

A man with a plan

By EMILY GEDDE Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, July 18, 2014 3:00 pm

His tennis shoes are laced up and Gary Fitch is ready to make a difference.

In two weeks, the retired mail carrier will set out on a 300-mile, 30-day walk from International Falls to St. Paul in an effort to end hunger in the state. He's calling the initiative "Minnesota Miracle."

"There are too many hungry kids in this state," he said. "We need to take care of our own. We need to do something about it."

And he intends to.

At 10 a.m. Aug. 2, Fitch will start his journey at the Bob Walls Memorial Union Hall and invites anyone and everyone to walk him for as long as they can.

"Even if people can walk the two miles to the city limits line of International Falls, that'd be amazing," he said.

"International Falls is the 'if' in Minnesota Miracle. If we can start off well, we can make this happen."

Since the more than two years after the idea of Minnesota Miracle began, Fitch has partnered with Second Harvest Heartland, the largest hunger relief organization in the Upper Midwest, and he has also gained support from the AFL-CIO, the largest federation of unions in the United States. The effort has also gained support from the Koochiching Labor Assembly, which represents unions working in Koochiching County.

"It's a grass roots labor movement," he said.

Originally, the walk was set to begin in April, but to allow more time for Fitch to ramp up the behind-the-scenes effort, he moved the start date to Aug. 2. That way, the walk will conclude on Sept. 1 when he will join the labor parade at the Minnesota State Fair.

Fitch also revised his goal of raising \$30 million "to something a little more realistic."

"My goal now is \$1.5 million," he said. "That's only one penny a mile from 285,000 union workers...That's attainable. It would allow me to plug \$60,000 to \$70,000 into the 300 food shelves every year."



Gary Fitch

Gary Fitch will kick off his "Minnesota Miracle" walk to help end hunger in Minnesota at 10 a.m. Aug. 2 in International Falls.

So far, \$30,000 has been raised towards the Minnesota Miracle Ending Hunger Fund. The fund, he explained, will be set up as an endowment to generate additional dollars off interest.

“The nest has been built, now I’m working on filling that nest,” he said. “Donated money will never be touched. That’s going to stay there. We’re just going to use the interest.”

Fitch is hopeful Minnesota Miracle generates enough attention to encourage people to donate and get out and walk with him to feed more mouths in the Land of 10,000 Lakes.

“I may not be able to make the state hunger-free, but I’m just a little old 62-year-old guy,” he said. “I need everyone’s help.”