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WALK TO MARS



## CAP Launches National Fitness Challenge that Goes to **MARS**

*By Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Timothy H. Miner*

**D**uring Civil Air Patrol's Board of Governors meeting at the CAP National Conference in Baltimore, the national commander, Maj. Gen. Mark Smith, announced the launch of a fitness challenge that would take the organization to Mars.

The goal of the challenge is to have every member of the U.S. Air Force auxiliary contribute physical activity that generates a combined total of 33.9 million miles in equivalent distance — the average span between Earth's orbit and that of Mars. The program was devised to address the board and national leadership's concern with the physical well-being of all CAP members, especially senior members, who unlike cadets aren't required to participate in physical training as part of their participation.

The previous year, Smith approved the CAP Five Pillars of Wellness and Resilience as the paradigm for focusing the organization's attention on individual members' well-being. "The five pillars are Mind, Body, Relationships, Spirit and Family," Smith said in introducing the concept. "They represent the focus areas that contribute to our personal level of 'wellness.'"

"This personal wellness enables us to operate at our best, sustaining us during times of stress and making us resilient to the difficulties of life. This helps us to be successful as CAP volunteer airmen."

With the concern for fitness and physical well-being, the year between the Baltimore conference and the 2020



conference, set for Louisville, Kentucky, is considered the “Year of the Pillar of Body.”

During the September national character development lesson on resilience, all cadets focused on how to build good habits that support their fitness, which in turn positively strengthens the other four pillars of their lives.

In October, during Wingman Support Day, all members discussed the importance of fitness, rest, nutrition and recreation. Armed with the knowledge, all members will work together for the rest of the year on the Walk-to-Mars effort, a project that will make daily personal activity very important.

### **It is Not Just Walking**

While the program is called “Walk to Mars,” walking isn’t the only way to accumulate distance. Using a scientifically derived chart of 97 different physical activities from aerobics to Zumba, members will self-report daily or weekly physical effort via an online form to the national database.

Activities other than walking or hiking — which are directly reported — are converted to equivalent energy expended as if walking. Those more challenging than walking garner longer distance for the same number of minutes, thanks to the greater effort expended.

Any movement counts. Members with fitness trackers can report their daily distances. Cadet activities like drill and physical training accrue distance based on duration. Search and rescue exercise activities provide distance, especially for ground events.

The movement doesn’t have to be CAP-related. Personal recreation and

school or community sports are an important part of the challenge.

Cleaning, mowing and other household chores are on the chart as well. For members with limited mobility, activities like light weightlifting can provide a distance value.

### **Evaluating Success and Reporting Is Important**

The hardest part of the program may be not the physical effort but the consistent reporting required to collect the activities and distances. The National Task Force for Wellness and Resilience chose not to link tracking devices to the database. This method forces individuals or units to manually report regularly. This was done for security and to make sure a deliberate evaluation of personal effort occurs. If a member doesn’t make a daily goal or improve, they’ll know it, because they must report it.

One of the early best practices to emerge from the program’s first weeks is the importance of teamwork in the units. Squadrons can submit weekly spreadsheets that record the latest activity from all their members. Helping motivate and support each other for a sustained activity will provide an organizational bonus for units that rally together.

### **Challenges to Individuals and for Wings**

With a wide variety of activities to choose from, everyone should be able to find something enjoyable to do. With a mastery of the reporting process, every member is limited only by their own effort. That’s where the wing and region “competitions” come in. Every member is working out and expending energy for unit bragging rights while

working on their personal fitness.

To level the playing field between wings with a wide disparity of membership, each wing and region is working to achieve a higher percentage of its allotted quota. That quota was assigned based on membership as of Aug. 1. Every cadet and senior member received a quota of 535 miles. The winning wing will surpass its quota by the greatest percentage.



Great Lakes Region Commander Col. Matt Creed is a Gaelic football player who lost weight and improved his health while connecting to his Irish heritage this past year.

When it comes to challenges for the individual members, that comes from the Board of Governors itself. Col. Dale Newell from the Oklahoma Wing is an 82-year-old recovering from triple bypass heart surgery. He has personally issued the challenge





Walking is the baseline activity for the Civil Air Patrol Walk to Mars. Col. John and Maj. Teri Knowles walk by a local CAP headquarters building while “testing” a volksmarch at a Maryland airport. A volksmarch was part of the 2019 National Conference offerings.

