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Couple scales peaks of Everest for charity

By Adam Pochwalowski

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Climbing Mount Everest simply because it's there isn't enough motivation for Mississauga businessman and philanthropist Rob Follows.

Follows and his wife, Katrina, who two weeks ago successfully climbed the world's tallest peak after an unsuccessful attempt last year, did so in support of Altruvest Charitable Services, founded in 1994.

Based in Mississauga, Altruvest was formed by a group of business leaders, including Follows. Its mission is to enhance governance skills of charitable sector boards and senior leaders to foster more effective charities and stronger Canadian communities.

"Charities have their own mountains to climb, which are really bigger than Mount Everest, in my mind," said Follows. "They have tonnes of fabulous goals and objectives and visions, yet they don't have the tools or resources to get all the things done that they want done."

In scaling the 29,035-ft. Mount Everest, Rob and Katrina became the first North American couple to conquer, for charity, the world's Seven Summits, the highest mountains on the seven continents.

The Everest climb was paid for by the couple. All money donated went towards the goal of raising \$1 million for Altruvest.

"So, we sponsor ourselves, basically. A lot of people raise money for charity and half of it goes to pay for their own climb and we don't think that's fair," said Follows.

Follows said he and Katrina, and their crew, kept safety in mind throughout the climb.

"If something goes wrong, or somebody has to turn around, there's no compromising someone else's safety," he said.

Weather conditions and other obstacles on the trek made everyday tasks a chore, said Follows.

"You're trying to force yourself to eat when (you don't want to), and go to the washroom when (you don't need to)," he said. "Eating at (high) altitude is hard; you're taking Tums and things like that to keep the acid down."

In the end, it's all worth it, said Follows, adding, "I hope it would inspire people to step out and do things they thought they couldn't do, because I never thought I could climb Everest."