

LOCAL

A team of polar opposites

Local businessmen to again raise money for inner-city programs

BY JON WELLS

The men who successfully skied to the North Pole in 2006 agree it was a brutal, often demoralizing grind: Dropped on the polar ice cap, racing against time to reach the pole on shifting ice, crossing open gaps of frigid water, all the while wary of polar bear attacks.

And now, two years later, the group is preparing to head south. Way south – to the South Pole in Antarctica, a continent labelled “the most inhospitable place on earth.”

The first polar odyssey by five local businessmen raised \$460,000 for nutrition and music school programs for inner city kids, and other charities for kids in need. The new campaign is called South Pole for Kids, with all proceeds once again going directly to programs benefiting kids in need.

The team leaves for Antarctica at the start of December. The members are: Fred Losani, Mark MacLennan, Steven Perigord, Steve Stipsits and Peter Turkstra. They are all in their mid-40s and will be joined by California-based adventurer Doug Stoup, who has visited both poles several times, and also led a trip down the Amazon river.

Mark MacLennan had a chance to go to the North Pole last time, but decided against it because he didn't feel he was fit enough to make it. He has hit a workout regimen hard for this trip.

“I'm the rookie,” MacLennan said with a grin. “I was proud (of the team) last time, all the fundraising



PETER HAENTJENS, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Mark MacLennan, Steven Perigord and Peter Turkstra are three of the five men training for the polar odyssey.

for the kids. I thought ‘Wow, this time around, I'm doing it.’”

Turkstra said it might be the last kick at such a venture for the group, given the time and money required to organize the logistics of both the fundraising campaign and the excursion. (They pay the entire cost

of the polar trips out of their own pockets.)

“It has been so nice to be involved in something that ended up like this, with all the efforts of the volunteers, and everyone in the community who gave for the benefit of the kids. It has been great.”

For example, St. Mary school on McNab Street was one of 10 inner-city schools from the Catholic board to share \$107,000 of the North Pole funds for a student nutrition program. Principal Jerry Crapsi said they were extremely grateful for the support, which he

said has led directly to healthier and more attentive students.

He is excited about the South Pole campaign as well.

“(Fundraising) support for the next trip is important to sustain the nutrition program,” he added.

In 2006 the expedition team felt pressure to reach the pole against all odds, because of the charitable drive and the kids following their progress back home. (For the South Pole excursion, classrooms can once again follow the team's progress by registering for inclusion in The Hamilton Spectator's Newspaper in Education South Pole Expedition for Kids Program.)

The 2008 journey begins with a flight to the southern tip of Chile, then a six-hour flight to Antarctica, then yet another six-hour flight to set down on the ice 97 nautical miles (200 km) from the South Pole itself, and ski two weeks to the pole. The dropoff spot is where legendary explorer Ernest Shackleton halted his 1909 expedition due to nasty weather.

The South Pole trip will be much colder and windier than the North Pole – Antarctica is the coldest, driest place on earth. Adventurers have been known to get socked in for days at a time by the winds, and also face deep crevices in ice covering the continent that is four to five kilometres thick in places.

To learn more about the campaign or how to contribute, go to: southpoleforkids.ca

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