

LF, LB residents climb mountain to film water plight of African tribe

By LINDA BLASER

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They've already filled one hard drive with footage from their January "Climb for a Cause" up Mt. Kilimanjaro.

And they're still logging footage to tell the story that they hope will draw in more supporters to help fund 25 fresh water wells in the Uru villages on Africa's 19,500-foot mountain.

"We spent a week on a mountain," said Lake Bluff native Jeremy Vranich, 20, who led the three-person film crew. "We're still sifting through all the footage, piecing together the story."

The film will document three trips to the impoverished region that first inspired Margie Braband of Mount Prospect to reach out to her friends in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff to establish the non-profit organization It Can Be Done! to bring sustainable water access to the Tanzanian people of Uru.

Raise awareness

"When I first went to Africa in 2006, I came home with the idea that we needed to raise awareness about the people that live on the mountain, particularly their water needs," Braband said. "We need to do a documentary so that people here can understand what people back there need."

Braband approached her friend Barbara Joye of Lake Bluff who asked her son Jeremy Vranich, then 18 and a film student, if he'd be interested in the project.

"Immediately I said yes, without hesitation," said Vranich. Besides the opportunity to film a documentary, Vranich looked at it as an way to help himself while helping others.

"I was afraid to fly. I don't like heights. I never traveled to a Third World country. If I say no to this, I'll regret it for the rest of my life," he said.

Vranich took the challenge and has been

changed by the experience. "When we reached the summit, it was a little bit of an emotional moment. I realized everything was coming together, just like we wanted it to, and all through helping these people in Africa. It's truly symbolic," Vranich said.

Catherine Lynch, a 23-year-old Lake Forest native, and Sam Fell, 19, of Lake Bluff joined Vranich to film the people of Uru, their four-hour walk to gather water and the ascent and descent of the charity climb to bring awareness to the cause.

Physical challenges

"The climb was empowering," said Lynch. "To reach the summit was a challenge. The name of the organization says it all: It can be done." The main objective for the film crew was to overcome the physical challenges, the difficult terrain and ever-changing weather to make sure they were capturing the process of climbing

the mountain. "There were some very intimate moments on camera of the struggle," said Lynch.

The group will return to Uru this summer to film the drilling of the wells and what the access to fresh water will mean to the people who live there. With filming complete, the documentary should be released in 2010.

To Lynch, an important aspect of the project is how people anywhere can get involved.

"During our economic crisis, we're finding that people are reaching out more, that they will become each other's allies through this difficult time," she said. "We're trying to pool our resources as a community here in America, in Chicago, in Lake Forest, to extend our arms out to create a global community."

Braband believes that the spirit and energy the three-person film crew brought to the recent trip to Tanzania will allow the



Catherine Lynch of Lake Forest, Jeremy Vranich of Lake Bluff, Margie Braband, her sister Mary Legallet and their African guide, Honest, kept their spirits up during their climb.

organization to realize her original dream.

"Without Catherine, Jeremy and Sam on this trip, we wouldn't have interfaced in the same way with people," she said. "They were able to catch the spirit of the people of Uru. The camera and their warmth and enthusiasm gave them permission to enter their world."

Vranich urges others to get involved in the project. "You'll feel so great for doing it," he said. "You really see your work making a difference quickly. We are getting things done."

Visit It Can Be Done to donate at www.it-canbedoneafrica.org.

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