



# Mustering power to climb the tower

Organizers estimate trek up First National's 40 floors raised \$65,000

By ALLI DAVIS  
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Los Angeles firefighter Carlos Arellanes landed in Omaha at 11:45 p.m. Friday.

That allowed him four hours of rest before arriving at First National Tower to run alongside other firefighters and police officers in the 13th annual Trek Up the Tower in the Real Life Heroes division, which began at 6:30 a.m.

The trek raises money for Wellcom, a nonprofit dedicated to improving work-site wellness. This year, organizers estimate that the race raised about \$65,000.

Arellanes climbed the tower's 40 flights in full firefighting gear with the rest of the crew, but he wanted to tackle another challenge — the vertical mile.

He switched into normal running gear to complete the challenge, in which participants make 10 1/3 trips up the tower to equal one mile, ending their last climb on the 17th floor.

This is Arellanes' second time participating in the event.

Last year, his wife, Elsa Arellanes, *See Trek: Page 2*

## Trek: Climber wants 'to give back'

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climbed with him. Though not a firefighter herself, she wears full gear and a firefighter's cap that says "Fire Wife" with pride. She even passes a lot of the male competitors, Carlos Arellanes said.

"Since I'm still healthy, since I'm still a firefighter, I want to give back," he said. "And I should be ready, until I retire, to give it all."

The hardest part for fellow "vertical-miler" Susan Lash isn't the climb.

"The hardest part is getting out of bed and dragging myself here," said the 59-year-old from Illinois.

Then it's the first climb up the tower, when she feels "dead tired," but after that, things get easier. Maybe it's the runner's high, or maybe it's the inspiration from her red T-shirt that says, "Nevertheless, she persisted."

Lash thinks of the quote, which refers to Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., when she feels her legs telling her to stop.

"I tell them, 'No, we still have to go,'" Lash said. "Despite all that, I'm persisting."

Participants could register individually or as a team to climb the tower one time, or complete a vertical mile.

Ivan Marsh — who holds the record for the fastest trek up the tower at 4 minutes, 15 seconds — was registered for this year's race but did not participate.

Jason Larson, a 35-year-old man from Minneapolis, recorded this year's fastest time at 4 minutes, 49 seconds.

Some were there to achieve personal goals, but others, like Gwynne Wickman and her two daughters, were racing for a cause.

Wickman's 32-year-old nephew, Chaz Nummela, was diagnosed with brain cancer last June, when his wife was pregnant with their first child. Nummela lives in Florida, but Wickman wanted to help in any way she could, even if that meant climbing 40 flights of stairs in Omaha. The four climbers in Wickman's group donated money to the Nummela family fund.

"He woke up, and he could barely walk the other day," Wickman said. "No matter how long it took to go up those steps, I was going to go up those steps and be the strength for his legs. That's what I was going to do because I can't be there to lift him up."

adavis2@owh.com, 402-444-1276