

The Miami Herald

Former Miamian begins long walk Sunday

•WALK FROM 18

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The entire 10,000-mile journey, he projects, will take eight to 10 years.

"I'm not going overboard. As a diabetic, some days I'll only do five miles," he said. "This is not the mother of all difficult walks. It's not a race."

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SMART BOX
The World Walk hot line is 305-444-1932. Cesar Becerra can also be reached at worldwalkfordiabetes@hotmail.com.

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KEY WEST

Diabetic man will be walking with purpose Sunday

BY THREE YEARS AFTER BEING DIAGNOSED WITH DIABETES, A FORMER SOUTH FLORIDIAN SETS OUT TO CONQUER THE WORLD, ONE STEP AT A TIME.

BY CARM BUCKNER
cbuckner@flherald.com

KEY WEST — After doctors told him he had diabetes, Cesar Becerra made two rough promises to himself.

Because they said the disease could steal his sight, he vowed to see great lakes, mountains and seas. Because they

said the disease could hobble his feet, he vowed to walk the world.

And this Sunday, exactly three years after the crushing diagnosis was made, Becerra will take the first steps of his wildly ambitious journey to be the first diabetic to travel the globe by foot.

Setting out from Key West's South

ermmost Point at 10 a.m., he plans to work his way up U.S. 1 at a clip of 16 to 15 miles a day. Miami, he guesses, can be reached in two weeks; the Pacific Ocean by mid-2005.

"I'm going to be walking on the Great

*TIMM TO WALK, 88

The Miami Herald

off on a 2,000-mile trek across the Appalachian Mountains, a venture he called "Peaks of Progress," to raise awareness and money for diabetes research.

News of Becerra's Appalachian feat caught the atten-

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couple, he said. Funds that are raised will go to the Everett, Wash., chapter of the American Diabetes Association. Details of the trip and contact information are posted at <http://www.1af-coty/worldwalk.com>.

Holbrook, for her part, said she values the message Becerra's walk sends most: that diabetics can and ought to exercise. As Americans grow heavier and eat less nutritious food, "Type 2 diabetes is reaching epidemic proportions," she said. Exercise helps the body use glucose better, reigning the disease in.

Becerra's ties with the Keys compelled him to choose the Southernmost City as his starting and ending point. He was once a volunteer guide at Indian Key State Park, and fished regularly in Key Largo as a kid.

After hitting Alaska, a goal that's at least two years off and dependent on how fundraising goes, he'll venture next to either Japan or Russia — by boat or plane. "I can't walk on water," he said. "Not yet."

FLORIDA B

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KEY WEST

Diabetic man will be walking with purpose Sunday

■ Three years after being diagnosed with diabetes, a former South Floridian sets out to conquer the world, one step at a time.

BY CARA BUCKLEY
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• **TURN TO WALK, 6B**

Without items many would deem necessities — dentures and a hearing aid. They are asking Herald readers for help.

BY MICHAEL VASQUEZ
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Ivan Pezet is waging war against prostate cancer. He and his wife Barbara are also battling poverty. And so they have learned to adjust.

Vegetables don't make it to the dinner table in the couple's modest Miami Beach apartment without first spending a minute or two in the blender.

Ivan Pezet finds the soup-like puree easier to eat.

Barbara Pezet, on the other hand, wouldn't mind using a fork for a change. But her sunken cheeks betray the fact that she has gone without needed dentures for months. Left toothless, Pezet finds it

• **TURN TO WISH BOOK, 2B**

NEW YEAR'S BIRTH, 3B

BABY, 2004 ENTER TOGETHER

Sydney Noelle of Miami-Dade is born just seconds after midnight.

EDUCATION, 5B

SOME DISTRICTS GET 'A'

A survey for Gov. Jeb Bush scores school districts around the state.

DEATHS, 4B

LEE MILLMAN

Former development director of the Miami branch of the Anti-Defamation League.

Former Miamiian begins long walk Sunday

•WALK, FROM 1B

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"I'm not going overboard. As a diabetic, some days I'll only do five miles," he said. "This is not the mother of all difficult walks. It's not a race."

Becerra was 28 years old and just off an exhilarating tour of the 50 U.S. states with his wife, Maud, when he learned that the culprit behind the unquenchable thirst dogging him was Type 2 diabetes, the variant that affects over 90 percent of the country's 19 million diabetics.

