



Jay Crawford/The Intelligencer

Werner Berger holds three crucial pieces of mountain-climbing equipment — an ice ax, climbing boots and extreme UV goggles.

Climber's new goal: Conquering Everest

One more successful climb and Werner Berger, 69, will have scaled the highest peaks on each continent.

BY CHRIS ENGLISH

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He's reached the top on six continents. Next up on Werner Berger's ultra-ambitious mountain-climbing list is the last and biggest at 29,028 feet: Mount Everest in Nepal in Asia.

Berger, a Canadian citizen who spends much of his time at the Lower Makefield home of his fiancé, Heshie Segal, is scheduled to start his ascent of the world's highest mountain on April 11. With the other 11 members of his team, Berger hopes to reach the summit in six to eight weeks.

If that happens, he'll have climbed the highest mountains on all seven continents, Berger said. At 69, he also believes he'll also be the third-oldest person — and the oldest Westerner — to scale Everest.

"It all started in 1992 when I went to Nepal just to backpack into the Everest base camp area, but then I absolutely fell in love with mountains," Berger said in an interview at Segal's house just before he left for the Everest expedition.

"I guess that's when this started, this goal of climbing the highest peaks on all seven continents," he continued. "I do it for the challenge and the enjoyment. There's been some scary moments, but for the most part, it's been absolutely exhilarating."

Aside from personal fulfillment, Berger said his mountain adventures will also help him explode some myths and expose some truths about the health-care industry. He said he's making a feature-length

documentary that will help focus attention on health issues he feels the public needs to know about.

"It will be controversial," Berger said of the film he hopes to release next year. "It will use the climbs as a metaphor for health, and will say things that drug companies don't want us to say, that governments don't want us to say and that big money doesn't want us to say."

Berger said he wants his climbing to have a greater meaning, though he does take a measure of personal pride from his accomplishments.

Since setting his "seven continents" goal, Berger has scaled the highest peaks in: North America (Mount McKinley, Alaska, 20,120 feet); South America (Mount Aconcagua, Argentina, 22,834 feet); Africa (Mount Kilimanjaro, Tanzania, 19,340 feet); Europe (Mount Elbrus, Russia, 18,481 feet); Antarctica (Vinson Massif, 16,067 feet); and Australia (Mount Kosciuszko, 7,310 feet).

There are times he has second-guessed his mountain climbing passion, but it never lasts, said Berger.

"Once, we were scaling a wall on Vinson Massif in Antarctica on Christmas Day and it was just so tremendously hot," he said. "The thermometer didn't say so, but we were in a location where the sun was just beating down on that wall. I remember thinking, 'What in the world am I doing up here when I could be sitting at home with my family having a drink?'"

Describing himself as financially comfortable, Berger said he finances the climbing expeditions himself. He owns a company called Strategic Results International that consults with corporations on employee issues, including how to make workers happier and more productive.

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