

Hardships don't stop hiker's trek for child

Schiwal completes Appalachian Trail raising CdLS funds

By Bobby Moore

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Through seven months, 14 states, 2,174 miles and millions of steps, local hiker Jim Schiwal's journey across the Appalachian Trail was for a single cause - raising funds for the Cornelia de Lange Syndrome (CdLS) Foundation.

Completing the trail, which stretches from Georgia to Maine, was a goal for Schiwal for over 20 years.

Realizing his goal was not easy though, as obstacles ranging from the death of Schiwal's mother to a falling accident that resulted in a head injury slowed him down.

Despite the difficulties, Schiwal kept hitting the trail for Alley Grubb, a 6-year-old girl who was born with CdLS.



CdLS is a little-known genetic disorder that can lead to severe developmental anomalies. It affects both the physical and intellectual development of a child. Hiker Jim Schiwal shows 6-year-old Alley Grubb photos of his long journey across the Appalachian Trail. (Photo by Nathan Todd)

"My mother passed away during that time, but this young lady (Grubb) kept me going," Schiwal said. Schiwal met Grubb, a first-grader at Lithia Springs Elementary School, through Rhonda Case, the director of the Woodie Fite Senior Center.

Schiwal said that his mother wanted him to return to the trail, and a number of local supporters provided him with supplies throughout the seven months.

Among Schiwal's supporters were his friends at the Woodie Fite Senior Center; John Phillips, owner of B.J.'s Barber Shop and the person in charge of mailing food and supplies for Schiwal to various post offices and hostels along the trail; and Art Moore, the Webmaster of www.hikerjim.com. "It was the drive and really the focus of the people that supported me that kept me on the trail," Schiwal said.

In addition to local supporters, Schiwal was given a place to stay by members of the Grubb family in Pennsylvania and Maine.

With Schiwal able to overcome obstacles like his head injury, which fortunately occurred when he was hiking with a former Army Ranger who was able to help him, an ideal situation set itself up as Schiwal had the opportunity to reach the end of the trail he began Feb. 11 on Sept. 11.

"We completed the hike by hiking up Mt. Katahdin on 9/11 as our attempt to take back the day from terrorists who destroyed part of our country in 2001," Schiwal said in an e-mail to his Web site.

Reaching the peak of Mt. Katahdin on Sept. 11 was not ideal, though, because of sleet and slippery rocks, but Schiwal and a group of hikers that included an Australian grandmother of 14 persevered.

“I was happy that we could summit on that day, but it turned out to be a bad weather day,” Schiwal said. By finishing a “thru-hike” from the Appalachian’s starting point in Georgia to its finish in Maine, Schiwal became part of the estimated 20 percent that complete the hike.

Since returning to Douglasville, Schiwal’s efforts have raised \$5,000 in pledges and donations for the Connecticut-based CdLS Foundation. The amount is written on a giant check that is decorated with the footprints of Grubb.

With a 20-year goal out of the way, Schiwal has decided that he wants to bike across the United States in the summer of 2009 to raise money for Grubb.

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