Diabetes often damages nerves and impedes circulation, Becerra learned, and, left untreated, can lead to blindness, decadened limbs and amputation.

After the clouds of depression unleashed by the diagnosis lifted, Becerra decided to stop taking drugs that reduced his resistance to insulin, but sickened him. He also began exercising, in a feverishly headstrong way. With Maud at his side, he set off on a 2,000-mile trek across the Appalachian Mountains, a venture he called "Peaks of Progress," to raise awareness and money for diabetes research.

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"He was an inspirational young man who had never exercised, who wasn't interested in exercise, and was now doing the Appalachian Trail hike," said Holbrook. "He was an incredible motivational speaker. What a transformation to make."

Becerra shed 35 pounds from his 205-pound, 5'3" frame, and, with Holbrook egging him on, set his sights on walking the world. Others have gone before him: Dave Kunst of Minnesota walked the globe for three years, ending in 1974. American Gary Hause is currently doing the journey; Englishman Karl Bushby started his global trek in 1998 and is still at it; and Arthur Blessitt of North Fort Myers dragged a 12-foot cross around the world.

But Becerra, as far as he knows, is the first diabetic to make the attempt. Along the way, he must monitor his blood-sugar levels obsessively and closely watch his feet; his circulation is already spotty, and an ant bite took six months to heal.

He plans to camp, stay with



MISSION: Cesar Becerra, who has Type 2 diabetes, aims to walk around the world to raise awareness of the disease.

STYLING: LOVELACE/L.A. FILMMAKERS COOPERATIVE

hosts and friends, and spend long stretches talking with school children and community groups, urging diabetics to exercise more. He lined up sponsorship from his former employer, the L.A. Filmmakers Cooperative, and is hoping for support from Brooks footwear, whose running shoes he will wear. He is still on the hunt for more dona-

Maud will join him, he says, now and then. "We've never been a conventional couple," he said.

Funds that are raised will go to the Everett, Wash., chapter of the American Diabetes Association. Details of the trip and contact information are posted at <http://www.laf-co.tv/worldwalk>.

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Servas Traveler Walks 10,000 miles for Diabetes



Cesar Becerra, Servas member walks for Diabetes

Servas Traveler, Cesar Becerra has undertaken a walk of herculean proportions. The young South Florida historian will make history as the first Diabetic to attempt to circumnavigate the globe on foot! On January 4th, 2004 at approximately 10 AM, Becerra, took the first steps on a journey that will cross four continents, 30 countries and could last nearly a decade, raising awareness and funds for Diabetics. And along his global route Cesar will stay with Servas hosts.

The 10,000 mile journey began and will end at the historic Key West Mile Marker and will raise funds for both The American Diabetes Association

and the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. But more important than funds for research, Becerra will attempt to inspire and educate Diabetics on the importance of daily exercise.

Thirty-one year old Becerra, remembers the day he was diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes. "I instantly slipped into a depression, the whole world looked as if it was coming to an end. Now I know that having Diabetes is far from the end, it is in fact a grand beginning."

Becerra manages his Diabetes with diet and exercise instead of medicine. He hopes to inspire and set an example that just a daily regimen of walking each day can significantly assist Diabetics young and old control their Diabetes.

The countries being walked through have a particular role in the Diabetes story. They represent an important population that can be inspired by this voyage and embrace and assist Cesar's cause. Here are some interesting facts:

USA: An estimated 16 million Diabetics.

England: The first country to begin curbing young children's attitudes about junk food. There is a new "free fruit" pilot program for public schools and local cycling programs with access to 8,000 miles of cycling paths by 2005.

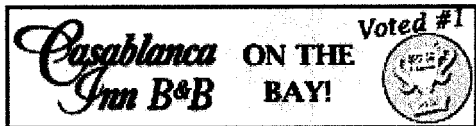
Netherlands: Martin Mes was in a Diabetic coma, and his doctor suggested amputating his blackened feet. He has become a world inspiration for running a 3,880 mile marathon (the furthest distance any Diabetic has run) from Jerusalem to Holland.

Germany has the fastest growing diabetic population in the world; this is expected to double in just ten years! Inactive lifestyle is the leading cause.

Egypt: A child with Diabetes will live only 6 years due to lack of medicine and testing supplies. For a poor family, a box of test strips costs a monthly wage; a pump costs almost a year's income.

