

Embracing history: Man sets hugs record in Vegas

February 14 2010, By OSKAR GARCIA , Associated Press Writer



Jeff Odnash, nicknamed Teddy McHuggin, hugs a tourist as Joshua Dietrich, left, holds a sign on The Strip in Las Vegas on Saturday, February 13, 2009. Odnash set the Guinness World Record for hugs in a 24 hour period and succeeded in giving 7, 777 hugs. (AP Photo/Laura Rauch)

(AP) -- A 51-year-old Ohio man has embraced the Valentine's Day spirit faster than anyone before, giving 7,777 hugs in 24 hours for a new world record.

Jeff Ondash, who sought the squeezes under the costumed alter ego Teddy McHuggin, broke the record Saturday night outside the Paris Las Vegas hotel-casino on the Las Vegas Strip.

"When you hug somebody, they all walk away from each other smiling," Ondash said. "They say an apple a day keeps the doctor away; a hug a

day - it's just fun."

Ondash said he wanted to become the world's hugging champion to raise money for the [American Heart Association](#) during American Heart month.

The cause is important to him because his brother and father both died relatively young because of [heart problems](#), he said.

His daughter Carlie, who tallied her father's hugs with a manual counter at the start of his attempt on Friday, came up with his pseudonym to make his spectacle a bit more fun. As Teddy McHuggin, Ondash sports a red NASCAR-style driver's suit with hugging logos and a wrestling-style championship belt.

"Jeff Ondash breaking a record really doesn't mean a lot," he said.

"Teddy McHuggin on the other hand, he's the reigning world speed hugging champion, now going after the world marathon hugging champion.

"No one on earth has ever attempted something like that before," he said.

Ondash, of Canfield, Ohio, already held the record for most hugs in one hour with 1,205, according to Guinness World Records.

The previous record of 5,000 hugs in one day was set last year by Siobhan O'Connor in Dublin, Ireland, Guinness spokesman Philip Robertson said.

To break O'Connor's mark, Ondash needed more than 208 hugs per hour - or about 3 1/2 hugs per minute. Ondash logged just over 700 hugs during his first hour of embraces on Friday night.

He said he embraced all kinds of people throughout Friday night and Saturday and was tired from being on his feet and not eating. But Ondash said he wasn't planning to go to sleep right away.

"I'm going to go and enjoy the town tonight," he said Saturday.

Ondash said he did not expect Guinness World Records to certify his record for several weeks. The organization did not have a judge present at his attempt. Instead, independent judges who tracked Ondash in shifts were to submit affidavits to the organization.

Ondash says he, as McHuggin, is now eyeing both the world's longest single hug - currently 24 hours and 1 second - and breaking his current two records consecutively, which he said was "unheard of."

"I don't even know if I can do that but I'm going to attempt it," Ondash said. "It's like climbing Mount Everest twice - same thing."

More information: Hug Teddy for Charity:

<http://hugteddyforcharity.com/>

American Heart Association: <http://www.americanheart.org>

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