

MEDALS FOR MILES

A NEW PROGRAM FUNDED
BY PCTA BOARD MEMBER ERIC RYBACK
WILL RECOGNIZE THOSE
WHO COMPLETE THE TRAIL
WITH AN ELEGANT MEDALLION

By Janet Fullwood, Communicator Editor

Walking from Mexico to Canada (or Canada to Mexico) on the Pacific Crest Trail is a major accomplishment, whether done in a season or over the course of years. Starting in 2010, those who've earned the right to say they've done it will be recognized with a medal worthy of being cherished and passed down through generations.

"Completing the PCT is a monumental, a life-changing event that deserves significant recognition," believes **Eric Ryback**, the newest member of the Pacific Crest Trail Association's Board of Directors, pending approval by the membership in the coming election. "You discover many things about yourself: how far you can go, what your limits are, what your capabilities are as a human being."

Ryback is intimately familiar with the rigors and rewards of long-distance hiking, having completed the Appalachian Trail in 1969 (as a 16-year-old); the Pacific Crest Trail in 1970; and a route approximating today's Continental Divide Trail in 1972. The year after his PCT journey, the ambitious teen wrote a book about his experience. *The High Adventures of Eric Ryback* became an outdoor classic that sold more than 300,000 copies and is still widely read by PCT hikers today.

Ryback disappeared from the hiking scene in his 20's and went on to raise a family and launch a successful career in financial management. His home in St. Louis, Mo., offered few reminders of the Pacific Northwest's mossy woods, the Sierra's snowy peaks or Southern California's baking deserts. But Ryback and the Trail were destined to meet again.

In 2008, Ryback accepted an invitation to attend the Annual Day Zero PCT Kick Off event, a weekend-long launch party for the thru-hiking season. The "gathering of the tribe" he encountered at Lake Morena, Calif., moved him deeply.

"I was so impressed with what was happening down there - I had no idea of the scale and enthusiasm and wonderful people I would meet," he said. "In reminiscing and talking about the Trail and going back 38 years, I knew I had to become a part of it again going forward."



The idea of awarding hikers who complete the PCT's 2,650 miles with a medal or trophy in place of the existing Certificate of Completion issued by the PCTA arose at Kick Off during conversations with PCTA Executive Director **Liz Bergeron**, Ryback said. It was a cause he was proud to back.

"In the end I came home and designed it, then solicited different companies for bids," Ryback said. "That took about a year of going back and forth, because I wanted it to be very special. A lot of medals awarded in athletic events are nice, but I wanted this one to be Olympic caliber. I think completing the PCT is the equivalent of that. This is the ultimate medal a hiker can have."

The 3-inch-diameter medallions, made of solid brass and weighing 9 ounces, will be engraved front and back and presented on a custom-designed lanyard. "My idea is to give it not only to the most recent finishers, but to go back and reach out to all who have completed the Trail," Ryback said.

"It will be an honor system," he added. "Whoever accepts it has to live with themselves."

Details about the new PCTA medal program will be announced and medals unveiled in the spring. 🌲