

the Express



WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS

DAILY NEWS

THIS WEEK

Top Story::
Political capital



"That is my major, major, major motivator right now, to change that system." — Ray O'Neill

[FULL STORY]

Editorial::

Tale of two cities

Every four years, it's a rite of late summer and early fall — municipal election time. The signs are literally everywhere...

[FULL STORY]

Feature::

Fort Amherst tea room closing



"Lots of people are going to be sad to hear that the tea room isn't open anymore." — Frank Galgay

Sports::

Going to the mountain

Just off a trek to the highest peak in North America, St. John's woman preparing to bike from Tibet to Nepal

**By Danette Dooley
For The Express**

T.A. Loeffler has a tattoo about the size of a kiwi fruit on the outside of her right calf.

She had the Chinese character for courage permanently etched in her leg after she led an 18-day rafting trip down the Grand Canyon two years ago.

Someone recently told Loeffler the character also stands for hero.

While she doesn't look at herself in that light, the things this adventure-seeking Buddhist and physical education professor at Memorial has done over the years has inspired others to realize their dreams, no matter how impossible they may appear.

"I went down to Argentina with this wonderful Rotarian from P.E.I. in 1999," Loeffler recalls.

"When I got back from Denali (in June) I had an e-mail from his daughter who I'd never met. She said that she'd been hearing about my exploits through her dad, and that she wanted to tell me that her mom had been sick all this winter with cancer and that she'd been struggling a lot. But when (her mom) read about my training for Denali, she went and did her physio and went for her walks that she needed for her recovery. When I heard that I'm just, like, bawling."

Loeffler's Denali experience happened two months ago, when she climbed the high highest peak in North America.

But that gruelling trek wasn't enough for her.



Danette Dooley/For The Express

T.A. Loeffler: "I worked so hard and trained so hard for Denali that I knew I couldn't be done with adventure."

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View



[FULL STORY]

Entertainment: 'Two of the same-sized in a pen playing'



"I knew Tom's music and I didn't know he was even Canadian. I had Planet Love and I was so crazy about that CD!" she laughs. "I remember pulling over to the side of the road, saying, 'Who is this guy?' He was just so great."
— Cathy Jones

[FULL STORY]

She's now preparing for an adventure in Tibet, where she'll attempt to complete one of the hardest cycling routes in the world.

Her 35-day climb in June led her to the top of Denali, or Mount McKinley as some call it.

The trek took her around and then up the 20,320 foot mountain.

The mountain is estimated to be around 30 times the size of Signal Hill.

Only 50 per cent of the mountaineers who attempt Denali each year reach the summit.

Loeffler's September trip will take her from Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, to Kathmandu, Nepal.

The bike ride is a gruelling 1,150 kilometres long and takes in more than six mountain passes, the shortest of which is 4,700 metres high and tallest of which is 5,200 metres high.

The expedition demands physical endurance as well as mental toughness.

In drawing the route on a wall, Loeffler — who turned 40 during the excursion up Denali — says the combination of peaks and elevations make the sketch look like an echocardiograph.

"On our last day, we do the world's largest downhill. We go from 5,200 metres to 1,500 metres, in one day, biking over 120 kilometres. So I have to be able to grip the brakes for hours on end."

'good to see Everest'

It is also the only trip in the world where you can visit the Everest base camp by bicycle.

The mountain's north face is where Reinhold Messner began his successful solo ascent of Everest in 1980.

"I'd seen Everest from the south side three years ago and, just as it was useful to see Denali before I undertook the rigorous training, I felt it would be good to see Everest from the north side. Because it's a big decision whether to try to climb from the north or the south side."

Loeffler says the time she'll spend at the base camp will help her decide whether a hike up Everest is an adventure she'll attempt next spring.

Whether or not she'll be able to raise the \$100,000 needed to climb Everest remains to be seen, but Denali has taught Loeffler there's no such word as can't.

Physically, mentally and spiritually, she says she can ready herself for the climb.

"Denali taught me that I have the discipline, drive, and direction to go after whatever I set my mind to, not that I'd be guaranteed success by any means, but that I can no longer let myself off the hook."

Letting herself off the hook means backing off an idea or dream without

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at least a full effort first, she says.

"I worked so hard and trained so hard for Denali that I knew I couldn't be done with adventure. It's one of the hardest things I've done in my life. We were pushed to our edges in terms of the amount of physicality. We were climbing 10 to 12 hours a day and the weather was very cold. On summit day, it was minus-30."

There is no possibility of helicopter rescue in Tibet. In that way, it is more remote than Denali, Loeffler says, adding, "though one could drive five days to lower elevation."

'just like Newfoundland'

In preparing for the three-week Tibet trip, Loeffler has been training upwards of 20 hours a week.

One component of the training is testing the number of times she can ride, non-stop up and down Signal Hill. At the moment that number is four.

"I also have what I call uptown-downtown, which is going up one hill and riding down the next, up and down, up and down, it's a joy to live in such a hilly place," she says.

It's also important that she get used to windy conditions, making St. John's a perfect training ground.

"The Tibetan plateau is known, just like Newfoundland, for its wind. And I figure St. John's is the only place where you can ride in a circle and face the wind the whole time."

Loeffler is hoping the Tibet experience will help her find spiritual guidance as to what adventure she'll embark upon next.

She may stay on and do some international development work in a neighbouring country.

If that doesn't pan out, she may trek back into the mountains to again see the south side of the mountains and revisit a Buddhist nunnery to see if they'd be interested in having their stories told.

A filmmaker as well as adventurer, Loeffler could offer them that opportunity.

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"So many of them had to escape from the cultural persecution in Tibet by going over high mountain passes and risking their lives for their freedom to be able to practice their religion."

Amazing Trek to Everest

21 day trek through the Himalayas - to the Base camp of Mt Everest

www.adventurealternative.com

'costing me'

Loeffler is originally from Edmonton, but has been living in Newfoundland for about a decade.

While she's put her future plans on holds in order to let the adventure

speak, Loeffler says she's inclined to move towards conquering the seven summits — the highest peak on each of the seven continents.

In continuing to undertake what will likely be a series of world class grueling adventures, she's hopeful they'll benefit not only herself but also those who hear about her determination in reaching for her dreams.

Nothing is impossible, she says. However, raising money to turn her dreams into reality is a challenge.

Her current fund-raising initiative sees her offering people the opportunity to sponsor a string of prayer flags, which are brightly coloured markers hung in the mountains of Tibet and Nepal with Buddhist prayers written on them.

The belief is that when the wind blows, the prayers are carried by the wind.

"This trip is costing me about \$5,000. I've got one sponsor so far, AppleCore Interactive, who sponsored me on Denali. I'm trying to seek some other sponsors as well. Because if I ever decide to go for the big one (Mount Everest) it's got about a \$100,000 price tag on it. So I need to get good at asking, which I'm not good at."

To find out more about sponsoring a prayer flag or about Loeffler's adventures, visit www.taloeffler.com

danette@nl.rogers.com

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