

# Walking for the elderly

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HELENA-WEST HELENA —  
Randy Hogan

**Teri Swezey, a member of Seniors Obtaining Assistances and Resources, is making a cross-country journey on foot to raise funds and awareness of the vulnerable elderly and their caregivers.**

A self-proclaimed “baby boomer” is making a long cross-country journey on foot in support of the vulnerable elderly and their caregivers in the U.S.

Teri Swezey, a member of Seniors Obtaining Assistance and Resources Inc. (SOAR) board, was in Helena last week drumming up support for her worthy cause. The purpose of SOAR, said Swezey, is to raise awareness and funds for vulnerable elderly people and their caregivers.

Swezey began her trek in Wrightsville, N.C. on April 1. Averaging about between 15 and 20 miles per day, she hopes to reach her destination in Cambria, Calif., some 3,039 miles away, by sometime in October.

A public health researcher, Swezey was caregiver for her late mother, who had end-stage dementia.

“My mother, Mary, had late stage dementia,” said Swezey. “Sharing the last few years of her life as her caregiver is the inspiration for this walk across America. Mom’s soaring swan dive is the inspiration for the SOAR Feat 2012 name and logo.

“I believe that by raising awareness, many others who share the same struggles Mom and I went through, will find relief and support along their own journeys with aging,” she added.

Swezey's goal is to raise at least \$180,000 from the walk.

"Every penny counts," she said. "If two people pledge a penny per mile (\$30) for each of the approximately 3,000 miles of the walk we can meet this goal."

Funds will be used to provide much-needed assistance for co-pays for prescriptions, low-income meal programs and relief services for caregivers.

SOAR and Swezey are seeking partners and sponsors who will gain increased exposure by being featured on the SOAR Feat 2012 Website, Face Book page, promotional materials and press releases that will be forthcoming about the walk.

Swezey has not quite reached the mid-way point of her long trip. She estimates the mid-point to be Spiro, Okla.

"I have met a lot of interesting people along the way and the people in Helena are quite friendly," she said. She praised Helena-West Helena Police Chief Uless Wallace for providing her a police escort across the Helena Bridge.

So far, Swezey says she has encountered few problems, with the exception of the extreme heat in some areas and dehydration. She reported that she has solved the dehydration problem.

A friend in a vehicle pulling a small trailer, or camper is accompanying her. The camper is equipped with beds and plenty of food to eat, thus saving on food and lodging bills, plus having the security of having someone nearby.

She said laughingly, "I won't mind a bit riding in the vehicle all the way back home."