

Another dream

So long to my 'trail guy' role,
says **Eric Van Steenburg**

So long, Lakewood. Adios, Uptown. I'm heading up to the far north.

OK, I'm not going to Canada, Chicago or even Frisco. I'm moving to North Dallas. While that might not be a big deal to someone who travels to downtown Dallas every day from Plano or Southlake for work, it is a big fat hairy deal for me.

See, I've lived and worked in either Uptown or Lakewood for the last 13 years. I wasn't one of those people who never traveled outside of LBJ — the Dallas version of 'the Manhattanite who never leaves that island. Heck, I didn't go north of Mockingbird, unless it was to visit my favorite pub in Mockingbird Station. North Park Center mall? Forget it. Too far.

In fact, my wife and I were prepared to

go completely urban. We both work in Uptown, we take the DART train to Dallas Stars games, and just about everything else we do is in between. We were ready to park our cars, permanently, purchase a condo in a downtown high-rise, and become one with the city. And then I got the call.

The University of North Texas decided to help me fulfill my lifelong dream of becoming a full-time university professor and accepted me into their Ph.D. program in the College of Business Administration. If all goes well, I should have a Ph.D. in marketing in about four years.

As my family was still trying to figure out how we could survive four years on just one income, we got an offer on our house and closed in three weeks. It was sort of like ripping off a Band-Aid real fast — painful, but quick. I'm still not sure how we pulled that off.

All that was left was to accept the offer from UNT and quit my job. Yikes. I've been working for the Friends of the Katy Trail for more than seven

years. I love this project. I love working with the volunteers, the city, the donors.

As someone who's passionate about exercise, the outdoors and quality urban living, the Katy Trail was a great gig. Plus, I got to wear shorts and a T-shirt to work — at least when I didn't have an important meeting scheduled. After all, I was the "trail guy." I even walked into a meeting with some heavy hitters from Hillwood one day in my sandals, a fact that they still tease me about to this day.

I've seen the Katy Trail expand from a two-mile strip of concrete that didn't go anywhere to a 3.5-mile urban oasis that Dallas residents use to get to the American Airlines Center, SMU, Downtown, Uptown, dinner and shopping. Major plazas, lighting, landscaping, connections — all were added over the last half-dozen years.

And because I really do love this city, I made sure that when my family looked for a new place to live, one that would get me closer to Denton but keep my wife's commute to Uptown bearable, we went no farther than North Dallas. There's something about having that city's name in my address that still makes me feel connected.

So I'll be spending more time traveling north starting in late August. My days with the Friends of the Katy Trail are numbered. I feel Lakewood, Uptown and Downtown slipping away. I'm more reliant on my car now than I'd like to. My urban dream is ending.

Or is it. Maybe I can use my free time — when I'm not studying, writing, teaching, doing research or commuting — to figure out how to make trail and bike connections between North Dallas and downtown. I wonder, do they have bike racks at the American Airlines Center?



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Katy Trail. He is also a Community Voices volunteer columnist. His e-mail address is eric@katytraildallas.org.