. He came back a couple days later with a plan, painstakingly looking at every step along the way."

Through a network already in place with Veterans of Foreign Wars, Mike and Wally will attempt to find accommodations along the way, but the two-man team needs additional volunteers to tackle to mountain the of logistics involved in such an undertaking.

"I have complete faith that the hospitality of the American people will take care of me, but I'm prepared if it doesn't," Mike said. "Originally I was going to take a dog along with me, but my brother told me I'd look like a hobo. Growing up in Illinois there was a hobo that came through town every year. Sure enough, he had a dog."

Mike will set up mail drops along the way that will replenish his supply of flags and food, though he plans on eating most of his meals at rest stops.

"I'll fill the gas tank with whatever," Mike said. "I just want to keep a low profile and make sure I stay on schedule. I'll have food enough prepared for the days in between towns."

Once Mike takes his first eastbound step on May 1, he and Wally anticipate it will take him 37 days to pass through Teton Valley. There is great confidence in the success of what has been dubbed the Project America Run, but the two-man team needs additional volunteers to help with the effort.

"Everybody in this valley has a skill," Mike said. "We can cover a lot of ground."

Mike anticipates going through ten pairs of running shoes as he jogs across America. He is already sponsored by Brooks and Patagonia, but he needs additional volunteer talent to make this patriotic dream a reality. Call 208-360-9647 or visit www.projectamericarun.com to contact Mike with regard to the following positions listed in the box.



Citizen courtesy photo

Mike Ehredt will watch seasons change across America as he journeys from coast to coast to honor fallen soldiers. Mike and his friend Wally Thrall are anxious to iron out the itinerary but they need assistance. Please see the box below to see if you can help this local man achieve his goal successfully.

PROJECT AMERICA RUN

Web Site Manager We need someone to overhaul our current Web site and keep it updated with fresh information. Once the run commences, Mike will be frequently uploading blog entries and photographs to be put on the Web site.

Media Manager This very important position requires excellent organizational skills, staying ahead of Mike as he makes his way across America, communicating with appropriate media outlets, submitting press releases, and handling requests for interviews.

Data Management We have to organize a ton of data regarding hosts, state transportation, fallen soldiers, ceremonies, media contacts, donations, etc. We need a well-organized individual with excellent computer skills who can help us manage all this information.

Data Entry We also need two or three individuals who can work with our data management person to input all this data as needed.

Section Managers Mike's run is broken down into 4 sections. We need a three-person team for each section to plan and tag-team support Mike while he is running each section. This will involve considerable phone work and numerous other details, as well as being on-call in case Mike needs to reach someone.

Flag Preparation We will need several individuals with good handwriting who will be able to write labels for flags. This will be an ongoing process over the next many months, as there are over 4,300 flags to label.