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Freedom Run stops in Avon - Father/son duo trekking cross-country for charity By Wade Coggeshall

AVON — At 75 years old Tom Knoll could easily be excused if he decided to take it easy.

Then again, that wouldn't be Tom Knoll. Instead, the retired Marine is running 3,300 miles cross-country with his son Warren in an effort to raise \$1 million for charity. "Just because you're a senior citizen doesn't mean you can't stay active," Tom said.

The trip, called the Freedom Run Across America, started March 1 in San Diego and is scheduled to end July 4 in Washington, D.C. The Knolls, along with escort Hubie Krawczyk, have been running or bicycling about 30 miles a day. They've been stopping at various points along the way, including Saturday morning at American Legion Post 145 here. The American Legion is a Freedom Run sponsor. After leaving Post 145, they journeyed to the Speedway Post for a picnic before embarking for Cleveland.



Tom Knoll and his friend from the Marines, his son Warren and Hubie Krawczyk pose with the Avon American Legion Post Commander.

"When you look at people who are missing a limb or are terminally ill, I don't really have any excuses," Warren said.

Another special aspect has been all the impressive people they've met along the way. That includes a Young Marines group in Arizona comprised of 11- and 12-year-olds ("They all know where they're going. They're going to be successful," Tom said) to Marine Corps reserve officers in Palm Springs. They're making it a point to stop at Veterans Administration hospitals and visit with patients, some of whom rarely have visitors. Warren says those who can't donate money to charity can take as little as an hour of their time to visit veterans who gave so much of themselves in service to our country.



American Legion Riders from Avon, Zionsville and Speedway prepare to escort the Freedom Runners to the Speedway American Legion

Though Tom is retired from the Marines he went back to work for the government doing defense intelligence after 9/11 ("You're never too old to serve your country," he said). He's also a college professor, author, and helps coach a running team in Hawaii, where he lives. Somewhere amongst all that, he makes it a point to visit one of the Seven Wonders of the World annually.

"People should always have goals," Tom said. "If you do everything you want to do, you'll probably die shortly after. What else is there to live for if you've done everything?"

Still, the Freedom Run's nature is quite an undertaking. Krawczyk told the Post 145 gathering here that he's often asked why he would do this. "There's a passion we have, and that passion is freedom," he said. And as they've seen with the people they've visited along the way, "Freedom comes with a price."

There's also something to be said for not just seeing this country, but experiencing it. "It gives you the opportunity to truly appreciate America," Krawczyk said.

To make a tax-deductible donation to Freedom Run, visit the website at www.usfreedomrun.com or call (414) 483-5412.

Freedom Run has been an interesting experience for several reasons. One would be the weather. It started off rather dimly in California, with high winds to accompany 160,000 feet of vertical gain and 10 inches of shoulder space on the road in which to jog while semis whizzed by. Then there was the tornado they dodged, and of course the variations in temperature. Tom suffered a fall 19 miles in that caused a cataract in one of his eyes and 25 stitches to close a gash in his head.

Nonetheless, the participants think Freedom Run has gone well. Factoring in the charities they work for — the Wounded Warrior Project for injured veterans; the Sunshine Foundation, which grants wishes for seriously ill and abused children; and the Challenged Athlete Foundation, which helps disabled athletes — stitches are nothing.



Warren Knoll unfurls an American flag he's preparing to run with up U.S. 36 en route to the Speedway American Legion Post Saturday afternoon.

"We don't just live our lives for us, but other people too," he said.

Lastly, Freedom Run has been a curious father/son experience. Tom estimates they've gotten along about 90 percent of the time while Warren added, "We're German, so more than once in a while we butt heads. Later on we laugh about it."

This isn't the first cross-country trek Tom has made. The first was 25 years ago, 3,100 miles from D.C. to Los Angeles for the Sunshine Foundation, done in 64 days. It's not surprising considering he's a triathlete and one of the founders of Ironman. Physical fitness has always been important to Tom, which is why he's also promoting the President's Council on Physical Fitness on the Freedom Run. Warren is a triathlete too.

"There's not anything I won't do if somebody else wants to do it," he said.