

Special to the Citizen

Lucian Spataro on the Appalachian Highway in Ohio, nearing the end of a cross-country ride

## Tucsonan rides across U.S.

Business consultant saddles up in effort to save rain forests

By **ROBERTA S. LOPEZ**  
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Few people would give a year of their life to fight for an environmental cause, and risk severe saddle sores to boot.

Tucsonan Lucian Spataro is an exception.

Spataro, who mounted a horse May 19 in Los Angeles, set out on a 2,800-mile odyssey across the United States to raise funds to help save the world's vanishing rain forests. He will complete his journey tomorrow near Annapolis, Md.

After he completes the ride, he will visit Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York to attend environmental fund-raising events before returning to Tucson Oct. 21.

And as a finale, Spataro and his horse will trot around the nation's capitol before meeting with congressional leaders, he

said.

The ride took five months, but Spataro began training for the adventure last year.

Although the ride has drawn national media attention, Spataro calls it a Tucson event.

The board of advisers for "Ride Across America" includes U.S. Rep. Jim Kolbe, R-Ariz., and car dealer and banker Jim Click. Bazy Tankersley, owner of Al Marah Arabian Horse Ranch here, and David Trexler, manager of the ranch, donated the horses, equipment and trainer for the ride.

Spataro visited about a dozen cities, including his hometown of Athens, Ohio. He also stopped in Flagstaff; Albuquerque, N.M.; Oklahoma City; and St. Louis, to name a few.

After completing high school in Athens, he got a University of Arizona degree in business administration and environmental

studies.

Spataro, 32, a business consultant who co-owns companies in Tucson and Mexico, said in a recent telephone interview he was looking forward to coming home.

"I have basically put my life on hold for about one year," he said.

Spataro has ridden largely in the cool hours of the morning. In the afternoons, he's given speeches and seminars to teach people how to help protect the environment.

It's been arduous but rewarding, Spataro said.

"This is something I have always wanted to do. It is a very important issue and I had to do it now because I am not the kind of person to say 'What if?' I do it now, not 10 years from now."

Making such a trip was on Spa-

**TUCSONAN**, continued/8A

## Tucsonan treks across U.S.

5-month, 2,800-mile ride raises money to save rain forests

Continued from 7A

tar's mind for quite a while before he decided the time was right because he had a good cause.

"I was meant to do it. I saw it as a mental and physical challenge. It was something I had to accomplish," he said.

The ride has hurt him "physically, financially and mentally," Spataro said. But once he started he "knew I couldn't quit. It definitely was a long, long road at 25 miles a day."

Originally, Spataro was accompanied only by a trainer and horse, named Sweet William. Later, two couples, from Texas and Connecticut, along with two new horses, named March Along and Sea Ruler were added to the team.

As the journey moved into cooler and more populated areas, Spataro said, the momentum picked up. "We have met about 10,000 people directly — and through media coverage probably another 4 million," he said.

Coverage included a segment on the national Cable News Network and a weekly update on a local news program.

"The horses made a big difference; they serve as a icebreaker and the ride attracts attention to a very important issue," he said.

Ride Across America and the Rainforest Action Network are hoping the ride will raise national awareness of the destruction of rain forests.

According to the Network, a non-profit international conservation organization, unless something is done, all tropical rain forests will be gone by the year 2050.

This would result in the loss of up to 5 million species of plants and animals, along with the chance to develop cancer treatments from the plants. A high percentage of medicines in the United States come from rain forests, in addition to vaccines and chocolates.

Money raised from the ride through pledges and donations will all go to the rain forests, said Fran-

cesca Vietor, an official with the network and Ride Across America.

"Private sponsors have donated almost everything," Vietor said. The estimated \$100,000 raised probably will help preserve plants and animals in Hawaii.

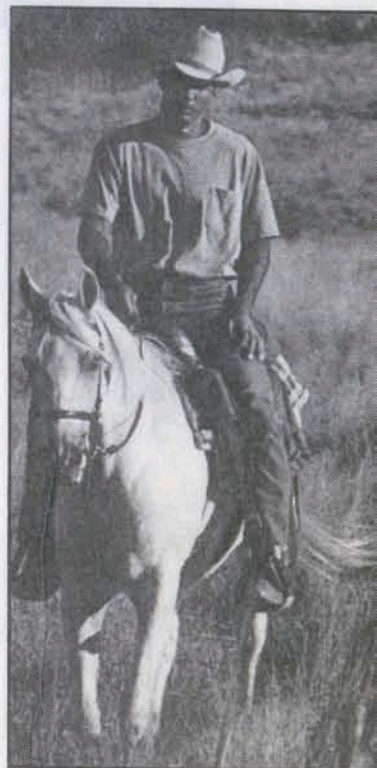
"There are so many pristine rain forests in Hawaii. Since it is a 'Ride Across America' we thought we would save an American rain forest," Vietor said.

The ride will establish a Guinness World Record of time and distance on horseback, Spataro said.

Setting a mark is nothing new for Spataro, who accomplished a world record as part of a team of scuba divers who rode a tricycle 64 miles under water in a pool as a local fund-raiser.

So what will Spataro do next? Besides possibly starting a local environmental group, Spataro said, "I will go back to work for awhile. Then next year I want to go diving off Spanish galleons in Mexico."

For further information about



LOUISE L. SERPA/For the Citizen

**Spataro in New Mexico**

the Rainforest Action Network write: Ride Across America, 30 Broadway, San Francisco, Calif. 94133, or call (415) 398-4404.