

Woman's walk across the US stops in Eufaula

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By Shauna Belyeu



Family members often honor late loved ones in many different ways, but few people challenge themselves to walk across the country. That is exactly what Teri Swezey did.

Walking stick in hand and a colorful pinwheel over her head, Swezey strolled through Eufaula last Thursday to share her story.

Swezey, 57, lives in Carrboro, NC. She was the primary caregiver for her mother, Mary, who had late stage dementia. "Sharing the last few years of her life as her caregiver inspired me to walk across the country and raise donations and awareness on behalf of the vulnerable elderly and their caregivers," said Swezey. "Caring for elderly family members can be the sweetest moments but they can also be isolating and stressful."

Swezey sold her house to finance her 12-state, 3,039-mile expedition also known as SOAR Feat 2012. SOAR, short for Seniors Obtaining Assistance and Resources, was designed to raise awareness in three specific areas:

- Prescription co-pay assistance for seniors
- Low-income meal assistance for seniors
- Relief services for caregivers, also known as respite care

Swezey began her journey on April 1, 2012, walking between 15-20 miles a day. Her journey will conclude in October when she reaches Cambria, California, her parents adopted hometown.

Swezey says she was inspired by others who have made a journey across the states such as Author Peter Jenkins who wrote "A Walk Across America" about his journey from New York to Oregon. "I've always loved to walk and thought what a great way to do what I love and educate others," said Swezey.

"We also need to educate women about our own long-term care planning." Swezey is also sponsored by AARP, which has a national campaign called "Decide.Create.Share." It is aimed at increasing baby boomer women's awareness for their own long-term planning.

After her visit here in Eufaula she plans to continue down Highway 9 West toward Norman. In the meantime, she has a message to share, memories to recall and a long road ahead. For more information on Swezey's journey go to walkusa4soar.org, to follow her on Facebook at SOAE Feat 2012.