



Teddy Keizer: Oregon Trail Blazer

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ASK ANYONE TODAY WHAT FIRST COMES TO MIND when they hear the word “politician;” chances are the answer isn’t a very positive one. Teddy Keizer aims to change this, and the 36-year-old Southeast Portland resident has a record of accomplishing his goals.

As a seventh-generation Oregonian, Keizer, who is running for the Oregon legislature this year, has deep roots in the state. The patriarch of his family, Thomas Dove Keizer, led the Keizer wagon train over the Oregon Trail in 1843. It is said that he was the first to bring covered wagons over the entire trail. The key to this success was the arduous cutting of a route through the forests of the Blue Mountains in Eastern Oregon. Thomas was also a member of the Second Territorial Legislature in 1844 and the first captain of the Oregon Rangers, the first police force in the Oregon Territories. His homestead was used to name Keizer, Oregon, outside of Salem. Teddy Keizer’s great-grandfather Russell Keizer and his brother, Phil started the Keizer Brothers Hospital in North Bend where Phil was also one of the first mayors.

Growing up in Coos Bay, Teddy Keizer headed off to Brown University, where he studied geology, biology and political science and was elected student body president. Following graduation, Keizer was in charge of Patrick Kennedy’s environmental platform during his successful campaign for Congress. This put Keizer on track for a political career in Washington, D.C. when he realized that he did not yet have the life experience to really understand and serve his community. So he set a challenge for himself: to

expand and deepen his understanding by living in as many different places as possible, while taking on as many different jobs as possible.

When you live on the road or on the trail you are constantly out of your element. Whether it is treating the dying cancer patient while working on an ambulance, working with a team to beat the seemingly insurmountable odds of a world record, or breaking through the boundaries of a child’s fear of mathematics, each experience adds to your understanding of why people and society act the way they do.

While he was living in Colorado, Keizer’s curiosity was captured by the “Fourteeners” speed hiking record. The record involves hiking all 55 of the Colorado peaks over 14,000 feet in the shortest amount of time. Despite his not being a trained athlete, the challenge appealed to his drive and energy, and his passion for the outdoors. Teddy trained for two years, gathered a loyal crew and went on to hike all 55 peaks in 10 days, 20 hours, and 26 minutes, a time that remains unbeaten.

But the “Fourteeners” record was not only about setting and achieving an extraordinary individual goal. Keizer understood that success meant inspiring and motivating a diverse group of people to believe that together they can achieve something that might seem too difficult or even impossible.

“You have to understand, none of us who worked with Teddy had any sort of experience with this kind of thing,” says Eric Freeman, friend and frequent

support crew member. “But Teddy had the vision and the plan and made us all feel like we could do it. I met amazing people – some of whom met Teddy on the trails and were inspired to join him. We all worked together, had a great time and we really accomplished something incredible.”

Keizer went on to challenge and conquer several more records around the United States in speed hiking and ultramarathons. Following these victories, he moved back to Oregon. He was ready to hang up his trail running shoes and begin a more settled life with his wife Ann, a teacher. This included volunteering for Mayor Tom Potter’s campaign for civil rights and working as a legislative assistant for Senator Joanne Verger on a bill to bring healthy foods to students in schools and a revision of the Bottle Bill.

Keizer was unexpectedly drawn back into the world of ultramarathons when outdoor company Duofold approached him about creating a nation-wide event. He suggested a 50K hike in each of the 50 states as a tribute to Bob Marshall, a founder of the Wilderness Society, who had planned such an adventure but died before he could complete it. In 2005, Keizer set out from his Portland home to take his 50K hike in Oregon through the city’s Forest Park. He went on to travel around the United States for the next 75 days, completing 50K hikes in every state, from the Na Pali Coast of Hawaii, to the Narrows in Utah, to the forests of Mississippi, recently ravaged by Hurricane Katrina. His record-setting journey was later documented on the Outdoor Life Network on national television in a series of episodes called “Live Your Passion.”

When Keizer returned to Portland again, he was determined to make a positive impact on his state, continuing to fulfill his long-term dream of serving his community through government.

When I set out to walk the earth, so to speak, I was consciously looking for the differences between different subgroups of America: East versus West, North versus South. Yet it became clear from the beginning that by far the largest divide was urban versus rural. Having grown up in rural Oregon and now having made Portland my permanent

home, I believe that I am well suited to bridge that gap between urban and rural that has, at times, ground progress in our Legislature to a halt.

It is his hope that he will be in a position to further Oregon and Portland’s strengths of community, sustainability, and livability. As he puts it, “Everyone benefits from the promotion of clean, green, walkable, and bikable neighborhoods; clear and natural rivers, forests, and air; vibrant urban cores and productive farm and forest land.”

Most recently he has worked as Statewide Organizer for Stand for Children, collaborating with volunteers to bring legislative change to their communities on behalf of children. Keizer found this work immensely rewarding, as he was able not only to discuss changes that needed to be made, but to act on them, and motivate others to do the same.

Education is the great leveler. It is critical that we give every child every chance to succeed by providing a quality education. We must prioritize children first. That is why I have spent the last two years at Stand for Children working to build the political will to support children’s health, safety, and education. In essence, it is about opportunity: the opportunity for the next generation that comes from a commitment to leaving the planet in at least as good a state as we found it; the opportunity for every child that comes from a commitment to providing a quality education; and the equal opportunity to the American dream that comes from a commitment to civil rights.

Keizer’s unique collection of experiences has given him a point of view that seems to be a good match for Portland, a city where social activism and consciousness run deep and where people believe that their energy and ideas can create positive change. “There’s no end to what you can do,” says Keizer. “You’re really only limited by your own imagination.” ☼

