

Gym owner prepares to conquer Kilimanjaro

Gym owner's climb to benefit Alexa Foundation



Chris Tybor's ascent to begin Tuesday.

By Teresa Sharp, Niagara Correspondent, on September 27, 2015 - 12:01 AM

Have you seen a man in recent months toting a backpack around his Grand Island neighborhood looking like he might have 55 pounds of bricks tucked away inside?

It was Chris Tybor, owner of two Chris Fit gym locations, and yes, he was carrying more than 50 pounds of bricks on his back to train for his first mountain climb. And, he picked a whopper for an inaugural ascent – Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

And he's doing it for a great cause, raising \$10,000 for the It Happened to Alexa Foundation (IHTAF), which is celebrating 12 years of supporting victims of sexual assault and their families.

The Lewiston foundation provides financial, emotional and advocacy assistance to victims who prosecute their attackers. It has helped U.S. citizens in 48 states and 17 foreign countries secure an average sentence of 12.5 years – dramatically better than the national average.

"I feel honored and fortunate to be able to represent the Alexa Foundation," said Tybor last week before he left for Africa.

Tybor said he was approached by Alexa Foundation founder Tom Branchini and foundation executive director Ellen Augello, initially to donate to the cause. Both are Chris Fit gym members.

"But then they came back and said, 'Hey, we're looking for a couple of more climbers, would you be interested?,' he recalled. "And, I said yes."

Once the plans started taking definite shape in recent months, Tybor began devoting more time to "endurance-based training."

"One of my good friends is a state trooper and he loaned me some gear," he said. "I got 55 pounds of bricks and duct taped the edges and put them in a backpack and started walking around Grand Island, where we live. I increased the cardiovascular component. I have a spin bike in the house and I increased my duration on that, too."

Tybor operates his gyms in Lewiston and Niagara Falls as places "where anybody can go who might be typically intimidated by the bigger facilities.

"We're private and family owned," he said. "We have yoga and spinning classes and one-on-one personal training and nutritional counseling."

Tybor said that as a sports nutritionist, he researched what he should eat on his climb.

"They'll provide some meals, but I heard that as you increase your altitude, your appetite decreases, so I'm bringing jerky, some nuts and gels and gummies, too," he said.

The 35-year-old said he and wife, Cathy, will celebrate their seventh wedding anniversary separated by the Atlantic Ocean. The climb is expected to get underway on Tuesday with the goal of reaching the summit next Sunday.

"I want to thank my wife and my employees, because I couldn't have done this without them," Tybor said.

"And I want to thank my awesome gym members, because without them, I wouldn't have come close to raising \$10,000."

Tybor said contributions rolled in at \$50, \$100 and \$250 at a clip, with some pledging \$1,000 or more.

That money will help support an organization which has helped hundreds of victims of sexual assault.

Founded by Branchini and his wife, Stacey, it honors the courage of their daughter, Alexa, who survived the trauma of being raped by a stranger who broke into her college dorm the second week of her freshman year. It is the only foundation of its kind in the country.

“I have no doubt that Chris will succeed in his climb, I would expect nothing less,” said Augello.

“He operates as though failure really never is an option, just ask his clients. We expect a full report of his adventure with photos, including the Alexa Foundation logo featured prominently!”

The foundation will have another opportunity to climb in June 2016. For more information on the organization or to donate, visit: www.ithappenedtoalexa.org or call 1 (877)-77-ALEXA.