



A mother's memory keeps hope afloat: Local man to row across the Atlantic to raise funds for cancer research

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Paul Ridley's journey will represent far more than the 2,950 nautical miles he intends to travel.

Ridley is planning to cross the Atlantic Ocean in a specially designed rowboat to raise more than \$500,000 for cancer research in honor of his mother, Katherine Raub Ridley, who died of skin cancer in 2001.

He and his sister, Joy, last year established a nonprofit organization, Row for Hope, to gather donations to support the ocean crossing, as well as for cancer research.

Ridley, 24, said he believes it is his mother's determination, a trait she passed to her children, that has sustained him as he has taken the last several years to plan the event.

"It is all about determination, the deeply rooted belief that you don't let anyone tell you that you can't do something," he said.

Ridley's mother first fought skin cancer in her early 30s, but it returned 20 years later. She was diagnosed during the first week of October 2000 and died Feb. 5, 2001, he said.

Ridley, who works at Greenwich Associates, a financial services consulting firm, hopes to be the third and youngest American to row across an ocean armed only with his own skills - there can be no sail or motor, nor support from another vessel. Ridley said that if the currents cooperate, he may even break the American record.

He plans to set off from the Canary Islands off Morocco in early December and row west 10 to 12 hours each day, taking from 60 to 80 days before landing in Antigua in the Caribbean.

"Weather is the single biggest factor," he said, noting that if he comes in under 80 days he will have beaten the American record.



Paul Ridley of Stamford takes his 19-foot ocean rowboat out in Norwalk Harbor on May 1. Ridley plans a 2,950-mile journey in the rowboat to raise money for cancer research and education. (Chris Prevolos/Staff photo)

A rower since attending Colgate University, Ridley, originally from Binghamton, N.Y., said he caught the lure of open water rowing several years ago. After graduating from college, he moved to Greenwich to begin work at Greenwich Associates as a client associate. Ridley, who now lives in Stamford, said he soon got to know other rowers from lower Fairfield County.



Ridley's rowboat includes a U.S. flag and the Web site for his journey, www.rowforhope. He hopes to begin his trip in December. (Chris Preovolos/Staff photo)

He joined the Norwalk River Rowing Association and met Erik Swenson, who introduced him to ocean rowing.

"I fell in love with it and I ran with it," Ridley said.

Swenson soon became a member of the board of the directors of Row for Hope, which is based in Greenwich.

Ridley said he also realized that he could take this newfound passion and raise money for cancer research. "I liked what I was doing, and I was good at it," he said.

"It was probably about two years ago when the idea became more than 'I'd like to do this,' to actually 'I'm going to do this,' " he said.

"When I lost my mom at 17, I started to think I had to do my part in all this," he said, referencing other efforts in the fight against cancer. In the same year his mother died, his father, Mark, was diagnosed with prostate cancer. He was successfully treated and is now healthy.

"We want more of my dad's cases (of survival) and fewer of my mom's cases," he said.

Ridley has been training with Charles Huthmaker, director of the Norwalk River Rowing Association, concentrating on increasing core strength and building endurance.

"We focused on what he will be weak in," Huthmaker said, noting that Ridley's shoulders must be limber and his forearms strong. "His hands are going to become like hamburger. We have to make sure that his hands are nice and tough."

However, Huthmaker knows he cannot prepare Ridley for everything.

"There are some things he can't train for," he said. "They will happen after about two to three days on the water. . . . The first few weeks will train him."

Ridley plans on doing more survival training by planning a few overnight trips.

Ridley has invested tens of thousands of dollars into his specially designed 19-foot boat, Liv, which in Norwegian means "Life." "I thought through every storage compartment, every inch with the designer."

The shell of the boat has marine foam core tucked inside thick layers of fiberglass.

"It is very much 2008 technology," Ridley said, noting that the boat boasts miniature versions of nearly all the navigation and communication equipment found on a larger yacht. The systems will be run with solar power.

He said the most important piece of equipment will be the water desalinator, as he will have only a small reserve of fresh water. He will sleep in a cabin that doesn't provide much elbow room.

Ridley said he will have a satellite phone to call his land-based support team and the technology to allow him to update the Web site every day. Likely to burn 6,000 to 8,000 calories a day, he also must bring all his rations on to the boat. He has a GPS but can use celestial navigation if the systems go down.

"Hopefully, I'll never have to use it," he said.

Ridley said he has been planning this trip for the past three years and worked with family and friends to get the foundation off the ground. "I broke this down into a million bite-size pieces and tackled each one."

He said he has been talking about this every day. "When you spend almost three years thinking about every inch of the boat, you realize it is very doable."

Advised to prepare by spending as much time as possible in the boat, he said he is working to become comfortable in the vessel over the next seven months. He hopes to row in his boat from Norwalk to Martha's Vineyard on Memorial Day weekend to get a flavor of the ocean swells.



Paul Ridley with his mother, Katherine Raub Ridley (Photo provided).

Considering this journey was inspired by his mother, who lost her fight to skin cancer, Ridley, with his fair complexion, plans on "basically being completely covered in sunscreen" during the ocean crossing. He'll also wear clothing that will block ultraviolet rays.

He said the organization also has invested in another kind of protection, search and rescue insurance. But he has made sure to plan adequately so the insurance will be unnecessary. "There are a lot of things I want to do after this."

Ridley said he is grateful for his supporters, including his colleague Chris McNickle, a managing director at Greenwich Associates. The company not only helped to get the foundation launched, but also has allowed Ridley a leave of absence to complete his journey.

McNickle said in learning more about the effort, it was reassuring to know others had done it. "That gave the encouragement that this was not completely nutty," he said, adding that it "takes a certain amount of drive and skill to do this."

A small number of people have attempted trans-Atlantic rowing trips. Two Americans have successfully completed solo ocean trips: Tori Murden in 1999 and Richard Jones in 2000. Others have used crossings to raise funds for various causes.

Ridley said he sees the effort as two different projects - one side is administrative, the other is the actual rowing of the boat. He said the expedition could go off without the fundraising, but the fundraising needs the expedition.

"Ninety-nine percent of the people really latch onto to it. They really get it," he said. "It is what keeps you going."

Ridley said he believes his mother would have wanted to be a part of this adventure.

"She certainly was a big thinker," he said.

- Paul Ridley will tour the area to show off his newly designed rowboat and to raise awareness for a new foundation, Row for Hope, he helped to launch to raise money for cancer research.

- To find out more about the trip or to make a donation, visit www.rowforhope.com.