

Athens High grad rides horse across country

By Jeff Chappell
Athens News Writer

A hometown man and his horse will be stopping in Athens Sept. 17 and 18 to raise awareness and money, to help combat the worldwide destruction of rain forests.

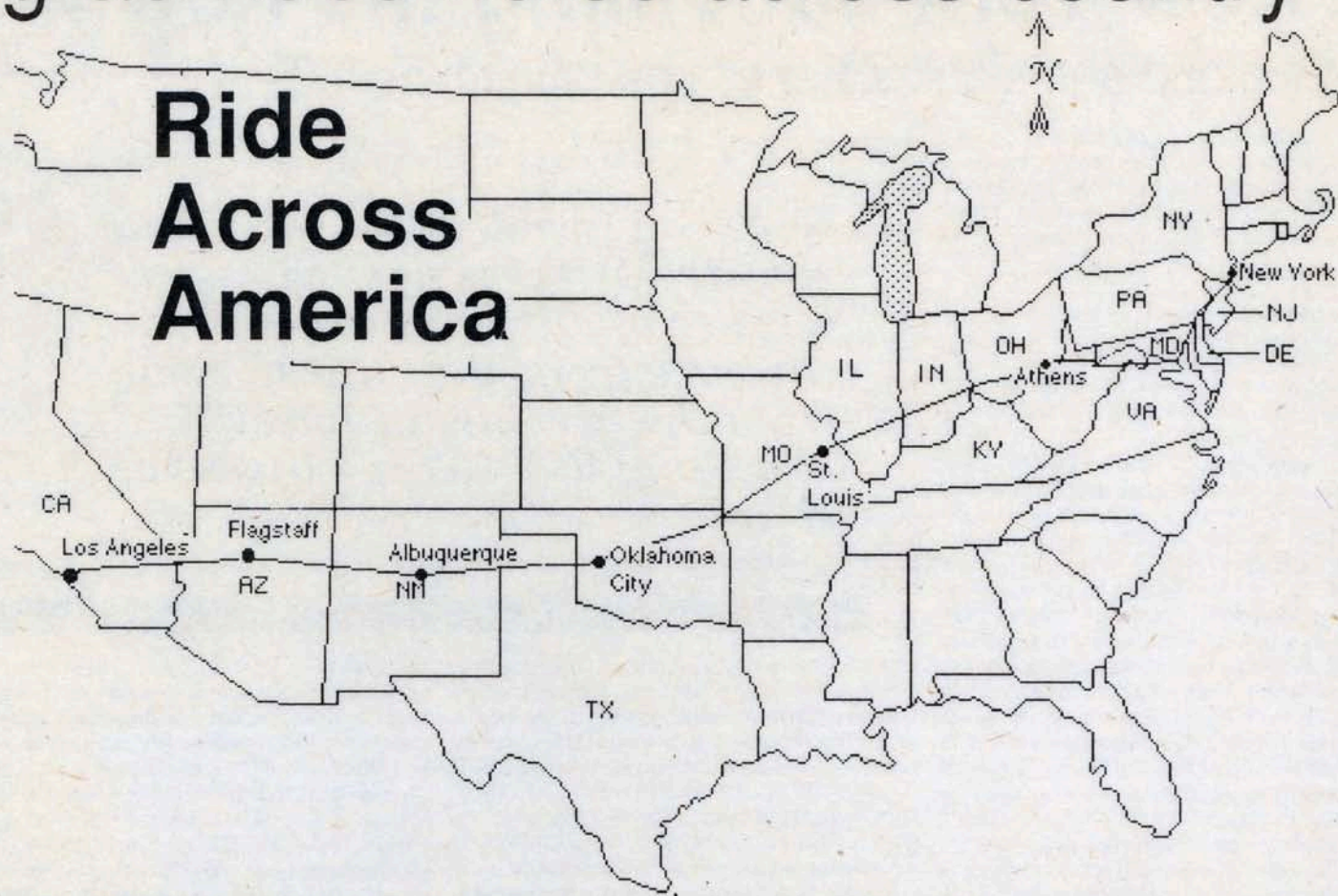
Lucian Spataro, 31, an Athens High School graduate and former Ohio University student, astride Sweet William, an 8-year-old Arabian gelding, will stop in Athens on their 2,800-mile "Ride Across America." The ride began May 19 in Los Angeles and will conclude in New York City later this month. Funds raised from the ride, expected to be nearly \$1 million, will be donated to the Rainforest Action Network of San Francisco and the Environmental Policy Institute in Washington D.C.

Spataro, founder and director of the "Ride Across America" program, wants to stress to people in both large and small towns the impact they have on the environment as consumers. Hence, his ride has taken him to Flagstaff, Albuquerque, Amarillo, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, St. Louis, Cincinnati and now Athens. He will stop at Washington, D.C., Baltimore and Philadelphia before reaching New York City.

Spataro is now in Illinois, according to Francesca Viotor of the Rainforest Action Network, and is on schedule. "He is doing real well, and should be in Athens the 17 (of September), maybe even the 16," she said.

Several local events are planned when Spataro arrives in Athens. On Sept. 17 Spataro is scheduled to appear at the Dairy Barn at 3 p.m. along with Sweet William. Also present will be city, county and chamber of commerce officials, along with OU faculty member Ted Bernard.

At 7 p.m. Spataro will speak at OU's Baker Center Ballroom, along with members of the OU Ecology Club and other local environmental groups. Local bands will provide entertainment, and pizza and beverages will be available. Although no admission will be charged for the bands, donations will be accepted.



The route that Lucian Spataro, 31, an Athens High School graduate and former Ohio University student, and his horse, Sweet William, an 8-year-old Arabian gelding, are taking across America.

On Sept. 18 Spataro is scheduled to speak in area elementary schools as well as to local community organizations.

Corporate sponsors have donated Spataro's gear, tack and feed, and Al-Marah Arabians of Tucson, Ariz., which specializes in Arabian horses, donated Sweet William. All funds raised from the "Ride Across America" will be funneled directly by the Rainforest Action Network and Environmental Policy Institute into efforts to preserve the remaining rain for-

ests. The Rainforest Action Network is a non-profit activist organization that works nationally and internationally to stop the destruction of rain forests.

Spataro hopes that his ride will raise awareness of the plight of the rain forests and encourage efforts to stop their destruction. He said it's unfortunate that the rain forests are disappearing so quickly, since 25 percent of the medicines used in the United States come from tropical rain forests, as well as many vaccines.

According to Institute literature, 70 percent of the 3,000 plants identified by the National Cancer Institute as useful in cancer therapies and treatments are found only in rain forests. Approximately 7,000 of the chemical compounds used in Western pharmaceuticals are derived from rain forest plants. Yet fewer than 1 percent of tropical rain forest species have been identified. The Rainforest Action Network estimates that by the year 2050 all the world's rainforests will be gone.