

For immediate release
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Duo Climbs “Roof of Africa” for Family Tree

When they reach the stunning apex of Mount Kilimanjaro, Shawn Tracy and Mark Sheedy will be miles above the rest of the Africa. Their thoughts, however, won't be far from Denver's struggling families.

Tracy and Sheedy, co-founders of Greenwood Village-based Associates Group of Companies, Inc., will embark on their most ambitious endeavor to date when they begin a multi-stage climb up Kilimanjaro Aug. 15.

With the backing of private donors and corporate sponsors, the duo launched “Climbing for a Cause,” a fundraising effort that has them ascending the world's highest peaks on behalf of Family Tree, a not-for-profit agency whose mission is to help people overcome child abuse, domestic violence and homelessness to become safe, strong and self-reliant.

For their second annual trek, Tracy and Sheedy decided to tackle Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. Sometimes referred to as the “Roof of Africa,” Kilimanjaro stands more than 19,300 feet and is the tallest mountain on the massive continent. It is a step above the team's grueling climb up Washington's Mount Rainier in 2008, when they raised over \$25,000 for Family Tree.

“That's a big way to convince people to donate. They are putting forth a huge effort and taking a lot of risk,” said Scott Shields, Chief Executive Officer of Family Tree. “When they said, ‘we're climbing Kilimanjaro,’ I was pretty shocked needless to say.”

Now the group is shooting for a lofty – and attainable – goal of \$100,000.

“Climbing for a Cause” began when Tracy and Sheedy, both former standout prep athletes, were trying to find a way to get out of the office while helping a local charity. They attended a Family Tree event in 2007 where Jeff Evans, an experienced climber who guided Colorado resident and blind mountaineer Erik Weihenmayer during his summit of Mount Everest, was serving as the keynote speaker. Coincidentally, they had already planned a climb up Mount Rainier, but the speech gave them added motivation.

“When we were trying to figure out what to do for a fundraiser, this just kind of hit home,” Tracy said.

This year, Evans will serve as their guide up Kilimanjaro, which starts in the jungle and ends on a glacier. Because of the varying terrain and endurance required to conquer Kilimanjaro, the men must train on steep inclines with 40-pound weight vests.

Never ones to back down from a challenge, Tracy and Sheedy, both of Douglas County, already have their sights set on a 2010 ascent up Mount Elbrus in Russia. The additional funds go a long way, but Family Tree points to the added benefit of bringing attention to the plight of Denver metro area families.

“I couldn’t understate what those dollars do for our organization,” Shields said, “but they also bring this huge intangible component that’s well beyond the dollars.”

To donate to “Climbing for a Cause,” visit www.agcclimb.com or www.thefamilytree.org.

Special to Media:

Tracy and Sheedy are available to speak about their upcoming adventure until Aug. 10. To schedule an interview, contact Steve Harrell at (303) 403-5883.

Family Tree provides a broad range of services and shelter to families and youth of metro Denver to overcome child abuse, domestic violence and homelessness. Each year, Family Tree provides services to more than 31,000 people, including more than 25,000 nights of safe shelter to families and individuals who might otherwise be homeless. --

Associates Group of Companies, Inc., - or AGC – is a Denver Technological Center-based commercial insurance brokerage and financial services firm. The company serves 1,500 companies and is a premier provider of commercial property and casualty, workers compensation and employee benefits in the region. --