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From Coast to Coast, In Running Shoes

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Twenty-seven-year-old UB alumnus Jason Gross plans to run cross country – literally – to raise money for diabetes research. The trip will start in New York in July, and should end in January of 2005 in Los Angeles.

Driven by months of hard training and spurred on by a desire to find a cure for an illness that affects his family and friends, a UB graduate will run from ocean to ocean this fall to raise money for diabetes research.

For six months starting in July, Jason Gross, a graduate of the Class of '98, will pound the pavement from New York to Los Angeles.

He has said that if he is successful, he could raise \$100,000 for research into Type II diabetes. The disease runs in his family — just a few years ago, Gross's grandfather died of complications from Type II diabetes.

"I just wanted to raise awareness," Gross said, noting that he also has a close friend with the disease.

Gross's trek across America will begin on July 4 with a ceremony in New York's Central Park. Six months later, he plans to finish in Los Angeles.

Each day, a support vehicle will drive 30 miles ahead of him and wait for his arrival at the end of the day.

"It will be my job to catch up," said Gross.

Gross plans to sleep and eat in the RV.

Gross, 27, who lives in Washington, D.C., received a marketing degree from UB. He also worked as promotions director for WRUB during his last two years at college.

"It was really hard to find work around Buffalo after I graduated," he said. "Buffalo will always be home to me. I grew up there. I love it."

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While Gross trains every day — and plans to run nearly 3,000 miles from July to December, he hardly ran at all while going to school at UB. In fact, Gross says he was overweight as a student.

"I used to be about 250 pounds at graduation," he said. "After graduation I just fell in love with running and started doing marathons. I just thought it would be a cool idea and wanted to try pushing myself."

The now-svelte Gross said he got the idea to take on the cross-country run because of his friend's illness, and because Type II diabetes runs in his family.

Gross said that his family has been very supportive of his atypical running dreams.

"I think everyone thinks I'm crazy, but they are really behind me on this," he said.

When Gross decided he wanted to do the run, the American Diabetes Foundation jumped on board, he said. Several local media outlets became interested in his journey.

Gross also expects Buffalo's ABC affiliate to cover him as his journey winds through Buffalo around July 31.

Though Gross never competed for the Bulls cross country and track programs, some UB track and field coaches are aware of his plans.

Tim Beach, the program's recruiting director, said he hopes that publicity surrounding Gross's effort will reflect well on UB's athletic programs.

"I think it sounds like a great idea," Beach said. "A lot of good things are happening here at UB. The publicity will be great for his cause, and hey, maybe there will be some for UB Track and Field."

As far as the inevitable "Forrest Gump" comparisons, Gross laughs them off.

"Hey, you know the Forrest Gump thing?" he said. "I've actually had people suggest I call up Tom Hanks and see if he'd be willing to help out."

For more information, visit www.diabetesrun.com.

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