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Climb Kilimanjaro!**

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or not?**

Celebrate retirement: Climb Mount Kilimanjaro



RON SCHLOERB/
CAPE COD TIMES



His three-pronged preparation includes distance runs, daily workouts and training hikes in the White Mountains of New Hampshire.



Left, Chet Yacek trains for his mountain climbs by running along the power lines in Sandwich carrying a full backpack.



Right, clockwise from top, Chet flashes peace signs from the summit of Mount Ishinca in Peru; Chet stops on the way to Ishinca; Chet and his son, Brady, pose atop Mount Whitney in California; and Chet pauses on the way to Mount Aconcagua in Argentina and what would be a challenging windstorm.



Chet poses with some of the Masai friends he made on his first trip to the top of Kilimanjaro.

Inside 4Cs' diplomatic human resources dean lives an adventurous mountain man.

BY SARA HOAGLAND HUNTER

Chet Yacek is celebrating his retirement by putting his feet up...atop the highest mountain in Africa. After 34 years as dean of human resources at his beloved Cape Cod Community College, Chet says he is retiring early while he still has "the legs" to pursue his passion: mountain climbing.

Meeting in the orderly office of the college administrator known for his modesty and ability to get along with people is like interviewing Superman's alter ego, Clark Kent. The desk is organized, the prepared notes meticulous, the conversation relaxed and easy. But ask about the breathtaking photos of snow-covered mountain peaks from South America to Africa on his office walls and the mild-mannered dean of diplomacy transforms into Chet Yacek, mountain man.

Jumping from his chair, eyes blazing, he waxes poetic about summits seen, challenges met and his upcoming retirement party atop Mount Kilimanjaro. "I will celebrate my retirement at 19,340 feet...taking it all in, maybe with a bottle of champagne - a very light bottle." The sky-high retirement party will also be a reunion of sorts. Chet will ascend "Killy" with the same Masai guide with whom he conquered it several years ago. Following the climb, he'll be joined by his wife, Susan, a registered nurse at Cape Cod Hospital, for a full-fledged African safari.

The rigorous climb will begin, as all his mountain adventures do, on the Cape's own Sandy Neck beach. "I take my boots off and put my foot in the water so I can say, 'I started this journey below sea level.'"

Although he has always been an avid hiker, Chet's penchant for ascent to extreme altitudes began only a decade or so ago. He insists that climbing is not only possible but a desirable activity for seniors. "I'm

not an anomaly. There are an incredible number of people on the trails in their 50s, 60s and 70s. The key is: just don't stop. Don't get sedentary because it's harder to get back in shape when you're older."

The lanky, fit 60-year-old could be the poster child for "not stopping." He is dismissive about his age, saying, "The number means nothing to me."

He insists that for seniors, as for hikers of any age, it is all about "training, training, training." His three-pronged preparation includes distance runs, daily workouts and training hikes in the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

Each weekend, Chet runs 6 to 12 miles of the hilly "natural track" under Cape Cod's power lines, replicating climbing conditions as best he can by carrying a pack in the heat of the day. He points to the athletic bag close to his desk, loaded and ready for his daily workout at the Hyannis YMCA across the street. Strength training as well as aerobics is part of the two-hour gym routine he has devised

for himself. In terms of weight lifting, he focuses more on repetition than weight. "I'm not going to lift boulders; I'm going to climb a mountain." Since running is such an important part of his training, Yacek spends a lot of time on the elliptical, sometimes "mixing it up" with the stairmaster and rowing machine.

The most ambitious element of his preparation is his trip every other weekend to New Hampshire. While Susan works her required, alternate weekend shifts at the hospital, Yacek can be found on the road or on the trail. A member of New England's 4,000 footer club, he's climbed all 67 peaks 4,000 feet and higher, many more than once. In fact, he's climbed his favorite, Mt. Washington, at least 70 times and considers it his training ground. It remains his favorite not only because at 6,288 feet it is the highest in New England, but because there are "so many ways

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up." Chet says, "I love the untraveled routes where I can be by myself."

When asked how the heck he does Mt. Washington as a day hike from Cape Cod, the soft-spoken dean once again sounds a little like Superman. Launching into an enthusiastic rundown of his routine, he describes his 3 a.m. departure, adding, "I reach the mountain at 8:30 a.m. It's seven hours up and down. When I get to the bottom, I sit in the car for a 1/2-hour breather. Then, I go to a local store for a cup of coffee and chase it with an energy drink. I'm home by 10 p.m. People ask me if I'm tired or sleepy at the wheel. No. I feel good. I love it so much!"

He displays the same excitement when asked about the photos adorning the office walls, each with a story he is eager to share: Mount Whitney in California with its spectacular panoramas and memories of a "very special" trip with his son, Brady. "We hit a thunderstorm on the summit and it's not like you can count between the thunder claps. You are right there. The lightning is right there."

Pointing to a daunting snow-capped range in Argentina, his highest climb yet, at 22,840 feet, he shows where a windstorm at high camp blew away several tents. "We were bouncing around inside our tents like ping pong balls and praying like there was no tomorrow."

Chet insists he is a "careful," "conservative" climber "not an adrenaline junkie." He says, "The goal is not to reach the summit. The goal is to get back safely. The summit is a gift, but it's important to remember the summit is only halfway there...More climbing accidents occur on the way down..."

Perhaps his most important safeguard is "the committee" – wife Susan and daughter Kirsten, who have "complete veto power" over his trip selection.

