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50 states. 50 weeks. 50 years old

Western New York native to take on the ultimate marathon

by Marwa Eltagouri

When people turn 50, they usually throw a huge party, or treat themselves to a vacation getaway or new car. But David Miller, 49, has much bigger plans: a trip to each of the 50 states – on bike.

His expedition, titled “Bike 50 at 50,” consists of him taking a year-long (50-week) bike ride through each of the 48 contiguous states, as well as Hawaii and Alaska the day after his 50th birthday, to help raise money for four different charities. He will travel for six days a week, biking about 70 to 80 miles a day.

Miller, who currently lives in Mexico and whose parents reside in Youngstown, has spent recent years training in triathlons of all sorts, and initially planned his 50th birthday project to involve a series of consecutive weekly triathlons around the world for a year. And though he had the flexibility to do so as an unmarried man with no children, as well as the ability to



David Miller and his dog and faithful companion, Max.

take a sabbatical from work, there just weren't enough triathlons for that project to be possible. He, therefore, decided to take on his own project.

“I thought 50; 50 weeks is almost a year; 50 states in the union; why not something related to that?” Miller said.

He began to plan out the details immediately. Miller began analyzing distances, referring to Google Maps, which this year has added a feature that allows one to figure out how long it will take to get from “Point A” to “Point B” by bike. This allowed him to draft a yearlong route.

The trip would begin in San Diego, and from there Miller would bike to Florida, and then bike from Georgia back to San Francisco. From San Francisco he would continue on to Washington, D.C., and then from D.C. bike up to Maine. He would then bike from Maine to New York state, through New York to Michigan, and then from Michigan bike to Washington state.

Once in Seattle, Miller would be able to travel to Alaska via the Alaskan Marine Highway, a ferry

system that goes from Bellingham, Wash., up to Homer, Alaska. From there he plans to bike through Alaska and then board a plane to Hawaii, where he will finish the trip.

Although he developed a set route, Miller still had to figure out how to accommodate his biggest challenge: his dog and companion, Max, a 5-year old Weimaraner.

“He’s always been with me, and so when I planned this I thought, ‘Well, what am I gonna’ do with the dog?’” Miller said. “I talked to the vet and she said that I couldn’t run him for eight hours a day, and that if I left him I should basically say goodbye since most dogs can’t stay alone for that long. And I really didn’t wanna’ give him up, so I started making plans on taking him with me.”

Miller therefore will purchase a special trailer to carry Max in, as well as his cargo, consisting of food, water, clothes, and supplies. Part of the preparation has thus included maintaining Max during the trip, since Miller will be trailing 160-180 pounds behind him.

“The extra weight means I’ve really got to train, and I still have to, because how do you train for an event that’s gonna’ take a year?” Miller said. “What I’m really trying to prepare for is not to suffer for the first four, five weeks of the trip, and have the rude awakening that I’m not in the physical shape that I need to be.”

Miller’s involved in a very strict training regimen, where he not only concentrates on the bike, but on swimming and running as well, since he finds it easier to mix training as a triathlete. Swimming provides him with an upper-body workout, contributing to the full-body cardio workout combination most ideal for his adventure.

Miller’s trip proceeds will go to four different charities, all of which he has a personal connection with. The first is the Cancer Research Institute, since Miller’s mother was diagnosed with cancer for the first time when she was 50. She’s had two bouts and has beaten

them both, through changing her lifestyle and through treatment. Miller’s father was diagnosed with angina at 33, so Miller also will send proceeds to the American Heart Association.

“You see my parents now, who are in their early-mid-70s, and they’re healthy, vibrant, strong folks who enjoy living life and travel, and living in Youngstown,” he said. “I really believe that it’s because of things like Cancer Research Institute and the American Heart Association that they’re still very much alive and healthy.”

Miller also feels that, since he will be out in nature and on the road for a year, it would be important to make a statement for the protection and betterment of the environment by contributing to the Nature Conservancy.

The fourth organization will be a Mexican charity, since Miller has resided in Mexico for 17 years.

A graduate of Amherst Central High School, Miller grew up in Buffalo and went on to study economics at the University of Michigan. He has traveled and worked overseas, and for a while resided in California, where he was involved with Athletes and Entertainers for Kids and the Make-A-Wish Foundation. In Mexico, he now works for his own company, dedicated to the founding and advancement of multi-sport health and fitness clubs. Miller founded the first one of its kind.

Miller’s trip will be well documented on his website, www.bike50at50.com, on Twitter and Facebook, which will be available in both Spanish and English. He intends to purchase a video camera to regularly post his observations on the Web.

He plans to embark on his trip Oct. 31, the morning after his 50th birthday, and plans to arrive in Western New York around mid-July.

“There are very few sure things over the next few months. I don’t know how I’m gonna’ get sponsorship; I don’t know if it’s gonna’ rain on me every day; I don’t know if I’m gonna’ encounter snow,” Miller said. “But the one thing that I do know is that I’ll be starting my trip on Monday morning, Oct. 31. That’s for certain.”

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