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His upward mobility is a vertical pleasure

Yardley senior aims high to climb the world's tallest mountains

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Corporate consultant Werner Berger is packing for his next trip. It's not business-related nor is it a relaxing vacation on a sunny island. It's a trip up the side of the world's tallest mountain.

If his bid to climb Mount Everest is successful, the 69-year-old Yardley, Pa., resident expects to become the oldest person to have climbed the world's seven tallest mountains.

Part of the Himalaya range and located on the border between Nepal and China, Mount Everest, at 29,028 , will be the last challenge in the series. Last year, Berger reached the summit of Mount McKinley — 20,320 feet — in Alaska.

He also has climbed Mount Aconcagua, 22,841 feet, in Argentina; Mount Kilimanjaro, 19,340 feet, in Tanzania; Mount Elbrus, 18,510 feet, in Russia; Vinson Massif, 16,050 feet, in Antarctica; and Mount Kosciuszko, 7,310 feet, in Australia.

"Just being in God's country," is how Berger described the thrill of mountain-climbing, living completely in the moment



Clad in a parka and holding an ax, Werner Berger, of Yardley, Pa., is preparing to climb Mount Everest.

without a care for yesterday or tomorrow. "There's no words to describe it," he said of the isolation and splendor.

Berger will begin his Everest climb early this month, with the expedition lasting between six and eight weeks. He will have a group of 12 support people, who will be split up into smaller groups of three to four people along the way.

With a backpack weighing 110 pounds, Berger thinks he has everything he needs to climb the mountain. However, this is his

first climb where he will have support personnel — sherpas adapted to high altitudes — to help carry his equipment.

As the owner of his own company, Strategic Results International, Berger has the freedom to pursue his mountaineering conquests. He also has the support of his loved ones.

Berger's fiancée, Heshie Segal, said, "I'm thrilled that he's going and going to accomplish a life dream."

However, she admitted, "On the personal side, I'm nervous."

Berger said his four children have similar sentiments. They are against him climbing at his age, but they are aware of the strength of his ambition.

According to the record books, the oldest person to climb Everest was Sherman Bull May, who at the age of 64 scaled the peak in 2001.

Berger began his climbing career at age 57 when he went to the mountains in Nepal and attempted his first ascent. According to his Web site, he has nurtured his dream of climbing Everest for 20 years and encourages everybody to have big

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PHOTOS BY FRANK JACOBS III/THE TIMES

All geared up, Werner Berger displays his climbing equipment. Berger's fiancée, Heshie Segal, is supportive of his impending journey to Mount Everest. "I'm thrilled that he's going and going to accomplish a life dream."

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dreams and work toward accomplishing them.

Berger said the amount of climbing the group does will vary from day to day, depending on the conditions. It is best to climb through the night and in the early morning, because the conditions are calmer. The day they reach for the summit they will begin climb-

ing at midnight and continue for 13 to 17 hours.

Berger recalled his favorite climb — up Mount McKinley in May 2006. Unable to complete the mission two previous times because of the conditions, getting to the top was a major achievement, he said.

Berger aims to produce a movie based on the Everest attempt. The documentary will be a metaphor for life and health, Berger said, and will include interviews with health experts. His movie director will be

at base camp for one month and a high-altitude cinematographer will be with him the rest of the way.

The release date will be early next year and certain titles are up in the air, such as "Beyond Death Zone," in reference to the life-threatening conditions above 8,000 meters.

Berger, however, is not particularly frightened by the risks involved. Big cities are also considered to be death zones, he said.

For more information on Berger, go to www.MeetMeAtThe-Top.com.