



News Release

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Student gives eye care to kids by climbing Mount Kilimanjaro

KOKOMO, Ind. — Because Ryan Bowerman saw the world from the summit of the world's tallest freestanding mountain, 250 children have a chance for surgery to prevent them from becoming blind.



Bowerman, an Indiana University Kokomo graduate student and assistant volleyball coach, was part of a team that climbed Africa's Mount Kilimanjaro to raise money for Vision for the Poor. The international non-profit organization trains and equips eye care doctors in developing countries, in an effort to reduce blindness from treatable causes.

Each surgery costs approximately \$200, and the five climbers collected about \$50,000 in donations — enough to treat 250 children.

“This opportunity combined travel, a new place I hadn't visited, adventure, and an organization I strongly support,” Bowerman said. “There are a lot of children who go blind in these

countries, who would not go blind in our country, because of our resources. I also like that they train local doctors, so it's a sustainable organization.”

Knowing he was climbing for such a worthy cause motivated him to keep going, as the climb to the summit, 19,341 feet above sea level, became difficult.

Altitude sickness nearly derailed his goal, making him miserably nauseated and weak from lack of nutrition, but he kept moving forward. He and his four fellow climbers, along with their trained guides, left their final basecamp just after midnight on July 26. They walked for hours in the dark, their way lighted only by headlamps. One team member turned back, too sick to continue, but Bowerman pushed on, determined to see the view from the top of the mountain fabled as “the roof of Africa.”

“It was an awesome feeling once I got to the summit,” Bowerman said. “The last day of the climb was one of my toughest tests of will power ever. Seeing the sun rise from over the clouds was one of the things that got me through. There were a lot of times I didn’t think I was going to make it. I’ve pushed my limits before, but this was different.”

The Crawfordsville native, who is earning a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies at IU Kokomo, discovered a love of international travel while he was an undergraduate student. He participated in two summer programs in Ecuador, and worked in that South American country for about 18 months after graduating. While there, he met Amanda Sidman, whose stepfather is executive director for Vision for the Poor. They later helped start a beekeeping project in Peru for farmers.

She had participated in mission trips to Vision for the Poor’s clinics in Guatemala, and told him about the Climb for Sight, in Tanzania.

“I’m always looking for my next adventure, and this was a chance to see a part of the world I’ve never seen,” he said. “It was also a chance to do it in a way that has meaning. Every \$200 we raised provides a surgeon to save a child’s vision, for the rest of that child’s life. That was great encouragement to remember, when the climbing got hard.”

The team departed for Tanzania on July 17, and spent a few days sightseeing before beginning the six-day climb. The first three days, the climb was a gentle slope, going through the mountain’s ecosystems, from rain forest, moorland, alpine bogs, and alpine desert, gradually ascending to the arctic zone at the top. They slept in small cabins at their basecamps, so they did not have to carry tents in their packs.

Bowerman greatly admired for the guides who led them, and the porters who transported their supplies for the climb.

“This was a once-in-a-lifetime climb for me, and they do it a few times a month,” he said. “They were really incredible.”

The climb to the top took four and one-half days, and their descent took a little over a day. Only about 45 percent of the 35,000 tourists who make the attempt each year are successful.

Bowerman experienced altitude sickness above 15,000 feet, and once he was below that level, he felt much better. Even with the sickness, he is glad to have the experience.

“It was a great adventure, and knowing I was doing it for a great cause made it even better.”

Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana. -END-