


POSTPONED: Tampa octogenarian plans trip across U.S. to film visionary business leaders

JANAN TALAFER | TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2020





 *Entrepreneur* notes Jan Roberts, the subject of this story, has decided to postpone her cross-country trip until Fall 2020 due to the threat of the #Covid19.

At 82, Jan Roberts shows no signs of slowing down as she prepares for an epic, 13,000-mile road trip that will take her to 34 cities in just 7½ weeks.

It's not a vacation; it's a search for the visionaries and change-makers that are shaking things up, and creating businesses that put people and the planet first for a more sustainable future.

Roberts is the founder of Cultural Innovations in Action, a Tampa nonprofit "shining the light on initiatives in the arts, education, economy, and communities that inspire hope and transform

society.”

She is also a former University of Tampa adjunct professor in the college of business and founder of Earth Charter U.S. She served as an NGO delegate to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development and has been a champion for positive social change for many decades.

Roberts is passionate about creating a more “just” economy that offers a different way to approach business ownership, one that improves the lives of working-class Americans and slows the growing wealth inequality.

She thinks that instead of using the traditional GDP (Gross Domestic Product) to measure the financial health of the country, we should turn instead to the new concept of GPI, or Genuine Progress Indicator, which factors in issues that impact quality of life.

This is the second time in the last few years that Roberts has put together a road trip of this type. She completed an 11,450-mile cross-country trip in 2014 to collect stories about “good people doing good things.”

83 Degrees Media featured that journey in 2014, and in 2018, Tampa’s Stageworks Theatre hosted a one-woman show about Roberts’ experience.

Road trip #2 launches from Tampa in April and will take Roberts up the East Coast and then across the country to California and back. Along the way, she’s got a full itinerary of people to visit that are

making a difference at the local, grassroots level. She's calling her trip, "On The Road: Cruising To A New Economy."

She'll be revisiting a few of the same cities and people she talked to in 2014 to see how everything is progressing, but she also has a full list of new interviewees.

"I'm hitting the road to prove that we do have innovative and practical solutions that benefit the many and not just the few," says Roberts.

Documenting change one interview at a time

Santiago Echeverry, associate professor of film, animation and new media at the University of Tampa, is on the board of directors for Robert's Culinary Innovations in Action. He's also designed a cool map that pinpoints a few of the many places Roberts will be stopping.

So far she has 32 interviews lined up in 20 cities. Here are a few:

- Ted Howard, who helped establish a green jobs and wealth-building program called Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland, OH, and India Pierce Lee, Senior VP at the Cleveland Community Foundation that granted initial funding for Evergreen Cooperatives.
- Jake Voelker, COO of Voodoo Brewery in Meadville, PA., that converted to employee ownership and in four years quadrupled the value of the business and expanded to six new brewpubs.
- Aleta Botts, executive director of the Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development's Cooperative Development

Center, a nonprofit and leading expert on cooperative business structures in Kentucky.

- Deborah Giles, director of Durham's Department of Equity and Inclusion to preserve African-American businesses through conversion to employee-owned or worker-owned cooperatives.

"There are great economic solutions that are happening and exciting stories about how the new economy is redesigning business ownership through employee-owned cooperatives," says Roberts.

She will also be investigating innovative concepts like the public banking movement in California. Last fall, California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed into law a public banking act that allows city and county governments to create or sponsor public banks, which in turn can offer public agencies access to low-interest loans for projects that benefit the local community, such as affordable housing.

Roberts intends to interview two leading California pioneers in this arena: Ellen Brown, founder and chairman of the Public Banking Institute and a Public Bank of Los Angeles advisory board member, and Miguel Santiago, a California assemblyman who co-wrote a bill that will enables cities and regions to charter their own public banks and create a public banking network in California.

Shaking up the status quo

Besides interviewing business entrepreneurs shaking up the status quo, Roberts intends to talk with people on the front lines addressing issues like reparations for African Americans and

helping Native American Indians reclaim tribal lands.

She'll be stopping in places like Durham, NC., to talk with William A. Darity, Jr., professor of public policy at Duke University, and a leading scholar on reparations for slavery, and Hakim Williams, chair of African American Studies and Director of Peace & Justice Studies at Pennsylvania's Gettysburg University, who conducts racial healing workshops.

"Most people immediately think of money when reparations comes up, but I'm also talking about the concept of collective healing and atonement, with programs that would add resources to the local economy and colleges, workshops developed on healing race relations, and discussion of the slave trade, redlining, and prison incarceration among African Americans," says Roberts.

When she arrives out west in places like Porcupine, SD, and Vinita, OK, Roberts will be looking at efforts underway to improve the economic condition of Native American Indian tribes. She'll be speaking with Patty Gobert, loan administrator with Native American Community Development Corporation, which provides loans to seven tribes in Montana, and Chuck Hoskins, chief of the Cherokee Nation, who led the effort to seat a Cherokee delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives for the first time.

Before she departs in April, Roberts is looking to the community for a little help to kick-start the trip. Her first request: She's looking for a volunteer videographer to accompany her and film the interviews, then put it all together in a 90-documentary that can be shown to the public.

She's also looking for financial support. "I have places to stay lined up, but I'm hoping for a few more people along the way to put me up for the night," says Roberts. She's also looking for a little extra gas money to fill the tank. It's a Pruis, so gas mileage is good.

For more information:

- Indiegogo fundraising campaign for Jan Robert's 2020 trip
- Cultural Innovations in Action
- 83 Degrees Media article about Roberts' 2014 road trip.



Read more articles by Janan Talafer.

Janan Talafer enjoys writing for a diverse group of clients, including print and online publications, nonprofit organizations and public relations agencies. One of the highlights of her writing career was flying with the 91st Air Refueling Squadron out of MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa FL for a feature about this elite military team. A journalism graduate of Bowling Green State University (OH), Janan's early career was in health care marketing and public relations for hospitals in Connecticut and Tampa Bay. She is an avid gardener, loves East Coast swing dance and enjoys touring around St. Petersburg on the back of her husband's scooter.

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