

Belton-to-Austin trek raises funds for missions

December 1, 2006

Posted: 12/01/06

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By Jennifer Sicking

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BELTON—Mile after mile, Bear Garza's feet pounded the pavement to help bring the gospel to others.

Garza raised money for the [University of Mary Hardin-Baylor](#) campus missionary fund and the school's general missions fund Veteran's Day weekend by running and walking from Austin to Belton—70 miles in less than 24 hours.

Bear Garza pauses in front of the chapel at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor just before he started out on his trek to raise money for Baptist Student Ministries missions.

Initially, he gathered about \$940 toward his \$3,000 goal, but additional money has continued to arrive in the mail, on his doorstep and in a jar in the [Baptist Student Ministry](#) building.

“It’s to help send students all of the world during the Christmas break,” he said. “It will help alleviate the money-raising stress for them.”

About 15 miles outside of Austin, his legs began to cramp. Further down the road, he stepped in a hole and hurt his foot. Construction caused his running path to be diverted and extended his planned 62-mile run by eight miles.

Lindsay Deringer, a junior recreation major from Marble Falls, rode behind Garza for part of the run.

“He’s a very driven person,” she said. “A gift given to him is endurance. He is very fit. This summer we talked about that, and we were praying to see

how he could use it."

Garza trained about a month, running between two to five hours each Saturday—counting time, not distance—in preparation for the long-distance run.

Garza, 22, acknowledges that at 220 pounds, he's built more like a weightlifter or a football player than a distance runner.

"I've always been blessed in athletics," he said. "I've always wondered about the physical limits of my body. It might be the most physically intense thing I've ever done."

Garza, a senior exercise and sports science major from Belton, discovered it was.

"Intense," is how he described it after finishing the more than double marathon-length run for God.

It also became an answer to prayer. Garza said he has been praying for school unity, and he saw it evidenced as he prepared for his run and during it.

"It's been cool to watch (other students) come alongside me," he said.

During his run, about 60 people came to encourage, run and walk alongside him.

"There was a tangible sense of community," he said. "I didn't expect all those people to show up."

Deringer also saw the run as building community on campus.

Some of the people who came to cheer on Garza and to run with him had never been to the Baptist Student Ministry building, she noted.

"At one point, there were about 20 people running with him," she said.

At 6:30 a.m., almost 17 hours after he started, Garza arrived at his apartment near the UMHB campus after running through the night.

"It was one of my best experiences in college to see it happen," Deringer said. "It was by the grace of God."

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