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A walk across America finds its way through the San Gabriel Valley

Cross country traveler joined by an 86-year-old companion hoped to inspire others



Ranger Kielak has been walking across America to raise money for charities since March. He was joined by Joan Virginia Allen, a local author who walked along with him on Valley Blvd. Aug. 28, 2024 in San Gabriel, CA. (Photo by John McCoy, Contributing Photographer)



By **DAVID WILSON** | dawilson@scng.com

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A coast-to-coast traveler made his way on foot through San Gabriel Valley Wednesday, Aug. 28, joined by a companion 60 years his senior.

Ranger Kielak, 26, started his journey in Myrtle Beach, S.C., on March 10.

Kielak and 86-year-old Joan Virginia Allen set off from a Baldwin Park hotel around 6:30 a.m. and completed the approximately 9-mile journey to the Sheraton hotel in San Gabriel in about four hours.

Kielak, a holistic success coach, was inspired by accounts of others who walked across the country. He met Allen, a fellow life coach, through coaching training.

Allen, a retired elder law and estate planning attorney, has always stayed active and at 60 made a promise with her husband Willis Allen that they would lead healthy, active and productive lives to 120 years old.

Two years ago, the couple hiked the Vernal and Nevada falls in Yosemite after her husband's hip replacement in 2020. On the way down, a 77-year-old man asked how old Willis Allen was and said he thought this would be his last hike but that seeing the couple inspired him to keep going.

Allen started [Dynamic Aging 4 Life Magazine](#), an online publication that provides a platform for seniors to share their stories of dynamic aging. Allen will be writing about her experience on the walk for her magazine.

Allen said that interaction in Yosemite encapsulated the goal of her magazine and why she wanted to join Kielak. When she heard about Kielak's plan Allen, a Ventura County resident, asked to be part of it once he reached California.

"That's why I wanted to share Ranger's story because it's so inspirational what he's doing and I wanted to share it from a personal viewpoint and from somebody 60 years older," Allen said.

Kielak's "hero's journey," as Allen called it, has gone through 10 states and covered more than 2,500 miles. Prior to embarking on the trip, the most Kielak had gone in a single day was the 13.1 miles of a half marathon and he had never traveled across the country.

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His takeaway from experiencing the country from his unique vantage point centered on the

He told stories of unhoused people offering him food, water and good conversation. A South Carolina first responder who survived severe burns gave Kielak bracelets with the messages “Still breathing. Still fighting,” and “Never quit” on them.

In Arkansas, Kielak said about 20 people stopped him during a 15-mile stretch to offer help and support.

“I’ve had deeper conversations with people just pulling over to see what I’m doing than I have with some friends,” Kielak said. “It’s just so interesting the road messages you get.”

Kielak grew up in Chilcoot, Calif., a town of about 300 people, half an hour northwest of Reno, Nev. He now lives in Modesto and selected three charities to raise money for during his walk.

He was a member of Future Farmers of America for four years, earning the American FFA Degree. Donations to Kielak will go toward the FFA’s grant program.

[Bigger Than the Trail](#), is a running and walking group that raises money to offer free mental health and therapy services. Kielak said he struggled with his mental health in college and running helped him through a dark period.

The Hospice Promise Foundation helps ease the financial pressure on families with a loved one who is in hospice care.

In 2020, Kielak’s grandfather passed away from Alzheimer’s and was cared for by Grace Hospice in Tulsa, Okla. Kielak made a point to plan for a stop in the Tulsa area during his trip.

“Should I remember things from my life, I want it to be worth remembering at the end of the day not what everybody else remembers,” Kielak said.

Kielak is scheduled to complete his journey Saturday, Aug. 31, at Will Rogers State Beach.

To donate and for more information visit withinrangecoaching.com.

