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At 69, Werner Berger is the oldest person from North America to reach the peak of Mount Everest. He has scaled the highest mountains on the seven continents of the world.

From Everest to Bucks

Werner Berger, who is planning to move to Lower Makefield later this year, reached the summit of Mount Everest last month.

BY ALEEA S. SLAPPY

THE INTELLIGENCER

Breathing a lot of cold, dry air has left Werner Berger with a cough.

The cough is just a temporary side effect of reaching the top of the world.

Berger, a 69-year-old Canadian citizen, reached the summit of 29,035-foot Mount Everest on May 22, making him the oldest person in North America to reach the peak. He's now reached the crest of the highest mountains on the seven continents of the world, with Everest being the last and most difficult.

"I still get teary-eyed when I think of it," said Berger of climbing Everest, while sitting in the living room at the home of his fiancée, Heshie Segal. He plans to move into her Lower Makefield home sometime this year.

Berger's interest in mountain climbing began when he was 16 and heard that Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay became the first people to climb to the summit of Mount Everest.

"I was so excited by this, and I forgot about it for 40 years," he said.

Berger's interest in mountain climbing was reignited in 1992 during a self-development seminar at which he was asked to list three things he'd love to do, but never thought he was capable of doing. His list included climbing Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, and seeing the Mount Everest base camp. After attending the workshop, Berger began dreaming about mountain climbing and took steps to reach his goal.

"If we don't go through the dreaming process, nothing will move us toward our goal or our vision," he said.

In preparation for conquering Mount Everest, Berger

spent about 2½ hours a day before the expedition doing cardio and strength training so he would have the stamina to carry 25 pounds up the mountain-side.

"At sea level, 25 pounds is nothing. But at that level, it's very heavy," Berger said.

The weight that Berger carried included three liters of water, two oxygen cylinders, an ice ax, a one-piece down feather suit and mountaineering boots with spikes on the bottom.

The climb to the top of Mount Everest and back down took 50 days for Berger and his crew. The team spent nine days climbing the mountain and the final ascent to the top took more than 15 hours. The team took two short breaks for five to 10 minutes on that last day of climbing.

"You drink a little bit, you eat a little bit, you change your oxygen cylinder and then you're off again," he said as he snapped his fingers to demonstrate how quick the breaks were.

The team took its second short break on the south summit of Everest.

Berger recalled the view from the south summit over to the higher north summit.

"The view was just spectacular. It is imprinted in my mind. I don't even need a photograph," he said.

After the second break, Berger said he was very emotional. "I knew this would be the day that I would stand on top of the world," he said as a smile formed across his face.

Reaching the summit, Berger said he threw his hands in the air as if he had crossed the finish line of a marathon.

Berger spent 32 minutes on top of the world.

"I had a good time on the summit," he said as he laughed like a young boy.

Berger has successfully climbed Mount McKinley (20,320 feet, North America); Mount Aconcagua (22,841, South America); Mount Kilimanjaro (19,340, Africa); Mount Elbrus (18,510, Europe); Vinson Massif (16,067, Antarctica), and Mount Kosciuszko (7,310, Australia).

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