Susan claims that although she has faith in her husband's judgment and training regimen, the photos from his trips have made her increasingly anxious. "Initially, I was a little ignorant of how difficult and spectacular these climbs actually were." In 2004, when she first saw his photos of the wind-battered summit in Argentina, she says her reaction was, "I had no idea!"

In addition to dramatic climbs in Africa and Argentina, Chet speaks with passion about his ascent last year of ice-covered Mount Ishinca in Peru, where he and his fellow climbers

inched along a ledge at midnight. "The guide told us later we never would have done it in daylight because there's nothing behind you. It would be too terrifying."

Why does he do it? "Not because 'it's there,'" he insists. "It's the total experience...I'm not overly religious, but when you are gifted [the opportunity] to stand on the top of a major mountain, on top of the world, you can almost feel the breath of God. It is an overwhelming spiritual experience. I've seen grown men reduced to tears – good tears..."

Another reason Chet loves to climb is the shared experience and deep bonds formed with fellow climbers who become a "lifeline." Explaining their mutual responsibility, he says, "You're not just taking care of yourself. You have to watch out for others. The bond of lugging heavy packs, being in harsh winds and weather where you can't sleep or eat and you're exhausted, can't breathe and your body constantly aches...These are bonds that last a lifetime. It brings you in touch with your humanity."

One of his favorite climbs was Japan's Mt. Fuji with two friends his age whom he met hiking in South America. As on all of his adventures, Chet found the cultural experience as important as the physical triumph. He explains that ascending Mt. Fuji is "a very spiritual experience for the Japanese. There are monks climbing in white robes and sandals. We stayed at the top one night then came back down for the incredible experience of sitting in an infinity-pool-type bath... while looking at Mt. Fuji."

He is equally enthusiastic about having studied Spanish to converse with guides in South America or hearing the Muslim call to prayer followed by the Christian bells in Tanzania. "I always go with local guides so I can immerse myself in the culture. It's more meaningful that way. I don't want to go where everyone looks like me."

Perhaps Chet's evident excitement at the opportunity to meet and benefit from the experience of others is not surprising in light of his having been known as a dean of diplomacy at work. Former president Kathy Schatzberg, who during her 14-year tenure considered Chet part of her inner circle, says, "One of the reasons I could be successful is because I had Chet... One of the things I admire about him the most is his ability to keep an impartial mindset and to find the common ground."

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Kathy cites Chet's training and talent as a professional mediator as one of the key reasons conflicts were resolved more readily at Cape Cod Community College than at other community colleges.

When asked about Chet's seeming double life as mild-mannered college dean and daring mountain climber, Kathy is quick to point instead to the overlapping qualifications of each: fearlessness and trustworthiness. "A mountain climber has to be fearless. Walking into a room full of ticked-off administrators requires fearlessness, too!" she says with a laugh. On a more serious note, she describes the trust Chet inspired in all who sought his consultation on sensitive matters of employment. "Everybody trusted him to total confidentiality...Isn't that the same need for a climbing team - the knowledge that I've got your back?"

Indeed, the bonds Chet has formed at Cape Cod Community College are every bit as strong as his bonds with

fellow climbers. "I have great friends here, many of whom started 34 years ago as I did. We've grown up together, become parents, watched our kids grow up...This is a place where people come and stay...We all work together well. This is a place where there aren't prima donnas, where everyone rolls up their sleeves to help each other."

Reflecting on a career that began in 1979, when he and Susan arrived for his first interview in their red, VW microbus with two little kids in tow, he speaks of the college with great pride. "You'd have to really work hard to find a person on the Cape this college hasn't touched in some way or other. It's an amazing place...The fruits of our labor are everywhere."

Chet says he can't go anywhere without running into a 4Cs graduate "whether it's the dentist's office, the cashier at Stop & Shop...or the Project Forward people I see in the community." This is a good thing for a mountain climbing dean who says he doesn't like goodbyes and won't be saying any. He won't have to. ♦

CROSSWORD ANSWERS

PUZZLE, PAGE 31

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The White Cliffs of DOVER, England (49 Across) are composed of chalk deposits accentuated by streaks of black flint. Founded in 1850, HARPER'S Magazine (127 Across) is second only to Scientific American (founded 1845) as America's oldest monthly. FARGO, North Dakota (66 Down) was named for William Fargo of Wells Fargo fame.

QUIZ ANSWERS

QUIZ, PAGE 30

1. "Dirty Jobs," wherein star Mike Rowe and crew performed functions like collecting owl vomit or making bologna. "It's difficult for me to envision a future that does not include exploding toilets, venomous snakes, misadventures in animal husbandry, and feces from every species," blogged Rowe.

2. Allen Funt (1914-1999), producer, host and frequent actor in "Candid Camera," formerly "Candid Microphone." Their catchphrase was, "Smile! You're on Candid Camera!"

Funt was once on an airplane that was hijacked to Cuba, but fellow passengers, recognizing him onboard, were jovial, assuming the hijackers' actions were part of a prank.

3. Three-star Michelin chef Gordon Ramsay. He is the author of several books, including the autobiography "Roasting in Hell's Kitchen."

4. Atlanta, Beverly Hills, Miami, New York City and New Jersey. The cancelled series was set in Washington, D.C. Internationally, shows documenting the travails of housewives in Vancouver, Canada and Dublin, Ireland, as well as Athens, Greece and Israel, have aired.

5. "Star Search," which also showcased comedy hopefuls Rosie O'Donnell, Chris Rock, Drew Carey and Dennis Miller.

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