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## Illness Leads Couple to Charity Journey

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Grove City, Ohio - By choice, nearly everything they owned was sold – their possessions whittled down to a 1989 motor home, a red three-wheeled motorcycle and some clothing. What might qualify as the lowest of points for most was the start of a high John and Lorry McMillan never imagined.

Since mid-November, the McMillan's have been on a quest to visit all 88 Fraternal Order of Eagles Aeries in their home state of Florida. After a four-day span in January 2011 brought John a pair of heart attacks and congestive failure left his heart pumping at 30%, the couple was determined to ensure the life in his years far exceeded the years in his life.

"I've never been the type to just sit around," John said. "For 50 years I worked hard, then they told me I had a bad heart. I have to do something. Obviously, I'm not going to do anything to make it worse, but I just can't sit around all day."

Through the Eagles, McMillan found a way to tie his remaining days in with a heart-healthy passion for giving that grew when he joined Bonita Springs Aerie #4002 in 2000. To make it work, he had to convince his wife, Lorry, to sell everything they owned.

"I didn't want anyone's help," John said. "I don't mean that in a negative way. We've always done everything we could to give back. I knew the members in Florida would donate, but I didn't want the money coming to us. I wasn't going to do this unless it benefited the charities, so I had to make sure we could cover the costs ourselves."

Lorry agreed almost immediately. The McMillan's moved to Florida some 18 years ago, with John giving up his job as a bar manager in Chicago, feeling the environment was not suitable for Lorry's 8-year-old daughter. Now his wife had the opportunity to pay it forward.

“I thought it was a little crazy at first,” Lorry said, “but I didn’t once think about saying no. It’s hard to give up everything, but John’s situation made me realize I might only have a month left or a year or five years. You never know.”

Since beginning their journey, the McMillan’s have visited 20 of Florida’s Aeries. At each stop, the Aerie is presented with a donation card and an option to give to one of the couple’s three chosen charities – The Max Baer Heart Fund, The Fraternal Order of Eagles Diabetes Research Center and Hope Hospice.

The couple, understanding the current economic climate, makes it a point at each stop to clarify that no donation is required. Those that choose to give back have their donations deposited into an account managed by the Bonita Springs Aerie to be presented at the end of the McMillan’s journey. Aeries that can’t afford to donate are recognized by the McMillan’s just the same.

“I made sure we had no access to where the money goes,” John said. “I’m just a man spending the time he has left with wonderful people, asking nothing more than hospitality and a donation to charities I know will continue to do good even when I’m gone if possible.”

The response has been tremendous. What was expected to be a 60-day tour of Florida has since doubled. The McMillan’s are spending three or four days at each stop. If there’s a karaoke machine, you can bet they’re singing. If there’s a bingo game, you’ll find a McMillan with a card. While most journeys of the sort result in little more than a hello and goodbye, John and Lorry are spending each minute experiencing every bit of life inside each Aerie.

“It gets harder and harder to say goodbye,” Lorry said. “We go into these places not knowing anyone and by the time we leave, we don’t want to say goodbye. Every member we’ve come across has made this an absolutely amazing journey for us. For years, we both worked and went to sleep and did it again the next day. For the first time, we’re really living life together.”

During one stop, John offered to take Auxiliary members in attendance for a ride on the back of his motorcycle. What started as an innocent offer turned into a nearly five-hour joyride, with a 93-year-old member taking her first ever ride.

“She’d never been on a motorcycle before so I had to get an Aerie member to help me lift her onto the bike,” John said. “I told her we could turn around whenever she was ready and she refused to go back. I feel like my heart is growing back. The response is overwhelming.”

Despite the diagnosis, John and Lorry are approaching each day with an outlook more positive than ever. Both are optimistic about completing their goal of visiting every Aerie in the United States and Canada by the summer of 2013.

Once finished, they would like to have the name and number of each Aerie written on the motorcycle, which they plan to auction off at the Eagles’ 2013 International Convention to benefit their chosen charities.

Until then, the couple will continue their travels, enjoying life together for however long it may last and sharing their time with friends new and old along the way.

“Everywhere we go, it feels like home,” John said. “That’s why we got so involved in the Eagles to begin with. They make you feel like family. We gave up everything to do this, but they make me feel like I have more now than I did before.”

Tomorrow may never be promised to the McMillan’s, but as long as they have today, you can be sure they’re going to live it.

**About the Fraternal Order of Eagles**

The Fraternal Order of Eagles, an international non-profit organization, unites fraternally in the spirit of liberty, truth, justice, and equality, to make human life more desirable by lessening its ills, and by promoting peace, prosperity, gladness and hope. Founded in 1898, the Eagles fund research in areas such as diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease and cancer, and raise money for neglected and abused children and the aged, as well as work for social and civic change.