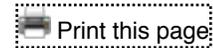


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## Marine bicycling cross-country makes it to Tulsa to celebrate Mother's Day with mom

by: MANNY GAMALLO World Staff Writer  
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 [Get more information on the Semper Fi Fund for injured Marines or make a donation.](#)

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There aren't too many people who would hop on a bicycle and ride 1,490 miles with a plan in mind to be with their mother on Mother's Day.

That was on Marine Maj. Bill Conner's mind, though, when he left Ocean-side, Calif., on Easter Sunday to start his 3,300-mile "Semper Fi Ride Across America" bicycle run to help raise money for injured Marines.

He paced his trip just to be in Tulsa for Mother's Day, so he could surprise his mother, Mary Ann Conner, whom he hadn't seen since the Christmas holidays of 2009.

His mother, meanwhile, had a hunch that he might make it home for Mother's Day. She was aware of his cross-country trip and knew that he was already bicycling across Oklahoma on his trek.

But all she could do was cross her fingers and hope.

She had an inkling that she might get her wish when family and friends took her to River Parks at 41st Street and Riverside Drive on Sunday afternoon.

Wearing a red "Proud Marine Mom" T-shirt, Mary Ann Conner let out a yell when she saw her son rounding a curve on the bike path, and she ran to him with arms outstretched, and together they hugged.

"This was the best Mother's Day ever," she said as she clutched a bouquet of flowers, her eyes still glistening with joyful tears.

"I was so excited last night at the thought that he might be in for Mother's Day that I couldn't sleep," she said.

Mary Ann Conner, a retired registered nurse who worked at St. Francis Hospital for 39 years, had cooked a casserole for dinner, but the family had other plans - to go out and eat to celebrate the holiday.

The 37-year-old Conner, who graduated from Tulsa's Bishop Kelley High School and later the U.S. Naval Academy, said he had every intention of being in Tulsa for Mother's Day.

In fact, he said, he arrived in Stillwater on Friday night and stayed there an extra day, just to time his arrival in Tulsa on Sunday.

"I had planned an extra day for the trip in case we had bad weather," he said. "But the weather was perfect all across the country."

Conner was accompanied for part of the trip by his brother, Bob Conner, 39, who met his younger brother at Albuquerque, N.M., and followed behind in his brother's SUV. Other friends had driven Bill Conner's SUV to

Albuquerque.

Bill Conner said the trip, so far, has gone well.

Traveling along back-road highways, Conner said truckers pulled over for him and motorists greeted him enthusiastically, especially when they saw the large American flag fastened to the back of his bike.

When he stopped at service stations, Conner said strangers would come up to him to donate money for the Semper Fi Fund, which helps injured Marines, their families and other injured service personnel who have worked with Marines.

Conner, who has served five tours of duty in Iraq and one in Afghanistan, has been planning this bike trip for the past year and began fundraising several months ago.

He put together the bike trip after arriving at Camp Pendleton, Calif., in March after his tour of duty in Helmand province, Afghanistan.

Conner's initial fundraising goal was \$17,750 to mark the 1775 founding of the Marines, but he's decided to double that amount after having already raised \$25,000.

Conner is doing this on his own. All of his expenses, food and motels, are coming out of his own pocket.

But it's worth it, he said, because there are too many Marines who need help, and there's still much fighting left to be done.

On Tuesday, Conner will leave Tulsa for the second half of the trip, which will end at Ocean View, Del., on Memorial Day at the latest, he said.

