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local news

Step by step

A Portland sculptor uses his feet to raise money for HIV/AIDS services around the state

by Inga Sorensen

Tim Mahn had his backpack stuffed, placed by the door and "ready to go." "My dog's backpack was ready, too," says the 40-year-old rock climbing and hiking enthusiast, who on Aug. 1 was scheduled to embark upon a 500-mile, 30-day trek on the Oregon portion of the Pacific Crest Trail.

A few months earlier, Mahn and four acquaintances had formed Team Northwest. The troupe planned to walk up to 15 miles per day for a month in an effort to raise funds for selected HIV/AIDS service organizations throughout Oregon. The event marked the first fund-raiser by the fledgling nonprofit organization Corporation for Arts & Humanities, which Mahn founded as a vehicle to "improve life in Oregon through the arts and humanities."

"I have always loved being in the outdoors," says Mahn, 40, a Portland sculptor who works in steel. "I also felt that it was important to continue raising awareness around AIDS and try and generate funding for AIDS groups throughout the state. To me this seemed like the ideal project."

Mahn thought his Team Northwest members felt likewise. But two days before the group's scheduled departure, his four teammates—two heterosexual couples—backed out.

"Leaving just me and my dog," says Mahn, who admits he was stunned by the sudden alteration.

"I said to myself, 'Well, I'm going anyway.' I'm an experienced backpacker so I wasn't worried about being on the trail alone, but I would have enjoyed the sense of camaraderie you get with others. It creates its own momentum," he says.

On Aug. 1, as planned, Mahn's housemate drove Mahn and his dog, Man Ray, down to Ashland, and the duo set off on the Pacific Crest Trail.

For the next 20 days, Mahn walked and climbed the trail heading north, occasionally connecting with hikers. Man Ray, whose paws got raw after traipsing through lava beds, ended his stint early. A pup pickup was arranged and Man Ray is home and doing fine.

Mahn, however, journeyed on, delving deep into the forest. *Tim Mahn and Man Ray* "Gorgeous. Just gorgeous," he says.

Always the artist, Mahn dug out just enough room in his pack for his Nikon camera, and a healthy dose of picture-taking occurred en route. Because the "team" was sucked out of Team

Northwest, Mahn scaled back his daily trek to closer to 10 miles. On Aug. 21, due in part to smoke drifts from the widespread wildfires throughout Southern and Central Oregon, Mahn halted his journey at Elk Lake, near the Three Sisters Wilderness area, and headed home.

"When you are on the trail, you only get bits of information," says Mahn. "I was hearing reports about the fires and how close they were."

Mahn also says he wanted to come back to Portland to get some fund-raising materials in order. He says he had been unable to redesign mailers given the extremely tight time frame between learning his teammates had dropped out and the departure date.

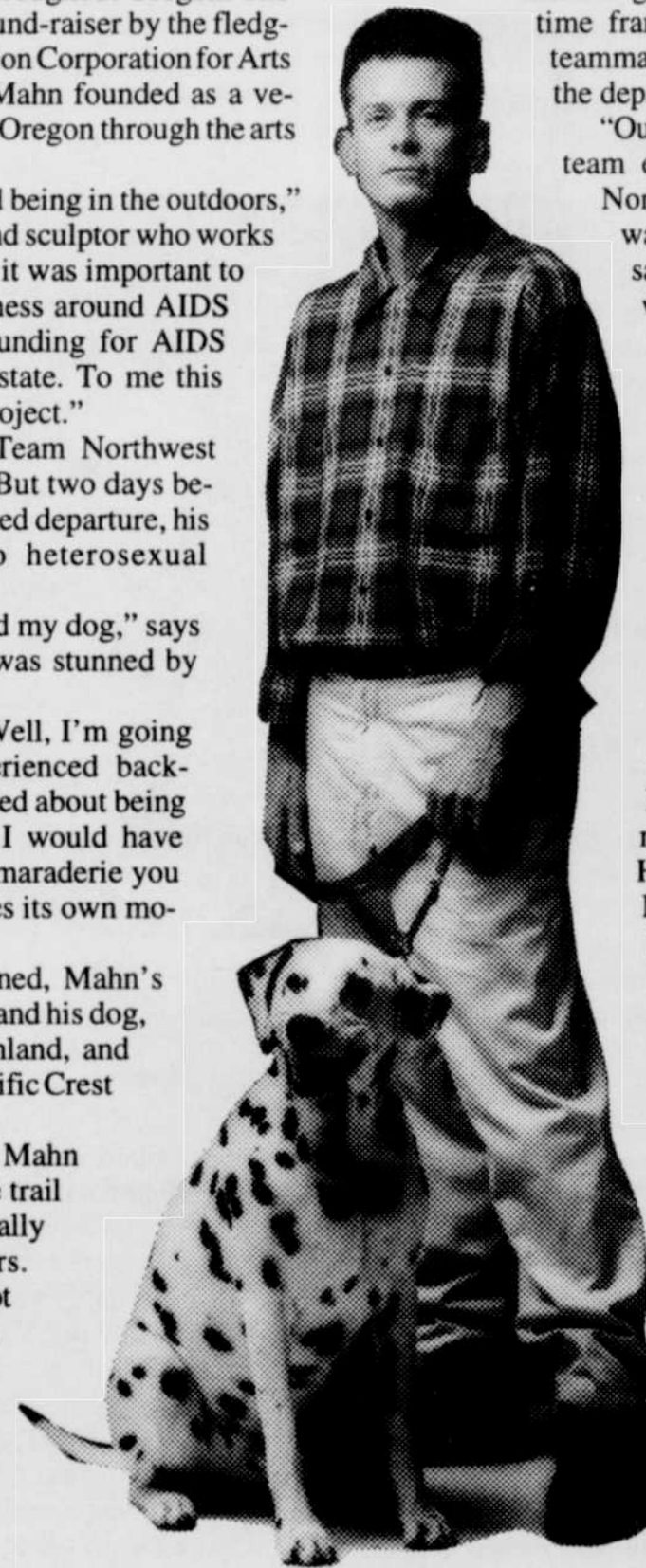
"Our materials said this was a team effort. They said 'Team Northwest.' Obviously that wasn't the case anymore," says Mahn, who was "stuck with 8,000 mailers with a picture of the five of us."

"I wanted to make sure our materials accurately represented what I was doing," he says.

Mahn says whether it be a one-person or team effort, his goal is to pull in funds for HIV/AIDS service providers. Money raised via pledges and donations by Mahn's walk will go to six groups: Klamath Hospice in Klamath Falls, Hopewell House in Portland, Blue Mountain AIDS Task Force in Pendleton, Ruby House in Roseburg, Central Oregon AIDS Support Team in Bend, and South Coast HIV/AIDS Resource Program in Coos Bay.

Mahn, who was diagnosed with AIDS in 1994, says he plans to begin the final week of his walk on Sept. 21. "Maybe I'll go from Timberline Lodge to the Bridge of the Gods. I'm not sure just yet. All I know is that I want to put a real finish on this," he says.

Those who would like to support HIV/AIDS services via Mahn's walk may write a check to: Corporation for Arts & Humanities, 3439 NE Sandy Blvd., Portland, OR 97232.



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