

## Keller fighting for cancer victims by

By Carol Stender

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**RICHMOND, Minn.** — Nick Keller of Richmond loves snowmobiling.

He traveled 11,000 miles on his sled over the last two snowmobile seasons and has earned the nickname, "the mileage man."

Keller plans to best that after Christmas with a 12,200-mile, 60-day ride to accomplish two things: He wants to beat the world record and raise money for cancer.

He calls the trek the "Snowball Cancer Challenge" and is taking donations and sponsorships for his ride.

"If, by some technicality, I don't break the record, I don't care just as long as we raise money for cancer," he said.

The cause is a dear one for Keller and his wife, Janet. Both have several family members who have battled or are battling the disease. The ride is especially poignant for Keller. His mother, Mary Jane, died of breast cancer when she was 56 years old. Keller will be 56 in April.

Ron Kern of A and C Farm Service and Yamaha in Paynesville suggested the record-breaking ride. At first, Keller said no but, when he considered riding for cancer, he quickly changed his mind.

He discussed it with Janet and the couple's three daughters. Each is now involved with some facet of the ride. Daughter Julie, a nurse in St. Cloud, has worked on sponsorships.

Melissa Ngeno of Jordan does the computer work and gets letters out on the event. Carrie, who lives in Australia, working for the Juvenile Diabetes Association, offers her expertise on non-profit organizations. Janet mans the phone at home and coordinates the effort.

They are establishing a non-profit the family has named the Keller Family Community Foundation. Keller hopes they can raise enough money to establish a perpetual fund. Eventually a board will be established of people from all walks of life, he said. The board will review requests and disperse funds to families to cover expenses like travel or hotel rooms during doctor visits or treatment.

His brothers and sisters quickly showed their support and pooled money for Keller's windshield decal that reads, "The Sons and Daughters of Mary Jane Keller."

Granddaughter Olivia and her third grade class at St. Peter and Paul Catholic School in Richmond took on the ride as their class project. The project, named "Nickels for Nick," has already garnered \$4,094. Olivia's teacher originally set a \$1,000 goal but, as Olivia told her grandpa, they showed her they could beat that amount.

He's found support for his venture wherever he goes. As he travels through central Minnesota, placing posters about his fundraising record-breaking ride in convenience stores, the businesses often give him

money. People often drop money or checks at Keller's home or stop him during his travels to offer donations.

"Everyone knows someone who's had cancer," he said.

Keller, a masonry contractor, tells of one masonry job he completed for a family with two young girls, ages 6 and 8. Keller struck up a conversation with the girls and their parents during his breaks. When the parents told the girls about his ride, they ran to their bedrooms and emptied their piggybanks. They brought two sacks of coins for Keller to place in the foundation.

He's been given gas cards to help cover fuel expenses and other sponsorships. Any sponsorship that isn't used entirely for the ride will be given to the foundation and all donations will be placed in the foundation to be given to families, Keller said.

Yamaha stepped forward as a sponsor. It will be a red Yamaha sled he'll be riding as he traverses snowmobile trails in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan to surpass the record.

He will travel without a support team, but several friends will join him during different parts of his trek.

Keller will also be documenting his travels via the Internet. He needs to record his odometer reading each morning and evening as he strives for the record.

He's no stranger to long rides. The Kellers have a second home in Michigan and have taken rides there