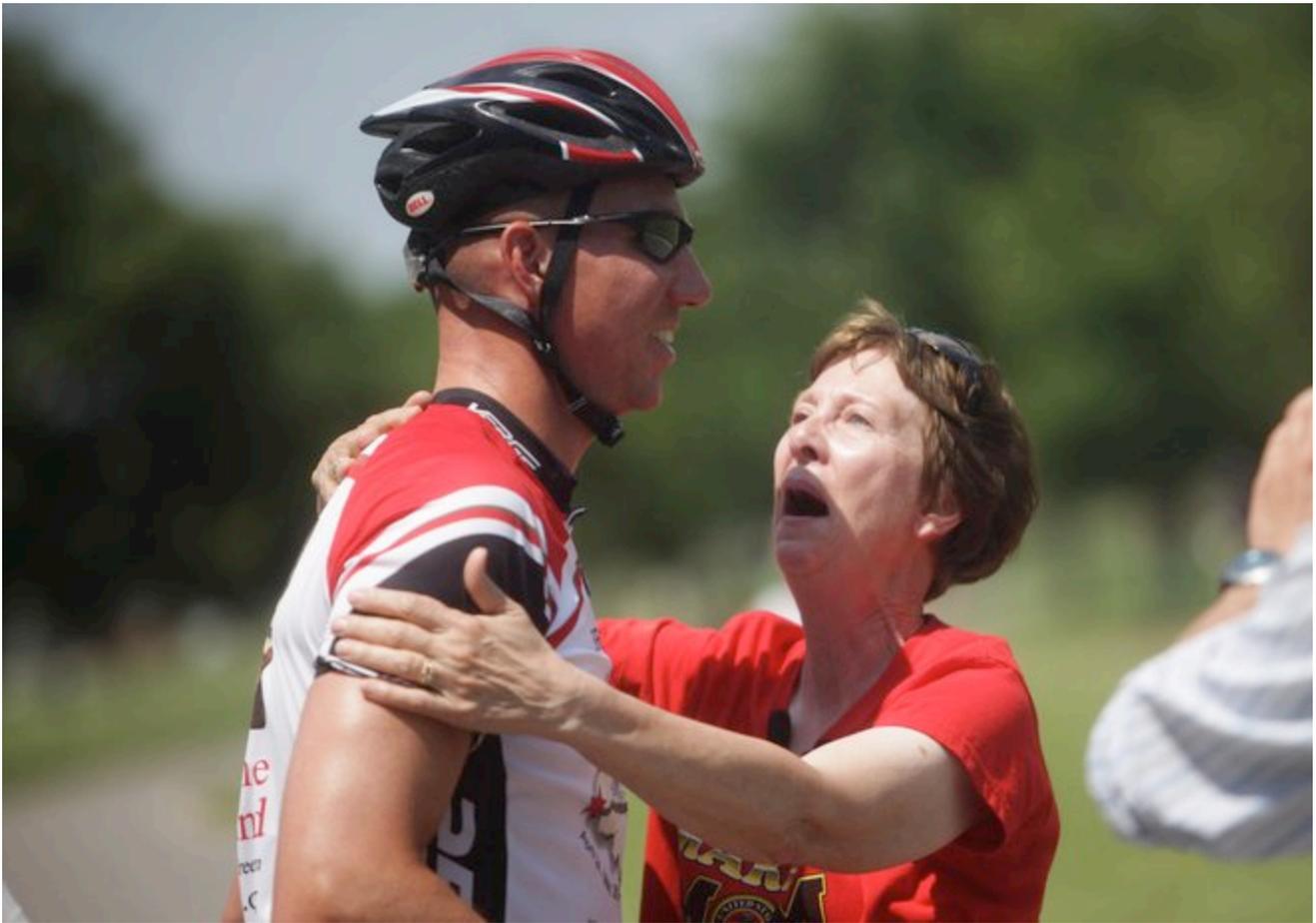
Friends will follow behind in his SUV until he gets to the area of the Mississippi River and from there he will go solo to Delaware and then return to Tulsa by air.

**Original Print Headline: Marine cycling cross-country arrives in time for Mother's Day**

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**Associated Images:**



**Mary Ann Conner greets her son, Marine Maj. Bill Conner, as he arrives in Tulsa on Sunday. Conner, of Tulsa, is riding coast-to-coast to raise money for injured Marines. ADAM WISNESKI / Tulsa World**



**Mary Ann Conner stands with her son, Marine Maj. Bill Conner, as he arrives in Tulsa near 41st Street and Riverside Drive. Conner, of Tulsa, is riding coast-to-coast to raise money for the Semper Fi Fund for injured Marines. Conner stopped in Tulsa to surprise his mother for Mother's Day. She had not seen him since his return from Afghanistan. ADAM WISNESKI / Tulsa World**



**Marine Maj. Bill Conner arrives in Tulsa near 41st Street and Riverside Drive on Sunday. ADAM WISNESKI / Tulsa World**

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