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## Woman to climb Mount Kilimanjaro for cause

By Joe Knight  
Leader-Telegram staff

"Some will say it's impossible,

To bring water to each one,

So from the top of Kilimanjaro, We will sing - it can be done."

- From the song "It Can Be Done" by Poppy Moelter.

Poppy Moelter is a massage therapist who moonlights as a musician and songwriter, but at the age of 49 she is about to become a mountain climber.

On Jan. 21 she will leave to climb Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

Climbing any mountain was not in her plans, nor was visiting Africa, but a close friend of hers founded a charitable organization called It Can Be Done, with the goal of digging wells in villages in Tanzania that lack clean water.

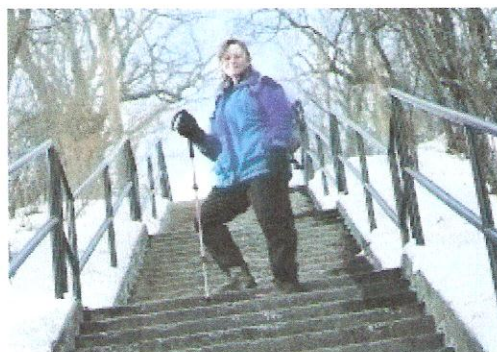
For their fundraiser Moelter just has to climb to the top of the 29,500-foot-high mountain and raise \$10,000 in pledges.

When Moelter heard about the trip, her first impression was that she couldn't afford to fly to Africa, but when a friend who does a lot of business travel said he could cover her airfare with frequent flyer miles, she decided to commit.

Since then she has gotten busy raising money and trying to get into mountain-climbing shape. Doing repetitions on the steps up the East Side Hill, which start behind the former Family Medicine Clinic, was part of her training regimen until the ice and snow came. The YMCA gave her a complimentary one-month membership, and she has been working on their stair-climbing and elliptical trainers. "Both give you that climbing effect," she said.

It Can Be Done founder Maggie Braband, 59, of Chicago started the fundraising effort after making a visit to Tanzania and neighboring Kenya in 2006. She had just retired from a career with United Airlines.

"It was a 'bucket list' kind of thing," Braband said in a telephone interview from Chicago. She didn't use the term at the time because it was before the release of the movie "The Bucket List" about two terminally ill guys who embark on some final adventures before they die.



Poppy Moelter stood on the East Side Hill steps, where she has been walking to train for a climb up 29,500-foot-high Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. As part of the effort she is raising \$10,000 in pledges for digging wells in Tanzanian villages that lack clean water.

**Staff photo by Andi Stempniak**

Going on an African safari, meeting a Masai warrior and climbing Kilimanjaro were on her list. She is a mother of four and grandmother of four.

The climb up Kilimanjaro was spectacular, starting in dense rainforest, passing through and under waterfalls, and ending on a glacier. To acclimate to the low oxygen levels at the higher altitudes, Braband's climbing party would always climb down a ways toward the end of the day, so they were sleeping at a lower altitude than they had climbed, she said.

They had to turn back when they were about an hour from the summit because they ran out of time and energy.

It was the people in the villages around Kilimanjaro that made a lasting impression on Braband. The women and children had to walk several miles daily to get clean water. They carried water on their heads in 5-gallon pails, which weighed about 35 pounds each, she said.

Not surprisingly, many women suffered from back problems, she said. Most of their hair has been rubbed off, although they wear scarves.

Braband returned to Tanzania with a film crew and a technical expert who determined they could reach clean groundwater by drilling about 200 feet.

She set her goal at drilling 25 wells in 12 villages. The wells will cost about \$2,000 each, which includes the cost of shipping a drill to the area and buying and shipping an ATV to haul it.

Moelter has been knocking on doors and distributing letters describing her trip to residents in her East Side Hill neighborhood and looking for sponsors.

She has found it difficult to have a corporate sponsor during a recession, but she has received a lot of small donations. "Even with the bad economic climate, people are really just willing to help the less fortunate," she said.

She has raised about a third of her \$10,000 goal.

She also has composed and recorded two songs that will be posted on the It Can Be Done Web site.

The trip will involve five or six days on the mountain and two days to see some more of Tanzania and hopefully some wildlife. They've been told they may meet monkeys on the climb, but it's unlikely they'll see larger animals.

Moelter was a backpacker in her 20s and hiked at altitudes up to 12,000 feet carrying a backpack. On the Kilimanjaro climb each member will carry water, but the food, tents and other supplies will be carried in ahead of them. "The air is pretty

thin. The most common reason for failing to reach the summit is altitude sickness," she said.

In November a crew from NBC's "Today" show, including Ann Curry, tried to climb Kilimanjaro, in part to show how the glacier and rainforest were changing due to a warming climate. They turned back before the summit when several members began suffering from altitude sickness, Moelter noted.

Moelter said she viewed the trip as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, but also a chance to help others. "It kind of meets a need that I have to contribute, to give back to the world, in particular to people who are less fortunate. I feel that I've been blessed in life, and that includes my health."

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