

Smith (88) completes virtual walk to Cape Town

ANIKA DE BEER

IT took him five months and 15 days to walk the 800km to Cape Town – but he did it.

When lockdown confined him to his home in March, Henry Smith (88), a well-known Port Elizabeth cyclist, was not content to sit around and wait until he could get back on the bicycle again.

On August 5, an article in *PE Express*, headlined “‘Never give up’ attitude leads the virtual way to Cape Town”, described his decision to do something with his free time during lockdown – a virtual walk from PE to Cape Town.

After a while, he decided just doing the walk was not good enough and decided to turn it into a fund-raiser for a local church.

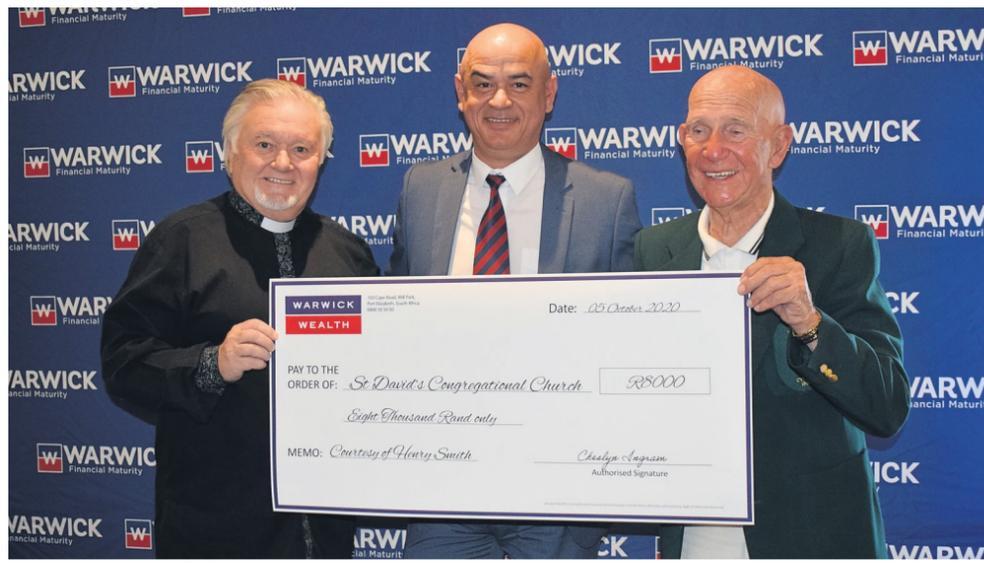
Minister Bruce Woolard, of St David’s Congregational Church, praised Smith’s dedication and mental philosophy that has kept him on a bicycle since the age of 14 and helped him throughout his virtual walk.

“I’ve known Henry since I was a child. He was a village hero. He was the only cyclist that could cycle up what was the steepest street in the city back then,” Woolard said. “He’s inspired a generation of people. We’re very, very proud of him.”

The local branch of Warwick got involved and sponsored every kilometre Smith walked. On October 21, Warwick Port Elizabeth regional manager, Cheslyn Ingram, handed over a cheque for R8 000 to Woolard.

Woolard said the funds will go towards the chapel they are planning to build in Sunridge Park.

“It’s called Second Life Chapel.



From left are Bruce Woolard (minister, St David’s Congregational Church), Cheslyn Ingram (Warwick PE regional manager), and Henry Smith at the handover. PHOTO: ANIKA DE BEER

“We’re using all second-hand material. So, it’s going to be recycled material – everything. The stained glass windows I’m making out of wine bottles,” he said.

He was especially excited about Smith’s involvement, because Smith was on the church building committee about 40 years ago.

“He was on the building committee and now, having done what he’s actually done, and made the donation, which we really do appreciate, that is actually going to be the first sum of money for us to build a recycled chapel,” Woolard said.

“Since he was on our building committee

so many decades ago, it’s wonderful to see the cycle of life – excuse the pun.

“And he’ll be featured in the chapel.”

Smith started his walk on April 1 and planned to reach his destination on September 7, with a quick ‘stop’ in Caledon on August 12 for his birthday. He missed his deadline by eight days when he had to take a break to heal from an injury.

“The theme of this venture is ‘never give up’. That’s basically what I had to do. Just before I reached Cape Town, my left ankle said you’re not taking another step.

“And I sat there and told myself I already put that article in the paper so there’s no going back,” he laughed.

“I took a rest for a few days. And then instead of walking half an hour at a time, I walked 15 minutes.”

He walked a total of 400 hours and said he has the calluses to show for it.

“I think it’s quite remarkable. Just to do something like that takes determination,” Ingram said. “In this day and age we’re filled with so much negativity. It’s very seldom that you get a good story out there

“There’re very few that actually attempt these types of things, so we’re happy that we could come on board,” he said.