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He'll ride 40,000 miles to raise breast-cancer research funds

By Emily Vizzo
May 29, 2008

CARLSBAD – David Clifton, 61, leaves today for a three-month, solo motorcycle trek through 49 states and several Canadian provinces.

His goal: raise \$100,000 for the Susan G. Komen for the Cure Foundation, an organization dedicated to funding breast cancer research, screenings and education.

It's a cause that holds personal significance for the Carlsbad man, whose wife, Doreen Clifton, was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2005, and whose close friend, Gerri Hickman, died from the disease that same year.

"I've been thinking about making the trip for a zillion years," David Clifton said. "And I'm hoping this is a unique enough deal that it will raise awareness for all women . . . If one lady goes to get an exam, that's all I would need. I'd like to help find the cure sooner, quicker, faster."

Clifton has mapped a route that first snakes up from Encinitas to Alaska and the Yukon territory before drifting into the Southern Canadian provinces.

From there, it makes a southern-twisting loop down through Colorado, meanders through the Midwest, twists southward along the East Coast and back through the Southwest to California.

The roughly 40,000-mile journey should wind down by Sept. 10, Clifton estimated. The kick-off was slated for 7 a.m. today at VG Donut & Bakery in Encinitas, where Clifton planned a final sugary treat with friends at his favorite hangout before heading out.

Although Clifton has called North County home for 23 years, he now lives and works in Dubai as a managing director for Interval International, an exchange company for high-end time shares.

He and his wife will eventually make their way back to their Carlsbad residence full time, he said.

"This is also a huge adventure for me," Clifton said. "There is no question I will hit snow, hail, 115-degree weather, huge rain. Tornadoes are an absolute potential."

Part of the adventure will be getting to know people along the way, he said. Clifton hopes that his immaculate, stars-and-stripes motif bike will spark interest in gas stations, coffee shop parking lots, and the campgrounds and mom-and-pop motels in which he plans to stay.

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But the main focus will be raising awareness, both by spending time with people on the road and by generating interest and donations online through the blog he has started.

"Don't underestimate the impact of getting a phone call like that," Clifton said, recalling the day he learned of his wife's diagnosis. "Man oh man, there's just no ducking, no hiding. If I can do a little bit in that regard, that would be cool."

Clifton plans to create chatty posts chronicling his experiences, including "Dog of the Week," his just-for-fun photographs of dogs nationwide. His bike has a mounted camera for snapping photos on the go.

More formally, he'll be interviewing people along the way about living an active lifestyle for the trip's sponsor, Titan, a Chinese sports media company.

"We're honored that he is going on this mission to help us with our mission, which is a world without breast cancer," said Sandy Rabourne, director of community development and outreach with the Susan G. Komen For the Cure Foundation and a breast cancer survivor.

"The funds he is raising are going to help uninsured and underinsured women, as well as to promote research. We're honored to partner with him and see him off" Rabourne said.

Clifton said his family has been very supportive. Daughter Kelly, son Brendon and Brendon's fiancée, Denise Petrillo, live in San Diego County.

Doreen Clifton, 60, said she is looking forward to meeting up with her husband at intervals around the country: Big Sky, Mont., and maybe Texas or New Orleans.

"I'm thrilled," said Doreen Clifton, who is in remission. "We, his family, are behind him 100 percent. We are very proud."

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■ Emily Vizzo is a freelance writer in San Diego.

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