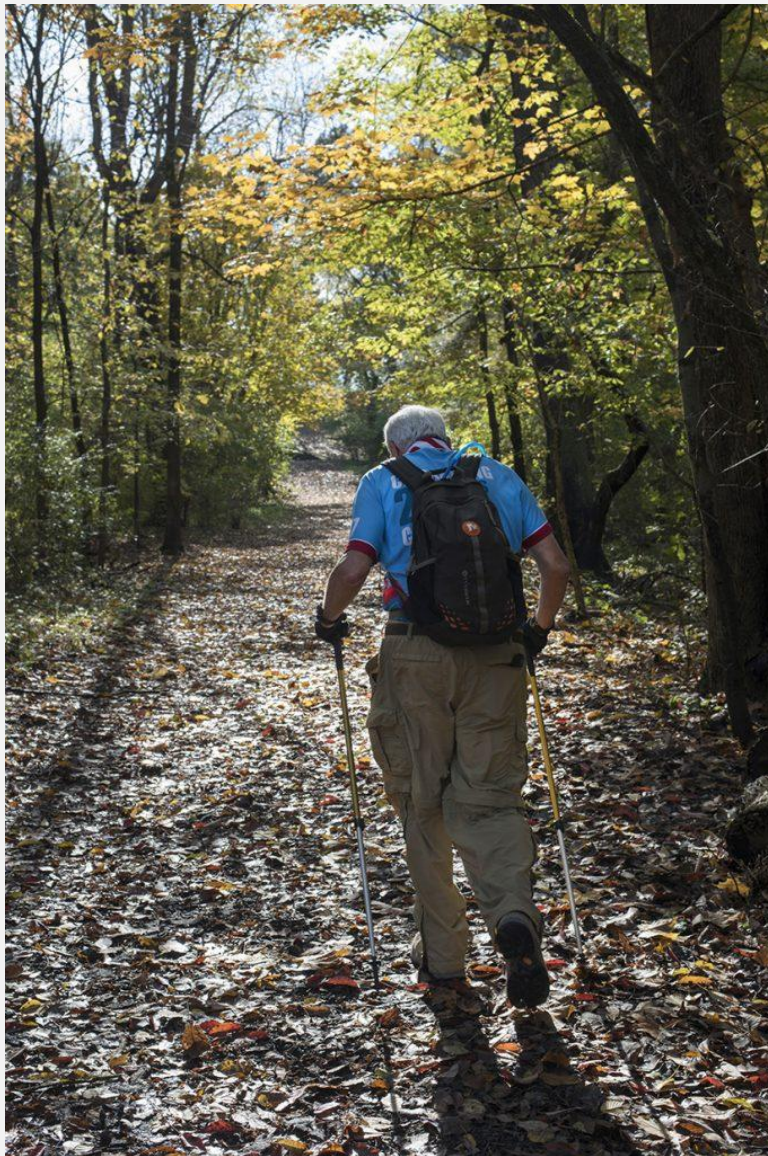




Finish Lines: Michael Bleier

Written by by Martha Rial, December 29, 2017



Retired attorney Michael Bleier trekking in Mt Lebanon's Bird Park

Michael Bleier, 75, has been retired for two years from Reed Smith's banking law practice. He joined the firm after 25 years at Mellon Financial Corporation, the last 14 as general counsel, He was intimately involved in the bank's expansion, its transformation into a global asset manager and its acquisition of Dreyfuss Corporation. The Lynn Haven Drive resident has no patience with anyone who is "bored" in retirement. Here's why:

What do you do to stay healthy and active? In October, I participated in The Trek, a five-day 40-mile charity walk in the Negev Desert, which encompasses about 55 percent of Israel's land. The challenging walk was for Norwood, a U.K. charity that helps children and young adults with disabilities. To prepare, in addition to my daily 2 1/4-mile walk on my home treadmill, I walked twice a week around the neighborhood for five weeks with my three-liter camel pack, wearing my boots, poles and hat. I must have looked funny in the hot weather we had. To date, I have raised over \$8,000 for Norwood. I will do a photo diary of the Trek for each of my sponsors. I also participate in a Sunday bowling league, and practice at least once a week. The last time I bowled much was many years ago. One of my first dates with my wife, Carol, was going bowling. Carol actually beat me with a 130. Since then, she has never broken 100. She says she tried real hard and the Fates were with her.

