

Climber treks to Pottstown to share message

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POTTSTOWN — Cost to climb Mount Everest: \$90,000. Taking in the view at 29,028 feet at age 69: Priceless.

Canadian climber and corporate consultant Werner Berger became the oldest North American to summit Mount Everest just one month ago, on May 22. That day he also became the oldest man to climb the "Seven Summits," the highest peaks on all seven continents.

Berger's Everest experience, which began April 2 in Nepal and lasted just short of two months, cost Berger roughly \$90,000; however, he was footing the bill for two other climbers: two men filming his upcoming documentary called "Meet Me at the Top."

Thursday night Berger and his film crew visited the Pottstown Health Club to share his experience and record some footage for the film, which he said is intended to promote better personal health.

How does one get from Everest to Pottstown? Berger met club co-owner Peg Calvario earlier this year at a conference where he was speaking. Calvario got to know Berger and his fiancée, Heshie Segal of Yardley. After Berger's Ev-

(See EVEREST TO POTTSTOWN on A3)
erest trip, he agreed to visit Pottstown.

"There are a lot of parallels in terms of your life and mountain climbing," Calvario said. "This parallel is really about increasing the awareness in this community, motivating people to make positive

changes in their lives."

About 40 people, including Berger's fiancée, gathered in the lobby of Pottstown Health Club to hear Berger's tale, see photos, and watch some film footage of his Everest climb.

"That's what setting goals or dreaming is all about," Berger said of climbing the tallest mountain on the planet. "It's one step at a time for everyone."

On April 2, Berger flew into the area at the bottom of Everest, which is about 12,000 feet, he said. It took 10 days to climb to base camp at about 17,000 feet, he said.

"You go slow to avoid altitude sickness," he explained. "You slow down to go faster."

He carried a pack of about 30 pounds. Sherpas — the Nepalese people who act as guides on the mountain and typically carry the bulk of climbers' gear — hauled additional items.

On his first day of climbing from base camp, Berger said he had a scary slip in an area known as the ice fall, a frozen river with ice chunks in it.

"Unfortunately my bad day on Everest came on this particular day, going through this ice fall," he recalled. The experience only strengthened his resolve to make it to the top.

After many more days of acclimation to the altitude, "summit day" finally came. The climb began at 9:30 p.m., Berger said. Climbing through the night, he and his group reached the summit just after 8 a.m.

There he saw the stick planted by Sir Edmund Hillary, the first man to climb Everest, and a 360-degree view of the world. Literally on top of the world, Berger removed his oxygen mask to breathe that rare oxygen. The mask was off for several minutes, until Berger's sherpas admonishments to "Put your mask on!" got through to him. Any exertion at that altitude without oxygen could be disorienting and possibly deadly.

Berger went to put his mask back on and it was frozen. All the condensation from his breathing had frozen in the open air. It took several minutes for the mask to warm back up again, he said.

"What was so captivating to me was that I knew that this was the day I was

going to be standing on top of the world," said Berger, choking up a bit. "It was such an intense emotion."

What he felt was "relief, exhaustion and total exhilaration," Berger said.

After about 30 minutes at the summit of Everest, the climb back to camp commenced. "It took 50 days to summit and seven days to get back to civilization," Berger said.

A question that Berger has been asked a lot these past four weeks is "How, at age 69, can you do this?" The answer is not superior genes, he said.

"You have to start looking after this body," he said. "Dare to dream of excellent health as one aspect of your life."

His fitness tips include getting sufficient sleep, eating nutritious food, taking nutritional supplements and following an exercise regimen.

"I do lots of cardio, but no running. It's bad for the knees," said Berger, who favors the stair climbing machine.

To prepare for his Everest ascent, Berger worked out four days a week using free weights and cardiovascular training.

Berger, who resides north of Toronto, will turn 70 on July 16. The father of four, the native of South Africa said he plans to spend the day at a cottage with family and do some water-skiing.

There will be no mountain climbing that day. His 65th birthday, by comparison, was spent summiting Mount Kilimanjaro.

But don't expect Berger to swear off climbing now that he's done it all. He plans to go back to Kilimanjaro next year.

To learn more, visit Berger's Web site, www.meetmeatthetop.com



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