



Sunday, May 03, 2009

North Carolina woman walks to Noah's Ark

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Photo by Valerie Baldowski/// Ann McLaughlin (from left), Curt Guild, Allison Hedgecoth and Paula Hedgecoth walk down L.G.-Griffin Road to the entrance of Noah's Ark.

By Valerie Baldowski

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Ann McLaughlin said she was inspired by the work Noah's Ark does for children and animals after reading about the Locust Grove facility on the Internet.

On April 19, the North Carolina woman set out to see it for herself - on foot.

Noah's Ark, which opened in 1978, is an animal rehabilitation center and a children's home.

McLaughlin began a 300-mile walk from Mooresville, N.C., to Locust Grove, with the intent of seeing the facility in person. She said she walked seven days a week, covering between 20 and 25 miles a day, until arriving in Locust Grove on Friday.

"I was fascinated by how wonderful [it] was, and how amazing Noah's Ark was - what they did for those kids and animals," McLaughlin said.

Word of her walk spread while she was traveling, and when she reached the

Arrangements were made for city and county officials to join her at Locust Grove City Hall on Ga. Highway 42, and walk the rest of the way, about three miles, to Noah's Ark on L.G.-Griffin Road.

In anticipation of her arrival, Locust Grove officials posted a congratulatory sign for McLaughlin in front of the municipal complex. Among those who welcomed her were Locust Grove Mayor Lorene Lindsey, County Commission Chairman Elizabeth "B.J." Mathis, and Diane Smith, one of the operators of Noah's Ark.

The walk began as a fund-raiser, said McLaughlin, but it turned into a personal quest to complete the trek.

"I don't know where the concept came from," she said. "I have to think it came from God."

The walk itself, she said, provided an opportunity to see the beauty of each area she passed through. Everyone she encountered along the way was kind and helpful, McLaughlin said.

Smith said she first learned of McLaughlin's plan to walk to Noah's Ark when she received an electronic communication from McLaughlin earlier this year. "She just e-mailed us out of the blue, and introduced herself," said Smith.

"She said she felt she was being led to do something for children and animals. All of a sudden, it came to her that this was what she wanted to do," Smith added.

Smith said she was initially surprised, but supported McLaughlin during the walk through frequent calls to her cell phone.

"It's totally incredible," Smith added. "She's one of my heroes right now. I'm amazed that somebody would have the heart to do something like this, and follow through with it."

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On the net:

Noah's Ark: www.noahs-ark.org

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