

Community News

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Horseman leaves Flagstaff on cross country trek

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Lucian Spataro left Flagstaff on Wednesday to continue his cross country horseback trek, supporting preservation of Central American rain forests.

Flagstaff was the first of Spataro's 12 official stops, while traveling from California to New York on horseback, seeking financial support for Rainforest Action Network.

Spataro, a 31-year-old Tucson entrepreneur, began his one-man trip in May in Huntington Beach, Calif., riding Sweet William, an 8-year-old Arabian horse owned by Bazy Tankersley of Flagstaff, said Sharron Winnicki, promoter for the rain forest group.

She said the group is optimistic about gaining momentum in the campaign to protect quickly evaporating rain forests, as Spataro grows closer to the New York destination, where his ride will conclude in September.

To date, the organization has collected an estimated \$40,000 toward its \$1.4 million goal, Winnicki said.

In addition to gathering financial support for rain forest preservation, the group is advocating boycotts of Central American beef and non-biodegradable materials that damage the earth's Ozone layer, she said.

"This isn't just a problem in Los

Angeles or in Central America, or Flagstaff, it's a problem that affects the whole world because of the atmospheric and climatic changes caused by carbon monoxide poisoning and the burning of the trees," Winnicki said.

She said, more than 150 people in Flagstaff, who attended a recent rainforest benefit at Wheeler Park, signed petitions and contributed to the group's efforts.

Spataro, a Tucson resident, has participated in similar benefits, using record-breaking activities and athletic skill to get attention and support for endangered programs or lands, he said.

"Antiquated slash and burn methods never were appropriate, but now they are even less appropriate," Spataro said. "I do this because I want people to be educated about how it's affecting our planet."

He said the money gathered will be used for educational purposes in the U.S. and Central America.

Spataro said he trained for almost six months with horse "Willy" before attempting the ride.

The two are becoming good friends, Spataro said, adding that he frequently walks alongside Willy to rest him.

Spataro said the Flagstaff horse was chosen from two final possibilities because of his calm nature and relaxed behavior near traffic, adults and children



Lucian Spataro leaves Flagstaff on horseback Wednesday on his trek from California to New York. Spataro is riding for a world record and to raise funds for Rainforest Action

Network, a group trying to save rainforests in Central America.

Sun Photo by Dave Nelson