

Baby Boomer “SOARs” Nation for Caregiver Resources

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Teri Swezey

“Fear is not a reason not to do something.” Those were the words spoken by the 57-year old Teri Swezey when she stopped by *The Seminole Producer* office for a short break during her walk across America on last week. Swezey is the woman walking 3,039 miles for a cause close to her heart in memory of her mother.

The baby boomer took her first steps in her cross-country trek on April 1, 2012 but her journey began several years ago during the time she undertook the care of her mother, Mary, who had end-stage dementia. During the last few years of her mother’s life, Swezey struggled with the idea of few resources being offered to caretakers of elderly parents.

During her illness, Swezey and her mother often talked of the limited resources for caregivers and Swezey had always wanted to walk across America. “My mom thought it was a crazy idea, but I know that now that I’m doing it, she would be proud of me,” Swezey said.

After Mary’s death, Swezey started to look more deeply into caregiver resources. “There was hardly anything out there in the way of assistance for caregivers,” said Swezey. So, Teri put together SOAR (Seniors Obtaining Assistance and Resources, Inc.) which is a nonprofit organization that focuses on three specific areas:

1. Prescription co-pay assistance for seniors;
2. Low-income meal assistance for seniors;
- and 3. Relief services for caregivers of the elderly (known as respite).

The inspiration of the SOAR name and logo came from a photo of Swezey’s mother performing one of the amazing swan dives she was known for. “My mother was very athletic,” Swezey said. “She used to do these amazing swan dives in her younger days and through that she instilled in me the importance of being active. She liked to soar in the sky but I like to keep my feet on the ground.”

Swezey's walk started in Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina and has stretched across seven states (NC, SC, GA, AL, MS, AR and OK) so far. Swezey reached her halfway point last Friday, July 20, in Norman, for a total of over 1,400 miles walked so far. "I've taken to riding my bike some now. It keeps me on track but it also offers me more time to stop and talk with the communities I'm passing through about resources for the elderly,"

Swezey said "AARP of North Carolina is one of my supporters so I'm spreading the word about AARP's 'Decide.Create.Share.' national campaign that is aimed at increasing the awareness of Baby Boomer women for planning for their own long-term care."

Swezey is not alone in her walk across the states, her good friend Robert Hoggard follows her journey in a truck and trailer, which also serves as being their home base.

"I've had a tremendous amount of support along the way and have met lots of caring and hospitable people." Swezey says her journey has been filled with many people stopping to check on her, bring her water, donate to her cause and also to share their caregiver's stories with her as well.

From Norman, Swezey will head down highway 81 and exit the state around Hollis. She plans on completing her cross-country journey in mid-October at the Pacific Ocean in Cambria, CA. Cambria holds a special place for the energetic woman as it was her parents' long-time adopted hometown.

For more information on her organization SOAR, visit her website at www.walkusa4soar.org.



The Long Road Home

Teri Swezey of Wrightsville Beach, N.C., passed through Seminole last week on her way across the U.S. Swezey will walk this route (right) to raise awareness of her nonprofit organization, Seniors Obtaining Assistance and Resources (SOAR), which seeks to help caregivers of elderly parents.