

THURSDAY, JULY 8,



HE WALKS FROM ONE END of Pine City to the other and everywhere in between. Easily recognized by his flashy shirts, Larry Roubinek keeps a brisk pace, but he likes to stop and chat with people he meets along the way. A retired truck driver, Roubinek makes annual treks to Mexico to enjoy the sunshine and, of course, the people.

Happy wanderer loves people

by Amy Dorn

Walking nearly 12 miles a day gives Pine City native Larry Roubinek a chance to do two of his favorite things, talk to people and exercise.

Many people recognize Roubinek by his brightly colored shirts and shorts, 102 shirts at last count, as he swiftly walks local streets and along Highway 61.

"I like fashion. I've always liked colorful clothes. I don't like dull colors.

"It's not that I want to be desperately seen, except at night if I'm walking. I've got some beautiful shirts, and if I get it reasonable, I can't pass it up."

Roubinek's clothes aren't the only thing people might notice.

"I get a lot of compliments on my legs," he said laughing. "I was at McDonald's in Texas one time and a lady said, loud enough for everyone to hear, 'Look at those legs.' You could've heard a pin drop for five seconds. Then I tried to pay for the food, but after that they wouldn't let me. I get a big bang out of it."

Roubinek has a knack for meeting people, whether he's walking local streets or dirt roads in Mexico. He has been taking annual vacations to towns in Texas and Mexico since 1972.

He usually likes to leave earlier than this year's March 18 departure, but he said that no matter when he leaves, he spends three months in the sun among the native people.

When asked what he likes to do in Mexico, he beamed the smile that everyone who has waved at him or stopped to chat with him recognizes.

"I don't always stick to a plan. I kind of live from day to day."

Larry Roubinek

"Oh, I bum around. I talk to people; they're so interesting. The people are so friendly down South. It's more of a slower pace, as a rule. I go to garage sales and flea markets."

Meeting so many different people is one of Roubinek's reasons for making the trek each year. He said he used to stay away from places like South Padre Island because people told him the college students on spring break would be trouble.

"But I decided I wanted to go, and the young people took me in. I was right at home. Someone always asked me if I wanted a pop or something."

His daily hike around small Mexican villages brings Roubinek in contact with many people.

"They're a happy people. It seems like they're always smiling. If they see you once, they remember you. People down there get me up on cloud nine sometimes."

Walking along a beach, Roubinek said, he struck up a conversation with three sisters and their two friends, and they invited him to talk for awhile.

"I spent the afternoon with them. They had ham sandwiches and pop. I didn't have to buy a meal or anything. Only one could speak English enough for me to understand."

Before leaving, Roubinek

said, he exchanged addresses with the group.

Not being able to speak the language hasn't been a problem for him. He said he always manages somehow with body language, or finds someone that is able to speak some English. Sometimes a person will even offer to teach him a few Spanish words.

Another day of hiking brought Roubinek to a woman taking care of sea turtles.

"I was walking on Padre Boulevard, right next to the ocean where the big hotels are, when someone told me to go see this gal who fed sea turtles. The smallest must have weighed 150 pounds, and a larger one was blind so she had to feed it."

This spontaneous adventurer keeps no daily schedule or routine.

"I don't always stick to a plan. I kind of live from day to day."

Arriving at the border in his pickup truck-camper each year, Roubinek parks and pays the pedestrian toll of 25 cents to walk into Mexico every day. He pays 50 cents when he crosses back into Texas.

"I always park in Texas and walk over. I've always got so much stuff, and it would take them forever to look through

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it," he said referring to customs officials.

He wears Mexican ponchos around Pine City and gets many requests to bring back extras. So every day he's in Mexico he brings one or two across the border for people at home.

"I wouldn't mind living down there. But I don't know which place I'd live because I like so many places at different times of the year.

"Where you're from is your stable ground. I'm so happy when I go and while I'm there. Sometimes I hate to leave. I'm not always in a hurry to come back."

But Roubinek said he's content to return to Pine City, where he was born in 1925 and grew up during the Depression on his parents' hog farm. He attended District 33 school and got his GED after staying home

to work on the farm during his high school years.

Then in 1945, he was drafted into the army and served nearly two years. After the army, Roubinek was married for 10 years and had three boys, who live in the Twin Cities.

Travel was always part of Roubinek's life. He drove trucks for 37 years for Twin City Ready Mix and other companies.

"I figured out how many miles I've driven for pleasure and driving truck, even in the army. It's over five million miles."

After being on the road and living in the Cities since his early life, Roubinek decided to retire in 1985 to his hometown.

Walking and visiting people takes up most of his days. But he said he enjoys exercise of all types, especially dancing.

"I don't do quite as much

anymore," he said, of the many miles he puts on his walking shoes.

"I do it for exercise. I like to walk fast anyway.

"I wore out four pairs of shoes in a year when they had that Walk Through Pine County, only I did it down South. I was making up near 240 miles a month."

One goal he'd like to reach in the next year is to enter the South Padre Island Walk America in October and walk over the Causeway Bridge, the longest bridge in Texas.

"I saw a pamphlet on it when I was down there. I want so bad to go across that bridge."

Roubinek enjoys life and said he doesn't take it for granted.

"I lead a full life."