

Greene County's 'Flag Man' trudges on in support of troops and USA

Richhill Twp resident Terry Ronzio reaches another milestone in his quest to inspire patriotism and gratitude toward the military

By Cindy Bailey, GreeneSpeak Editor/Publisher
WAYNESBURG—He's been cussed at by people who think America should mind their own business.

On the other hand, he's been cheered on by soldiers and veterans everywhere.

He's taken on one of the most powerful men in Congress, and was endorsed by a lesser known political party but snubbed by his fellow Democrats.

Numerous reporters have interviewed him and featured him in their publications, yet conservative talk show hosts won't give him the time of day.

When you walk down the street in Waynesburg with him and people honk, you're not sure if they're for him or against him, but Terry Ronzio doesn't care. He's the "Flag Man."

Now familiar to most Greene Countians, he marches on in the region, in Washington D.C, and even Norway—mile after mile, with Old Glory high above his head, to the beat of his own drum.

His goal is to encourage others to walk by his side—literally or figuratively—in a show of unity and pride in America. "I'll never stop walking," Ronzio, 44, said last month, who, as of mid-June, had trekked a whopping 4,234 miles since he began stepping out in support of U.S. troops three years ago.

After 9/11, Ronzio felt the military was taking a beating similar to those who had fought in Vietnam a generation ago.

Born on an Army base in Colorado, and now residing in Bristoria near Ryerson State Park, Ronzio has stuck to his roots. A creative sort, he exhibits high energy and brimming emotions as he talks about his life and his mission.

The 9/11 attacks impacted him greatly, he says, but he was too old to join up and he was raising two small kids on his own.

Then three years ago, in a bitter custody battle, he lost primary custody and was devastated. "It was a sad time in my life," he says, wiping his eyes. But he didn't wallow too long. "I decided now was the time to do something positive."

"They were trying to turn the war against the soldiers," he says. "It reminded me of Vietnam...As a kid I'd watch TV and it was so sad to watch the demonstrations....9/11 woke me up."

His first goal was 500 miles, which later became one mile for every soldier who died in the War on Terror.

"Our veterans and soldiers are the greatest patriots," said Ronzio, an herbalist, sometimes-disc jockey and chef, who is easy to talk to. "The reason we can sit here and talk about this is because these people died."

Meanwhile, Congressman Jack Murtha stunned his constituents with his about face on the war and later wrongly accused 13 Marines of "cold-blooded" murder, all of which prompted Ronzio to run against

Murtha last year.

A registered Democrat, Ronzio knew he didn't stand a chance, but was surprised and delighted when the Unity party endorsed him. However, his fellow Democrats refused all support.

Still, Ronzio says the folks who really matter—military personnel and their families, and ordinary citizens who love America—have shown their support in numerous ways, large and small, from the thumbs-up of passing motorists to the patches, badges, and commemorative coins from soldiers and military units. He carries these items with him every step of the way, wrapped carefully in a wrinkled cloth bag tucked inside his worn backpack.

Every 500 miles, he donates his flag to a military unit, the first one going to the Waynesburg National Guard. On Memorial Day of this year, he presented his 8th flag to the 459th Engineering Unit of Clarksburg, W. Va. at a ceremony in St. Clairsville, Ohio.

He says he will likely challenge Murtha again. But mostly, he'll just keep putting one foot in front of the other.

"I'm never gonna' stop walking for patriotism," he said. "Our soldiers need us to step up."

Ronzio's website is www.electronzio.org.



Ronzio carries on in all kinds of weather. Here he celebrates one of his 500-mile goals on the Veterans Bridge near Masontown. More photos of his flag-bearing experiences are available on his website.

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