

Big Climb Raises Big Money for ALS

By Fran Putney

At 19,341 feet, Mount Kilimanjaro is the largest free-standing mountain in the world.

The majestic volcano is part of the Rift Mountain range in the East African country of Tanzania. Climbing Kilimanjaro is a monumental feat, but that's what 26-year-old Jared King decided to do to raise awareness and research money for ALS, a progressive, debilitating, usually fatal illness affecting the nervous system and muscle movement.

Through his dad, Gerry King, who serves on the board of the Muscular Dystrophy Association, Jared King was moved by stories of family acquaintances who have suffered from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease).

King told his parents in May that he wanted to do something to fight the disease. "I don't think people know too much about it," he said. "It's so tragic how it can affect people in tip-top shape of life."

A Weber School graduate and self-described "outdoorsy" guy, King decided to combine two life passions — hiking and helping others — when he planned for the 11-day September trek up Mount Kilimanjaro's Shira Plateau and set up a fundraising page for supporters to pledge \$1 for every foot of his climb.

Inspired by hiking experiences he'd enjoyed in such places as Alaska, Norway, Idaho and even Camp Barney Medintz in Cleveland, where he said his love for the outdoors started, King found that climbing Kilimanjaro had become a dream.

"I love (challenges) to push myself to the edge of my comfort zone," he said.

King trained physically as much as possible but knew his success would depend on psychological strength. "For me," he said, "it was much more mental prep, getting in the right mindset and knowing there would be challenges and roadblocks. I would need to have the mental fortitude to power through."

He made the climb with the assistance of a professional guide, and it wasn't easy. Starting at about 14,500 feet, he began to suffer from acute symptoms of altitude sickness, including difficulty breathing and extreme pain and vomiting.

The last day was supposed to take



Jared King reaches his goal on Kilimanjaro.

one hour to reach the summit, but it took three because of his condition. It was tough, he recalled, "knowing your body is physically spent and feeling miserable."

But remembering why he was doing it "helped me dig deep to a mental, emotional place" that enabled him to make it to the top.

Those who supported the accomplishment helped King raise nearly \$50,000 for ALS research, for which he was recognized at the MDA Night of Hope gala Friday, Oct. 27, at the InterContinental Buckhead. He raised all the money through small donations in amounts from \$1 to \$100 from friends, family, work colleagues and people he doesn't even know.

"It was absolutely a humbling experience to get support from everyone who contributed and climb for people who can't," King said.

For her part, Jared's mom, Robin King, said she is proud of her son. "He has a special place in his heart for helping people with disadvantages."

Adventure and travel are in King's DNA. He studied international relations and Arabic at George Washington University and studied abroad in Oman. After college, he lived in Israel for more than a year while doing a fellowship with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

King now lives in Manhattan and works as the New York sales rep for Ceramic Techniques, a distributor of Italian porcelain and the King family business.

He said his Mount Kilimanjaro climb was "hands down the most physically and mentally challenging thing I've ever done."

But, he added, "it was absolutely worth it." ■