India has the largest Diabetic population in the world — 25 million people, expected to rise to 57 million by 2025. Highest cause shown from an urban diabetes survey last year: "sedentary lifestyle." Korea: westernization of lifestyles is rapidly increasing Diabetes and becoming a burden on public health. The country is looking to new ways to help combat Diabetes.

Cesar's motto: "Dream, Dare, Do!" is an inspiring one for us all and we wish him luck as he undertakes his global walk. He plans to walk through 11 states so perhaps you will have an opportunity to meet Cesar yourself in the coming months and years. For more information go to: <http://www.lafco.tv/worldwalk> or email Cesar at cesar@lafco.tv



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latest update:

Fighting diabetes: Walking for a great cause

By JEFF BRANSCOME
Intern

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Cesar Becerra said his Type 2 diabetes transformed into a blessing after he was diagnosed more than four years ago.

He eliminated his steady diet of cheeseburgers and replaced naps on the couch with daily walks.



click photo to enlarge **Cesar Becerra.**

But 32-year-old **Becerra**, a tour guide and historian from Miami, said these walks evolved into more than just a part of his everyday routine. The strolls transformed in journeys meant to inspire the 18.2 million Americans with the disease, he said.

"I just don't want people who have diabetes to think there are limits to anything," he said recently while visiting St. Augustine.

In fact, this goal is what brought **Becerra** to St. Augustine in mid-September. His stroll through the Nation's Oldest City was a small part of his planned 10,000-mile walk covering 40 countries and more than five continents, he said.

But this isn't the first time **Becerra** has set his standards high -- or far.

His previous diabetes walks include a 2,000 mile hike on the Appalachian Trail and a 51,000-mile road trip through the country.

His current trek is called the WorldWalk for Diabetes, an adventure that may take 10 years to complete.

But the 5-foot-3, 160-pound **Becerra** said he's in no hurry.

He started the trek nine months ago in Key West, exactly four years after he was first diagnosed.

Since then -- on his days off as a tour operator for Miami-based Educational Field Trips -- he has set aside about a week every month for the WorldWalk.

Each time **Becerra** resumes his trip, he travels -- either by plane or bus -- to the exact spot where he left off.

He reached St. Augustine a few weeks ago after he hopped on a bus from Miami to New Smyrna Beach.

On Sept. 17, he wandered up A1A and cut through Beverly Beach. Sixteen hours and 3 miles later, he arrived at the Historic Inn at 107 Anastasia Blvd. and collapsed on his hotel bed at about 2 a.m.

The next day, Saturday morning, he crossed the Bridge of Lions.

As he walked into downtown St. Augustine, he heard cannons explode from atop Castillo de San Marcos.

"When you walk through a community, you just get the pulse of that place," he said.

Becerra put aside a few days to relax and tour the historic sites while in St. Augustine. He usually takes breaks every 5 to 15 miles, he said.

When he doesn't have a house or hotel to crash in for the night, he said he finds a campground or pitches a tent on the beach.

"That's part of the fun," he said. "You have to improvise. Part of the WorldWalk is having the faith that everything will turn out all right."

Becerra put his journey on hold when he arrived in Jacksonville Beach at the end of September.

In November, which is National Diabetes Awareness Month, he'll wind through Georgia's small towns and big cities until he reaches Chattanooga, Tenn. This small slice of his journey will last about 35 days, he said.

Becerra funds his trip by selling merchandise.

at www.worldwalk.lpbm.org . A portion of the sales go toward the American Diabetes Association's chapter in Everett, Wash.

Janine Holbrook, a certified diabetes educator at the Providence Diabetes Program in Everett, met **Becerra** after his hike through the Appalachian Trail.

She persuaded him to speak at a diabetes conference in 2001 and was impressed by his message promoting diet and exercise.

"He has an absolute lust for life," she said. "It is his goal to get the most out of life that he can. He lives more in a year than most of us live in a lifetime."

Most Americans with diabetes are diagnosed with the Type 2 variant, according to the American Diabetes Association. Symptoms include an unquenchable thirst and frequent trips to the bathroom.

Becerra controls the disease through exercise, which reduces his blood glucose levels.

During his walks, he lugs around a 12-ounce backpack containing his glucometer and a few snacks including his favorite, sardines soaked in mustard and Louisiana hot sauce.

"I just love living on the go," **Becerra** said. "I'm definitely a nomad."