

Letter carrier walks the (300-mile) walk to fight hunger

July 23, 2014 by [Union Advocate](#)



Retired letter carrier Gary Fitch will walk 300 miles in August to raise money for hunger relief.

On Aug. 2 Gary Fitch, a retired letter carrier from St. Paul, will begin a long walk that he hopes will be a big step toward ending hunger in Minnesota.

Fitch, 62, will walk from International Falls to the State Fairgrounds in Falcon Heights, arriving on Labor Day. The 300-mile journey, dubbed the [Minnesota Miracle](#), will raise money for an endowment to fund anti-hunger initiatives across the state.

It may sound like a lofty goal, but Fitch believes it's possible if everyone pitches in. And it all starts, he said, with the state's union members.

"I'm asking them for a penny for every mile I walk," Fitch said "That's \$3 to watch me bust my butt for 300 miles.

"If we got a penny a mile from 385,000 union members in Minnesota, then we've raised a million and a half dollars. It's just common sense. There's strength in numbers, and I want to show the strength we have."

The Minnesota Miracle has received the endorsement of the state's largest labor federation, the [Minnesota AFL-CIO](#), and regional labor federations in [St. Paul](#) and Minneapolis have helped Fitch get his endowment fund off the ground. Already, unions have kicked in \$25,000 to jumpstart the Minnesota Miracle.

"The nest has been laid, and we're adding to it," Fitch said. "The checks are coming in, and my goal is to raise enough where after this is all said and done, we've got at least \$300,000 for the endowment. That will give us enough in interest to buy 30,000 to 40,000 pounds of food every year for food shelves in this state."

Walking the walk

The 300-mile walk across Minnesota will be the latest in a string of long journeys Fitch has taken on to give back to his community, state and country.

In 1989 Fitch rode his bicycle from St. Paul to Washington D.C., carrying nearly 4,000 handwritten letters from children fighting cancer, addressed to President George Bush and First Lady Barbara Bush.

“I wanted to give these kids their own personal mailman,” Fitch said. “Biking out to Washington gave them an assurance, knowing that their letters were going to get there.”

Fifteen years later Fitch embarked on an even more ambitious project. He biked from Seattle to Washington, collecting the “hopes and dreams of 23,651 schoolkids on paper,” he said. Those papers were scanned onto a flash drive, which Fitch presented to NASA.

“NASA took them, put them on the Atlantis shuttle and orbited the earth,” Fitch said. “Those kids put a circle full of hope around the planet.”

Stamping out hunger

Fitch, who walked 12 miles a day as a letter carrier, delivering mail to homes in St. Paul’s Como Park neighborhood, retired in March 2013. He’s fortunate, he said, to have worked in a job that affords him the opportunity to take on an ambitious project like the Minnesota Miracle in his retirement.

“I’ve got my union pension with the post office,” he said. “I had the blessing of being able to retire and do something like this. I represent everybody who wants to, but can’t do something like this because of whatever reason.”

The need for hunger relief is great, even in a “quality-of-life state” like Minnesota.

According to [Second Harvest Heartland](#), the Upper Midwest’s largest hunger relief organization, one of every eight Minnesota children is at risk of hunger issues, and 9.5 percent of Minnesota households are considered “food insecure.”

“I’m hearing about all these kids missing a meal, about elderly people wondering whether they should pay their electric bills or eat,” he said. “It’s time to take care of our own, and if we can do it then every other state in the nation can do it.”

Public support wanted

The Minnesota Miracle walk will launch from International Falls Aug. 2, and unions in the area are helping Fitch organize a kickoff celebration.

Fitch’s next major stop will be Duluth, where his visit will coincide fortuitously with the [National Association of Letter Carriers](#)’ annual picnic. Fitch will walk alongside his brothers and

sisters from the NALC from the Duluth Labor Temple to the park where the picnic will take place.

“I’m hoping to get a couple hundred people from the unions up there,” Fitch said. “We need to show that labor is stepping up to the plate and making a difference.”

Fitch also has reached out to food shelves across the state, offering the Minnesota Miracle as an opportunity to raise awareness and funds in their communities. The website, minnesotamiracle.com, offers pledge forms communities can use to stage their own “walks against hunger” on days Fitch passes through town.

“I’ve offered myself as a vehicle for any food shelf,” Fitch said. “If people want to come out and walk on behalf of their local food shelf, I’m a vehicle. I’ll usually be walking from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The rest of the time I’m going to be out soliciting my behind off, wherever I’m at.”

Fitch welcomes company along his journey. A map with his planned route is posted on minnesotamiracle.com, and Fitch will have his phone’s GPS locator turned on, so that anyone wishing to join him can find his location by looking at the website.

“I’ve got stories to tell, and I’m anxious to listen to a lot of them,” he said. “That’s going to be my enjoyment on this thing – meeting the people I meet and making a difference for them, for everybody that wishes they could.

“And when it’s all said and done I’m going fishing.”

Want to give?

Supporters can donate any amount online at minnesotamiracle.com. Second Harvest Heartland is collecting online donations for the Minnesota Miracle through September.

Donors also can mail checks for the Minnesota Miracle to the Minnesota AFL-CIO, 175 Aurora St., St. Paul, MN 55103. All donations to Minnesota Miracle are tax deductible.