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By Molly K. Ottman, WMICENTRAL.COM

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John Martin, surrogate runner for Runner Ernie Andrus in the Coast 2 Coast Runs, is coming to Show Low on April 21. Left, a collection of lapel pins commemorating the run.

SHOW LOW — World War II veteran Ernie Andrus' Coast 2 Coast Runs surrogate runner will pass through Show Low on his way to California. He will travel down the Deuce of Clubs on April 21 to raise money for the WWII LST 325 Ship Memorial Project.

Andrus was a Navy corpsman whose mission was to help wounded Marines stay alive until they could be transported to a hospital or hospital ship. Andrus served on the USS Landing Ship Tank 124 during World War II and was assigned to the Asiatic-Pacific theater. Andrus participated in several operations in Saipan, Tinian and Okinawa aboard the LST 124.

“It was a terrible war; there is no such thing as a good war,” Andrus said. “Many men died and not just from war; they died from sickness as well.”

The USS LST 124 was similar to the USS LST 325 Ship Memorial Project. The USS LST 325, now resting in the Ohio River in Evanston, Indiana, was used to land equipment and troops on foreign shores in wartime and made several landings in Normandy. Out of 1,051 LSTs, the 325 is the only one remaining as fully restored, but the Coast Guard will never let it sail the open ocean again.

According to the USS LST 325 Memorial Project, the LST 325 is the only operational LST in World War II configuration afloat in U.S. waters. The ship was listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places in 2009. The LST 325 is currently restored thanks to the help of Andrus and many volunteers who pay tribute to those who bravely served their country aboard LSTs.

Andrus completed his first two years and 10 months coast-to-coast journey in 999 hours 32 minutes and 1 second from California's Pacific Coast to Georgia's Atlantic Coast in August 2016. He finished one day after his 93rd birthday, making history. He is making the run again with the help of a friend, John Martin.

Andrus' dream is to take the ship back to Normandy for a D-Day memorial. He did not raise enough money on his first run for the ship to be there in 2019 on D-Day's 75th anniversary so he is trying again, and this time the run is going from Georgia to California through Arizona.

Vesta Melcher, a donor and participant of Coast 2 Coast Runs, Melcher said in an email, “Although Ernie is still alive and kicking, he's had some health issues that made him unable to complete a second coast-to-coast journey to raise additional funding. A friend of his, John Martin, has undertaken the run for him.”

Martin retired from the **San Bernardino County Fire** Department in 2018 and worked in fire service for 28 years. Martin completed 2,000 miles when he reached Apache County on March 23. The 2,000 mile run took Martin 1,107 days and 5,320,000 steps. Martin has 650 plus or minus miles and about 17 months remaining until he reaches the finish line at Mission Beach in San Diego.

If it seems a long time to get from Springerville to Show Low, Martin runs only 3 miles a day, three days a week to keep up with the schedule of reaching Mission Beach on Andrus' 100th birthday of Aug. 19, 2023. He camps at local campgrounds in his RV and drives to the finish line, then hitchhikes back to the starting point and walks 3 miles back to his car.

Martin said he has met some amazing people during his journey and tells Andrus' story from coast-to-coast to everyone he meets.

Although Andrus is not with Martin on the coast-to-coast run, he runs the 3 miles at the same time and day that Martin does while at his home in California. Andrus plans on running the Coast-2-Coast Runs again and hopes to join Martin at Mission Beach.

"We welcome all runners and walkers to join John during any time of our journey," said Andrus.

If you see Martin running from coast to coast, you can sponsor Coast-2-Cost Runs for \$20 or more and event officials will give you Andrus' autobiography or a T-shirt. You can request an autographed copy of the book and Andrus will mail it to you for an additional \$5, or you can show support to one of the bravest Americans that the U.S. ever produced by walking along side of Martin.

"This is an honor to do this for Ernie. I am doing what any good friend would do," Martin said.

The Show Low portion of Martin's coast-to-coast journey will start at 10 a.m. on April 21 at mile marker 343 near the Show Low airport and go for 3 miles down the Deuce of Clubs. The pace will be slow, and anyone is welcome to watch or join.

https://www.wmicentral.com/news/ernie-andrus-runner-will-come-through-show-low/article_de855a56-2725-5fa8-a1b1-7f3991ccec37