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Elder Bikes Across the Country for Alzheimer's Association
By Sonya Burke

On May 14, Kentlands resident Joshua Elder, 23, will leave for the biking adventure of his life. He will be cycling the Great Divide from Mexico to Canada in order to raise money for the Alzheimer's Association.

"The purpose of the trip is to raise money and awareness of Alzheimer's and other neurodegenerative diseases. It is a fundraiser that I deeply believe in since it is both a disease that has affected my family and which is currently my top interest and reason for pursuing a career in medicine," said Elder.

The journey will take about two months.

"The route is 2,490 miles. It is no walk in the park. We will be facing a number of challenges. It is the longest off road bike path in the entire world. We will be cycling over 200,000 feet of elevation gain. From my cycling experience, we are going to have a minimum average of 40 miles a day," said Elder. "I suspect that we will be able to bike about 50-60 miles a day once our bodies adjust to the new circumstances," said Elder.

Cycling alongside Elder will be his high school friend Ryan McLaughlin in addition to other friends and family who hope to meet up with him at various points along the journey.

At least five days a week, Elder has been training for the ride by doing spinning and weight training at Bally's in Kentlands, cycling local mountain trails, and biking along the C & O Canal.

His inspiration is his grandfather Glenn Elder, a physician, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's while Joshua was in college in 2003.

"[My grandfather] gets very emotional every time we see one another and he is so sad of leaving this world," said Elder. "Despite having Alzheimer's his earlier days of brilliance as a doctor are still apparent. He is fully aware of what is happening to him and struggles to fight against it everyday" said Elder.

Once the ride is complete, Joshua will embark on another journey when he enters medical school at UCLA where he plans, not surprisingly, to study neurology.

"I am going to UCLA because of their tremendous neurology department. In addition, I have a keen interest on continuing my research by pursuing a PhD as well. I want to transfer into the MD/PhD program and pursue a PhD in neurogenetics to complement my interest in neurology as a specialty," he said.

In addition to training for the ride of his life, Elder is currently doing postbaccalaureate research at the National Institutes of Aging at NIH in Bethesda. He lives with his parents on Tschiffely Square Road, describes their relationship as extremely close, and calls his dad his "hero." He has a supportive girlfriend, Stephanie Reynolds, who is finishing up her public relations degree at American University and who will move to California to be close to him while he starts medical school.

Because his family was in the military, he has already traveled the world, speaks German, studied at Oxford, and at a very young age appears to know exactly what he wants to do with the rest of his life. In fact, he speaks with the knowledge and clarity of someone much older and has figured out the most important things in life are family and community.

“I want to come back and help other people,” he said.

Derwood resident Bill Baube learned of Elder’s cycling trip after a story appeared about him in another local paper. At the time, Elder’s goal was to raise \$10,000 for Alzheimer’s. With Baube’s assistance and an organization called Life Matters, Elder has increased that goal by eight times and now hopes to raise over \$80,000.

Baube simply describes Elder as an “extraordinary person.”

Proving our community is a supportive one, he has also been contacted by Dennis Chazelle, President of the Montgomery Village Rotary Club, who will join him on the New Mexico portion of the biking journey.

As he prepares to bike off into the sunset, Elder shared a story about an accomplished doctor he recently met on a plane while traveling to California. According to Elder, the doctor’s career was the most important thing in his life and he had achieved much professional success but with much sacrifice of his family, admitting he barely knew his own young children.

For Elder, life will be different.

“I want to be a great dad and a good doctor,” he said smiling.

No doubt, greatness is in his genes.