

Walking for seniors
by REX WILGUS
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Teri Swezey in Amory.

AMORY - Teri Swezey walked through downtown Amory on Thursday, June 7, on her way from North Carolina to California, part of an effort to raise awareness and funds for the needs of the elderly and their caregivers, especially in rural areas.

Swezey, a 57-year-old public health researcher, began her journey on April 1 and will finish in October. She chose a deliberately rural route and has been stopping at senior centers. She's becoming known as the "Propeller Lady" because of her unique method of trying to signal her presence on busy roads. She averages about three miles per hour.

The walk was prompted by Swezey's experience of caring for her aging mother.

"If you had to hire someone to be there 24/7 like I was, that would be three shifts - it's a lot of work. I didn't realize how much work it was," she said. She said the experience taught her that while the elderly need assistance - and there are increasing numbers of the elderly - their caregivers also need assistance.

She is actively seeking sponsors to help with both the walk and her new organization, SOAR (Seniors Obtaining Assistance and Resources, Inc.). She has just achieved 501 (c)

3 status. Through SOAR, she hopes to raise \$180,000 to help seniors with medication co-pays as well as to fund meals on wheels programs and relief services for caregivers.

Readers can follow her adventure on Twitter at @SOARFeat2012 or see walkusa4soar.org.

Swezey says she's enjoying the walk though she worries about dogs, snakes and sometimes careless drivers. "I don't want to become a hood ornament," she said. "I always walk facing traffic and try to stay focused. I've seen a lot of dead snakes on the roads."

Her partner, Robert Hoggard, follows behind with a truck and camper.

"This walk is not about me," Swezey said. "It's about the message. It's difficult to grow older. Programs like Meals on Wheels are being reduced at a time when there is increased need. We have an aging population. There are all kinds of challenges that the elderly and their caregivers face."

She said seniors shouldn't have to decide between food or medications or whether to heat the house when it's cold.

She said she's walking to Cambria, California, which is where her parents lived.

"It will be like going home," she said.

Read more: Monroe360.com - [Walking for seniors](#)