Maj. Dave Poppel recovered from serious back injury using his passion of running to condition his body. He is about to run his 20th marathon this fall.



All physical activity done during and outside of CAP events is eligible for recording on the Walk to Mars. Unit physical training nights and larger events like cadet encampments will provide some of the miles used for the goal.

to publicly acknowledge any member who bests his own step count during the next year, a count that’s expected to be about 4 million steps or about 1,200 miles.

### The Test Run

To test the methodology and processes for the Walk to Mars, National Headquarters staff took off on a challenge May 7 to “walk” from Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, to the National Conference in Baltimore by Aug. 8. They had 90 days to accumulate the distance.

Thanks to an enthusiastic response, the virtual walkers took only three weeks to reach their original destination while visiting every wing headquarters along the route from Alabama to Maryland. With time on their hands, they challenged themselves to reach as many wing headquarters as they could and still be back before the conference.

During the test’s 90 days the headquarters staff covered almost 4,400 miles and reached 24 wings’ headquarters. They virtually covered the distance from Alabama to Maine and then over to the Great Lakes Region and as far west as Iowa before dashing back to Baltimore to “greet” the arriving members from across the country.

The trial was a “rousing success,” said John Salvador, CAP’s chief operating officer. Thanks to his leadership and significant contributions from volunteer headquarters staff like Maj. Karla West, the software to handle the entire CAP population was tested and tweaked.

### The Role Models

Now that the Walk to Mars is off and running — OK, walking —





the national task force is looking for volunteer athletes as role models to use on social media and in its work. They provide the examples that motivate CAP members to be better than they are now and to demonstrate that every volunteer can find a way to demonstrate excellence with the right motivation.

To date four “CAP Athletes” have been named so far in the four weeks since the Walk to Mars began:

- The first “CAP Athlete of the Week” was the Board of Governors’ Newell, former Oklahoma Wing commander. His inspiring story is shared in a separate article (see page 41).

- Maj. Dave Poppel from the Connecticut Wing’s 186th Composite Squadron suffered a herniated disk in 2014 and was told he would never run competitive amateur road races again. Despite the pain, he hobbled to last place in a 5-kilometer race that year. Working through his condition, within a few years he was back to

winning his age division and is now preparing for his 20th marathon road race.

- First Lt. Edward Reed Jr., 76, is an Alabama Wing’s Tuscaloosa Composite Squadron mission pilot who just won three national amateur swimming events in his Senior Division.

- The fourth athlete is Col. Matthew Creed, Great Lakes Region commander, who is active in his local Gaelic football league to connect with his Irish roots and to lose weight — 25 pounds so far.

Every CAP member is eligible to be an Athlete of the Week.

### The Cruise Phase

With the number of CAP members who are submitting their fitness activities daily growing quickly, the organization is on course to meet the goal of 33.9 million miles by the next national conference.

“The Walk to Mars ties the

First Lt. Edward Reed Jr., a 76-year-old Alabama Wing mission pilot, just won three national amateur swimming events in his Senior Division, making him one of four CAP Athletes of the Week during the early days of the Walk to Mars.

important aspects of our focus of having resilient airmen through this year’s emphasis on the Pillar of Body, with teamwork and perseverance,” said Col. John Knowles, national task force chairman. “It is a fun activity that is a friendly competition between wings and regions that improves the fitness and lives of all our members.”

The national commander addressed the Walk in a letter to all CAP cadets in September. Smith said, “Once we have strength in all five of our pillars, there will be nothing that will hold us down.”





With Mars programmed into the CAP fitness navigation system, the sky, and beyond, is the limit. ▲

*Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Timothy H. Miner is a member of CAP's National Task Force for Wellness and Resilience and the "national coach" of the Walk to Mars. He and his wife, Cecilia, are avid walkers who are leaders in the national volksmarching community. Their greatest athletic achievement was Holland's Nijmegen Four-Day Walk, which had them cover 200 kilometers. They received the Queen of the Netherlands Walking Medal for their success.*

▲ All CAP members are contributing to the Walk to Mars. At the National Conference, senior members like Col. Brad Lynn (front), chairman of the CAP Board of Governors, walked around the Inner Harbor of Baltimore during the annual 5K Fun Run/Walk.

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