

ghbor



TIGER
BY BUD BLAKE

G27C11

Mountaintop revelations



JOE LEWNARD/jlewnard@dailyherald.com

Margie Braband of Mount Prospect came back from scaling Mount Kilimanjaro a changed woman. She started a foundation to raise money to help enrich lives in Africa after getting to know the climbing guides.

BY JEAN MURPHY
Daily Herald Correspondent

Margie Braband is a slightly built mother of four and grandmother of two. She looks like a strong wind could blow her right over.

She has never been particularly athletic, nor has she ever been a world traveler.

So no one, including her family, was prepared when the 57-year-old Mount Prospect woman announced that she planned to visit Africa and climb its tallest peak, Mount Kilimanjaro, after her retirement from United Airlines.

And they were even less prepared for the profound change in life goals and attitudes the five-day trek up the mountain brought about in

Braband.

It seems that Braband's effort to just breathe, put one foot in front of the other and make it up the mountain inspired her to try to make life easier for the people in Africa who had helped her make this incredible mental and physical journey.

Upon her return from the trip, Braband started a foundation called "It Can Be Done!" dedicated to improving the quality of lives in Africa through education and service.

The local guides who helped her climb to the summit made a lasting impact.

"The other guides on the mountain were betting against us making it to the



COURTESY OF MARGIE BRABAND

Victorious, Margie Braband and her friend, Katie Dillard Ryan of Austin, Texas, stand at the peak of Mount Kilimanjaro.

summit because of my age," Braband reveals. "They were amazed when we made it. But my climbing partner, Katie, and I encouraged each other and got ourselves where we needed to go. It was a difficult climb because it was cold and we didn't get a lot of sleep, but it was mainly mental."

"In fact, I would have to say that the hardest part was dealing with my own fears," she

continues. "I was afraid that I would somehow fail."

But when she didn't fail, but instead succeeded, it convinced her that "anybody, no matter their age, can accomplish their dream if they take it one step at a time, slowly, slowly or pole, pole, as they say in Swahili."

"Kili is a very climbable

See **MOUNTAIN** on **PAGE 3**

Mountain: Trip changes woman's outlook

Continued from Page 1

mountain because in most places the climb is very gradual. The biggest problem is altitude sickness and luckily, I didn't have a problem with that," she said.

But the thinning altitude definitely required focus and measured breathing, so talking among the climbers was kept to a minimum. Consequently, the climb became a "moving meditation" for Braband who recalls thinking about her family, of course, but also about what she was going to do with the rest of her life.

"I kept thinking that there must be a reason for this time in my life," she recalls, "because even before I went to Africa, I had a sense that this was going to be an important trip for me."

That led Braband to think deeply about the people and situations she had encountered in Africa because her heart had been touched by the beauty, courage and love she saw among people who had virtually no material possessions and a limited means of earning income.

Her mind kept circling back to what she could do to help the people she had met — particularly those living in the villages around Mount Kilimanjaro. Most earn their livings working as guides and porters on the mountain, helping climbers from all over the world to conquer the peak. Yet, when they return home, they have no running water, limited access to health care and education and many other challenges.

After they completed their trek up the mountain, Braband, her climbing partner, Katie Dillard Ryan of Austin, Texas, and Daniel Oloni, their travel agent who had not been able to complete the climb due to altitude sickness, took a very standard tour of Kenya, going on a safari, visiting the bustling capital of Nairobi and resting for a few days at a beach resort. However, their last stop, like their first, was anything but usual.

They spent several days in the rural village of Bongoma where Ryan once worked for several months as a volunteer and where Oloni lives.

It was here that Braband became convinced that her goals for the Mount Kilimanjaro villages were attainable. Ten years ago Bongoma was just as disadvantaged as the villages near the mountain. But in just one decade, she said, things have changed so that the people now have a clinic and a school. They have accessible clean water and have learned to make bricks so they can build better buildings. They even have a tank of water that they fill every day so that people can take showers and have flush toilets instead of outhouses.

In the year since Braband returned home she has been busy working to make her dream a reality. She has corresponded with Africans she met and done extensive research to assess the need. And she has sought the help of friends and established "It Can Be Done!" to better the lives of the people living around Mount Kilimanjaro. The foundation's Web site is www.itcanbedoneafrica.org.

"It Can Be Done!" held its first \$100-per-plate fundraiser May 9 in the Wojcik Conference Center at Harper College in Palatine.

The funds raised will be used to produce a film documentary chronicling another climb up Kilimanjaro this fall. The film, which will be produced by student filmmaker Jeremy Vranich of Lake Bluff, will be used to raise awareness and funds to help the people of the Mount Kilimanjaro villages obtain clean water, sanitation, education and health and wellness, as Braband says, "one step ... one person ... one village ... at a time." Small business grants for people in the villages are even a possibility down the road.

"When we go this fall we plan to consult a lot of people and existing organizations to ask how they envision their future and how we can best help them achieve their dreams. Once we have their input, we plan to identify specific projects we can take on," Braband said.

Anticipating a lengthy list of worthy projects, Braband has already started planning a "pledge climb" of Mount Kilimanjaro for next spring.