

Posted Sunday December 14, 2008

Tier man ready to row across the Atlantic Effort to aid cancer fight

By Doug Schneider • dschneid@gannett.com • Public Service Editor • December 14, 2008

BINGHAMTON -- The first night, Paul Ridley allows, may be the most difficult.

That's when he'll first face the darkness of almost 3,000 miles of ocean, the isolation of not seeing another human for 60 to 80 days, the claustrophobia of having one's existence confined to the boundaries of a 19-foot boat that has neither a sail nor a motor.

That night will come Friday or Saturday, at the end of the 25-year-old's first day of a scheduled solo-rowing trip across the Atlantic Ocean.

Ridley, a 2001 Binghamton High School graduate, can't wait.

"The boat is where I'm most comfortable," Ridley said by telephone last week before jetting off to his scheduled departure point in the Canary Islands, a Spanish territory off West Africa. "I know I can live on it. That gives me a good feeling."

The boat is a yellow Fiberglas craft christened *Liv*, after Norwegian terms for "life," "protection" and "defense." Ridley's motivation: to honor the memory of his mother, Katherine Raub Ridley, and to raise money toward a cure for the cancer that took her life the year that her son graduated from BHS and enrolled at Colgate University.

Paul Ridley calls the journey "Row for Hope." He hopes the project will raise \$500,000 for the Yale Cancer Center in Connecticut, the state where he lives, works and entertains the passion for rowing that he developed while studying economics at Colgate in Hamilton.

Two other Americans have completed such a row alone and unaccompanied by a support vessel.



Binghamton native Paul Ridley, 25, will start his journey across the Atlantic Ocean on Friday or Saturday in his 19-foot, yellow Fiberglas boat. Ridley is calling the journey "Row for Hope" to raise money toward a cure for the cancer that took his mother's life.

The last was eight years ago. About 85 rowers total have attempted the crossing; 60 percent have succeeded.

Three-year journey

Technically, the row will begin shortly after Ridley downs a Michael Phelps-style breakfast, but it really began at Christmas three years ago, during a conversation between Ridley and his sister, Joy.

"We both had wanted to do something significant in our mom's memory, but it wasn't until he got turned on to the idea of ocean rowing that it all seemed to fall into place," said Joy Ridley, 28, a Minnesota financial consultant who has been her brother's right hand in planning the event. "Our parents taught us not to take life sitting down, but to stand up and work for what we wanted. That became the beginning of Row for Hope."

Their father, Mark, a Lutheran pastor who lives on Binghamton's West Side, also had been diagnosed with cancer. He was treated and reports being cancer-free.

For Paul, the next three years were a balancing act. When he wasn't working, he studied everything from celestial navigation and sea survival to how to turn a diet of freeze-dried foods into something high in fat (hint: add olive oil).

"I don't have the luxury of running to Nirchi's around the corner," he jokes.

He's also had to do a dozen or so workouts per week to pound his body into the shape needed to withstand the rigors of propelling a boat through salt water for 10 hours a day. Though the south Atlantic is generally at its calmest in the winter, the ocean can crank out waves 10 feet higher than Ridley's boat is long.

Eleventh hour

Two weeks before the launch, Ridley's to-do list had been narrowed to logistical items.

The Web site where people can learn about the trip, track his progress and, most importantly, make donations? Up and running.

Paperwork: Ongoing. One doesn't get permission from the Spanish government to row through its portion of the Atlantic, apparently, without first proving he knows how to operate a VHF radio and can navigate using the stars, despite having an on-board GPS system.

ABOUT THE BOAT

Liv, the boat that will be Paul Ridley's home from launch until he arrives in English Harbor, Antigua, in February, is:

- * Part water-purification facility. A desalinization machine will make ocean water drinkable.
- * Part storage locker. It will need to carry three extra sets of oars, plus enough food to sustain Ridley for up to three months.
- * Part communications center. Though he will be unaccompanied, Ridley will carry a global positioning system, a satellite phone and a PDA to keep him in touch with his support crew back in the States -- if there's sunlight to keep the batteries charged.
- * Part pharmacy. Should he fall ill or be injured, he'll need enough antibiotics and First-Aid supplies to keep him alive for the up to 48 hours it could take for rescuers to arrive.

SOURCE: Press & Sun-Bulletin research

His flight overseas Thursday: Successful. His Friday update to his Facebook page reads, "Paul is in Tenerife, Canary Islands."

Making sure all the supplies got where they needed to go? Liv was shipped earlier this year -- cost: \$15,000 -- but there were worries that some little things, like the 12 pounds of Gatorade powder Joy was bringing, might have difficulty clearing customs.

Joy arrived in the Canaries on Friday. Mark and Nadine Ridley -- Paul's dad and stepmother -- will join them today. So will Liz Tomic, a family friend from Binghamton.

Shortly thereafter, though, it will be just Paul and the ocean.