

Top of the World

Local team set to raise \$500K for child poverty during 11-day trek

By PAUL LEGALL

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Paul Hubner will be following his own footsteps, as well as the great polar explorers of old, when he starts his dash for the top of the world today.

The 45-year-old president of Stoney Creek-based Baffin Inc. has outfitted some of the world's top adventurers. His boots have left a trail to the south pole, the base camp of Mount Everest and the high arctic.

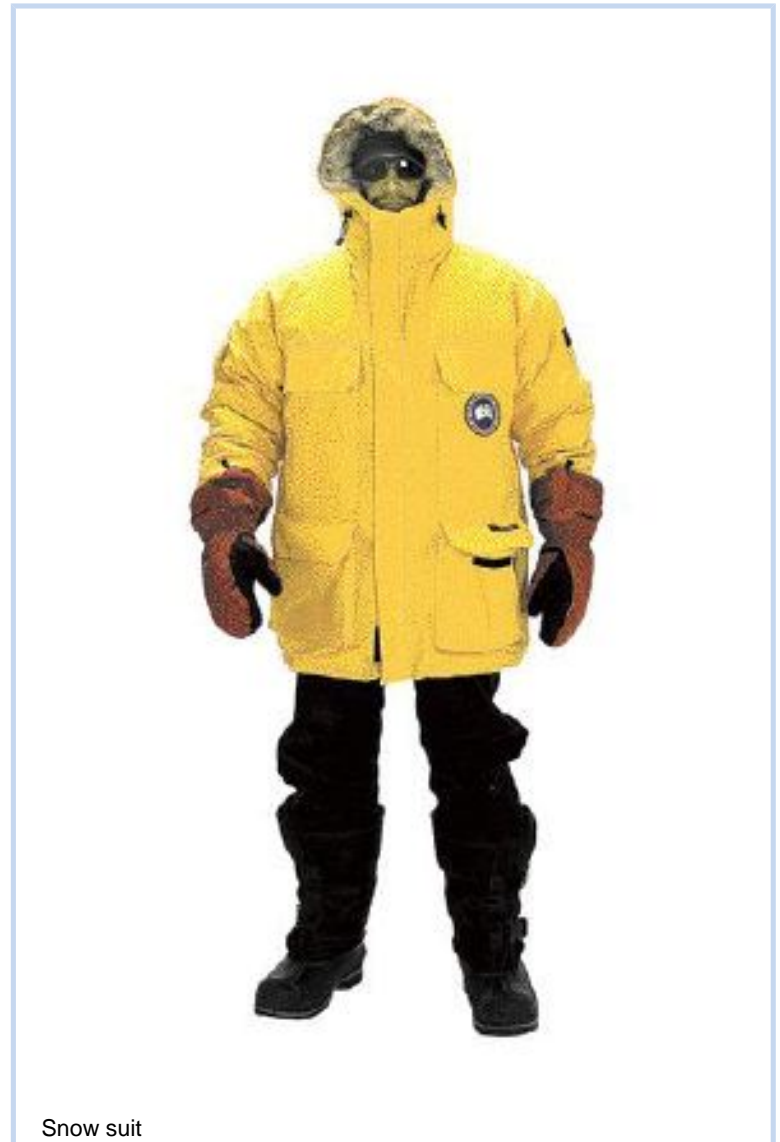
And today he's part of a Hamilton-area team that will make an 11-day run from the tip of Norway all the way to the geographic North Pole. That team, led by American extreme adventurer Doug Stoup, hopes to realize a dream of standing on top of the world. But along the way, the group will also raise close to \$500,000 to fight child poverty in Hamilton.

"There are kids in our area who go to school hungry, they may not have warm clothing, and many of our area schools are underfunded and overcrowded, meaning they don't have resources to provide music and after-school programs that are so important to a child's development," the trekkers said in a statement.

"We believe our fundraising efforts will make a difference."

Most of the money will go to nutrition and music programs in central Hamilton schools and the rest for food banks, shelters and other poverty-related programs.

What started as an adventure for four successful businessmen quickly turned into a fundraiser. And they have committed to raise the money from the



The polar ice is constantly shifting and breaking and leaving expanses of open water. In some cases, they'll have to lash their sledges together to form a makeshift raft, jump in the water in dry suits and swim to the next floe pulling the load. During most of the trek, they can expect temperatures in the -20 to -30 C range.

They'll be bunking down two to a tent and eating freeze-dried high-energy food hydrated with melted snow. As the seventh man in the group, Stoup will be rotating among the three tents.

At night, the trekkers will be entertained by the dance of the Northern Lights overhead and the constant rumble of the pack ice under them.

The Hamilton trekkers are all successful in their professional careers. They've been involved in high-risk outdoor activities such as wilderness camping and canoeing, helicopter skiing off mountains and scuba diving.

To get ready for the arctic trek, they've improved their cardiovascular fitness and dragged heavy tires over gravel roads to simulate sledge pulling. But they've never been in the arctic or experienced cold-weather survival. Yet, they feel superior clothing, footwear and equipment will enable them to survive the most hostile conditions.

"There's no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing," said Hubner last week.

For Losani, the polar expedition is the realization of a childhood dream. A bit of a daredevil, he's proven his pluck by scuba diving in shark-infested waters and skiing down mountains after being deposited on the summit by helicopter.

"It's the mental challenge that excites us. I'm sure we'll do very well," he said.

An avid outdoorsman as well as house builder, Stipsits feels he toughened his survival instincts by mountain skiing in British Columbia.

"There was the mental challenge of going up the mountain, which would take a couple of hours to hike, before going down in about a minute," he explained.

He steeled his nerves on slopes of almost 60 degrees which seemed like free falling down an elevator shaft.

"It looked vertical to me. You gotta gather your confidence and you know you can do it," he added.

"I'm looking to the sheer thrill of standing on the geographic North Pole."

After dragging his heavy tire for a 14-kilometre trek through the Dundas Valley, Turkstra feels he's physically and mentally ready to challenge the arctic. But even if he reaches the top of the world, he would only reluctantly call himself an adventurer and never an explorer.

"Doug made it clear. He considers himself an extreme adventurer, not an explorer. We had a lot of time to prepare for this, train and get the right equipment," he said.

Adventurers follow somebody else's footsteps, often with a Global Positioning System (GPS) in hand. Explorers roamed the globe when it was still possible to walk off the map.

Turkstra and his crew won't have to worry about the return trip. Wherever they end up, a helicopter will find them and take them back to base camp.

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