

By Sharon Corcoran

The Goodland Star-News
What would make a homeless man with \$40 to his name hop on a bicycle to pedal across the United States?

That's a question Bruce Hamilton of Columbus, Ohio, answers wherever he goes on his cross-country trip.

Hamilton camped out for a night in Goodland last month and spent part of the next day at the Goodland Public Library working on a book about his journey and at McB's Motor and Radiator Repair getting a tire replaced.

He said he left Columbus with the goal of pedaling 2,000 miles through nine states but has changed his course to include 15 states and over 4,000 miles. He is on a bicycle, pulling a tiny trailer with supplies, but has no support team or vehicle.

"There is no car with spare parts," he said. "It's just me against the elements, and I'm not backing down."

Hamilton, 56, said he has been unemployed since shortly after the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, and suffered from clinical depression during that time. He said he received an eviction notice in May and had two choices.

"I could go to a shelter," he said, "but I probably would have got to the door, turned around and run in front of a bus. Or, I could make the trip, make something positive out of it."

Hamilton said with a 2 1/2-year gap in his employment record, he had something to prove.

"I wanted to prove I'm not too old, not too worn out and still mentally able," he said. "I wanted to make the 2,000 miles a statement."

Also, he said, when prospective employers ask what he has been doing, he'll have something to tell them. And he had a chance to raise awareness of mental health issues, especially depression.

Hamilton said he had worked in sales for DeVry University but then started a new job Sept. 10, 2001, at a university in New York. He said he was headed for the Boston airport the morning of 9-11 to catch an

American Airlines flight.

He was locked in a train in New York's Penn Station with many evacuees from Manhattan, as a bomb threat kept them from moving forward, and then he could not get off the train at Newark's Penn Station due to a shooting right outside the building.

There was hysteria on the train when passengers heard about the bomb threat, Hamilton said; women were on their cell phones with family saying their last good-byes. They were convinced we wouldn't get out alive, he said.

In the months following 9-11, he said, it was a war zone in New York. He said he couldn't get his mail on account of anthrax, and finally, after 60 days, he decided the city wasn't for him and returned to Columbus. He has suffered from depression and unemployment ever since.

Before Hamilton left on his bicycle journey, his oldest daughter, Nicolle Hamilton, 25, of Seattle, sent a letter out to her e-mail address book about the trip. People mailed her father donations along with letters about their experiences with depression.

Hamilton said one of the best letters he received was from a woman from Austria who said her mother had suffered with depression her whole life.

He said the woman told him that the day he was leaving on his trip was the anniversary of her mother's death.

She sent a \$50 donation, he said, and said, "Take me and my mother with you on this trip."

Hamilton said others have told him he has been an inspiration to them and that he should write a book about the trip to inspire others.

"I never thought of myself as an inspirational person," he said, "but this has been an inspirational trip. It's been far too spiritual a journey to keep to myself."

Along the way, Hamilton said, he has met many people who have shared their experiences with depression and who have shed much light on what he has been dealing with and why.

One was a man walking across



Bruce Hamilton took off from McB's Motor and Radiator Repair, heading for Salina. Hamilton had spent the night in Goodland and is on his way back to Columbus, Ohio, completing a cross-country trip about which he is writing a book.

Photo by Sharon Corcoran/The Goodland Star-News

the country for mental health awareness, and Hamilton said he spent five hours talking to him and mentioned what happened to him on Sept. 11.

"I felt I wasn't a victim of 9-11," Hamilton said, "and I didn't have a right to be affected. He suggested I was suffering from post-traumatic stress."

That was one of the most beneficial things to come from the trip, he

said. But Hamilton barely had a chance to connect with the walker.

"I had three false starts that day," he said, "because of chest pains. The man had been walking five minutes when I met him. I could have missed him entirely."

Hamilton spent over two weeks at the Grand Canyon and met a number of interesting people, among them a man who lives a block away from him in Columbus.

"His son and my daughter are in the same class," Hamilton said.

Hamilton had never met the man before, but — as he put it — he traveled 2,000 miles to meet a neighbor.

Also at the Grand Canyon, Hamilton said he met two parishioners of Rick Warren, the preacher who wrote "The Purpose Driven Life." He said they encouraged him to go to southern California to meet the author, thus changing the course

of his journey. But Hamilton didn't get to meet the author since he was away on a sabbatical.

Along the trip, Hamilton said he has been through 29 storms, a tornado, two hail storms, a sandstorm and a near miss lightning strike by 15 feet. He was robbed, hit by a car and hospitalized for heat exhaustion and dehydration.

Before he reached Goodland on Monday, Aug. 23, Hamilton said, his tires were wearing out, and he knew he needed to get to a bigger town. When he got to Goodland, he happened upon an old park on U.S. 24 where he hoped to camp out.

Virgil Baumfalk, owner of McB's, said the police called him and said there was a guy wanting to stay on his property, a former roadside park on the east edge of town. Baumfalk said he told them it was OK. He said Hamilton came into McB's the next morning to thank him, and he asked about where to get bicycle tires.

Baumfalk said he bought one tire at Wal-Mart, since they only had one of the kind he needed, and put it on the bike. When Hamilton asked what he owed, Baumfalk said he told him just a smile.

"A man visiting with him gave me \$5," Baumfalk said.

Hamilton said he is divorced and has five daughters. Besides Nicolle, they are Michelle, 24; Megan, 20; Courtney, 16; and Mollie, 13. He said they had mixed reactions when he first told them about the trip, but they have all come to support him.

He said they prayed he'd be safe, find what he's looking for, and that he be provided for financially. All their prayers have been answered, he said.

Hamilton said he is working on a book about the journey and hopes to get it published and that he may have another career out of the journey. He said people have encouraged him to go into motivational speaking, a career he'd always been interested in.

"I felt I didn't have a message," he said.

Until now.

Letters and/or donations can be sent to him in care of Nicolle Hamilton, 4711 Second Ave. NE, Seattle, Wash. 98105, or can be made at his web site at www.7stateride.info.

K-state raises \$7,200 here

Sherman County contributed \$7,195 to the record \$54.2 million in cash raised by the Kansas State University Foundation during the year ending June 30.

Contributions from other area counties included: Cheyenne, \$4,165; Greeley, \$2,255; Rawlins, \$3,730; Thomas, \$19,429; and Wallace, \$950.

Lee Borck, Larned, chairman of the university's foundation board, said this year's cash contributions surpassed last year's total of \$44.8 million by 21 percent.

"It is a privilege to extend our gratitude to the 47,000 donors who

made this success possible," he said. "K-State alumni and friends are incredibly generous, and K-State would not be where it is today without that support."

Deferred gifts and pledges of \$16.7 million, combined with cash gifts, pushed the total for the year to \$70.9 million, the second largest overall total in the 60-year history of the foundation.

In fiscal 2004, gifts to the foundation established 94 new scholarships and three faculty chairs. There were 18 gifts and pledges of \$1 million or more.

The year's return on investment

was 19.35 percent, the second-highest in foundation history. Total assets at the close of the year were \$315 million.

Of the 47,000 donors last year, more than 21,000 of them made pledges through Telefund, the all-volunteer telephone campaign.

Gifts to Telefund totaled \$1.6 million on pledges of \$1.4 million, a 113 percent fulfillment rate.

"Less than one-third of the university's operating budget now comes from the state," said President Jon Wefald, pointing out the importance of private gifts.

corrections

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