What new activities have you found time for? I am learning to play the piano. Tom Roberts, a Duquesne University music graduate and jazz musician, is my teacher. I really enjoy it, even though so far, I am not very good at it. And there is always time for my grandchildren in Pittsburgh, Bethesda, Maryland, and Boston. I enjoy traveling to their hockey, track, soccer, basketball and baseball games and I look forward to their holiday visits to Pittsburgh. It's great fun being a grandpa and hopefully helping our grandkids (two granddaughters and six grandsons) make wise life decisions.

<https://lebomag.com/finish-lines-michael-bleier/>

A trek of a lifetime

Written by [Michael Bleier](#)

Guest blogger Michael Bleier shares with us the details of his life-changing hike this fall

Despite my 75 years (and 35 years residing in Mt. Lebanon), I undertook a 40-mile challenge, in the form of a charity trek over five days in the Negev Desert. The October trek was for the Norwood Organization, a UK charity that dates back to 1795 and has Queen Elizabeth II as a patron, and services over 5000 children and young adults with an array of learning disabilities and needs. This was my second charity trek for Norwood, the first being a 30-mile trek into and out of the Grand Canyon in 2012, when I was 70. I undertook these challenge treks for a dear Reed Smith corporate London partner, who is the organizer of two challenge charity treks a year, at locations all around the world. My friend has an adult son who was born with disabilities. A number of years ago, with friends, my friend organized a school for children with disabilities and it operated within the larger Norwood organization.



A birds' eye view of the trek

The Negev Trek Challenge was in southern Israel. The desert accounts for 55 percent of Israel's land mass and is in an inverted triangle shape whose western side is contiguous with the desert of the Sinai peninsula and Egypt, whose eastern border is the Arabah Valley and the Red Sea, and whose northern border is Beersheba, Masada and the Dead Sea. The 40-year wanderings of the Jews after fleeing Egypt described in the Old Testament took them into parts of the southern Negev desert covered by the Trek

The Negev trekking contingent numbered 49, 47 of whom were British, and four Israeli guides. The Negev is predominately a rocky desert and the route the trek took was quite mountainous,

starting with a climb above Ein Gedi waterfalls, through and over two canyons, through the Zin Valley with a steep descent to Ein Aqua spring, onto a plateau, crossing the Ramon Crater floor, climbing Mount Shlomo and continuing and concluding with a trek to Nahal Gishron through a steep gorge and canyon, and concluding at Eilat, Israel's southernmost city on the Red Sea, across from Jordan and the city of Aqaba. The trek on the floor of the Ramon Crater, which scientists believe was formed about five million years ago and is the world's largest erosion crater, was part of the Nabatean caravan route between the Mediterranean Sea and Petra. The trek included overnight stays in youth hostels and a Bedouin camp. We also visited a 6th century synagogue.

I can truthfully say the 40-mile trek was the most physically demanding effort I had ever undertaken. It was harder for me at 75 than doing a bivouac and live fire training at Fort Polk, Louisiana, in 1967. At times it was somewhat scary being on the edge of Mount Shlomo and coming down over rocks and boulders, particularly since I am scared of heights. Even while walking across Pittsburgh's bridges, I won't go near the railing, preferring to walk as far toward the center as possible. I wouldn't have made it down the mountain without the help of a number of my British co-trekkers and guides. They were all so helpful, especially the young trekkers. They all kept their good humor and were supportive despite the obstacles. Their attitudes exhibited to me why the British were so critical to World War II's favorable outcome. Bob Diamond, a Reed Smith DC real estate partner, and I were the only Americans on the trek.



Author Michael Bleier, left, with Bob Diamond, a Reed Smith real estate partner from the Washington, DC office.

At three-quarters up Mount Shlomo, Eitan, the leader of our trek told me I didn't need to go any higher, since it was going to be an even more difficult climb up to the summit and very hard coming down. I asked him, "What would I tell my grandchildren if I didn't go to the summit?" He said OK, but he told me I could stop whenever I wanted to. I made it to the top.

There was also a biking component to Norwood's fund-raising effort, which included more than 150 bikers, mainly from the UK.

To date, I have raised slightly more than \$8,000 toward my \$10,000 goal. I have personally covered all the costs for my trip, so all the funds I have raised go directly to Norwood. If you would like to donate, you may send a check payable to American Friends of Norwood, to Amanda Gordon, c/o Reed Smith, 20 Stanwix Street, Suite 1200, Pittsburgh, PA 15222. Contributions are tax deductible. If you want information on Norwood, go to these links: <http://norwood.org.uk/Services> or <https://wn.com>

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