Vail Daily

Founded by Jim Pavelich & Jon Van Housen

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New marriage, new heights

Edwards couple raising funds to climb Everest

By Edward Stoner
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TOP: Kristine and Brandon Chalk, of Edwards, are trying to raise funds to climb Mount Everest this spring. Kristine Chalk, a local elementary school teacher, plans to correspond with her students during the expedition.
LEFT: Kristine Chalk negotiates Mont Blanc earlier this year. The Chalks have climbed peaks all over Colorado, the West and the world.

SPECIAL TO THE DAILY

EDWARDS — Brandon and Kristine Chalk fell in love on Denali.

Their relationship grew stronger as they conquered Capitol Peak, Mount Elbrus and Mont Blanc.

They got married this fall, and fittingly, they have set their eyes on a higher goal — Mount Everest.

"You look at couples that go and do their own things," Kristine said. "We're like, 'We wouldn't want to do that at all.' Obviously, we have things we do on our own. But it brings us so much closer."

"To be able to share these adventures together," Brandon said. "We wouldn't want to have it any other way."

The Edwards couple plans to leave in late March, try to summit Everest in early May and return to the Vail Valley in late June. They would apparently be the youngest American married couple to ever summit the 29,029-foot peak, the highest mountain in the world.

But it is a costly endeavor — the climb's price tag is $50,000 for the couple. That includes government permits, food, fuel, oxygen and hiring Sherpas. Brandon, a mechanical engineer, and Kristine, an elementary school teacher, are trying to raise money to help fund the trip.

They are holding a fundraising event Wednesday at e-town in Edwards. They also are raising funds through their Web site. Many friends, as well as a company called juggle.com, have already offered support and sponsorships.

Their trip would not be all about Everest. After the climb, they plan to volunteer for about two weeks with Taksindu Social Welfare, a nonprofit that helps developing Himalayan communities, in particular by building and improving school facilities and training teachers. They hope to form a connection between the Vail Valley mountain community and the Solukhumbu district of the Everest region.

Kristine, a fifth-grade teacher at Red Sandstone Elementary School, plans to bring along her own students on her journey using technology.

"They'll get to be able to write me e-mails, and I'll be able to Skype to talk to them," Kristine said.

Brandon and Kristine have been climbing big mountains for years. Brandon, a North Carolina native, grew up taking hiking and climbing trips out West with his dad. He fell in love with mountaineering.

"First of all, just being outdoors, being outside," he said. "I think just it's way to really challenge myself. It gives me a great sense of accomplishment."

Kristine's love for the outdoors blossomed when she was a guide for a group that takes teens on expeditions to places such as Mount Rainier in Washington.

They started dating just before they climbed Denali — aka Mount McKinley — in 2007. They have climbed many peaks across Colorado and the West, in summer and winter. The Chalks plan to ultimately climb all of the Seven Summits, the tallest points on each of the seven continents. Brandon has three under his belt; Kristine has two.

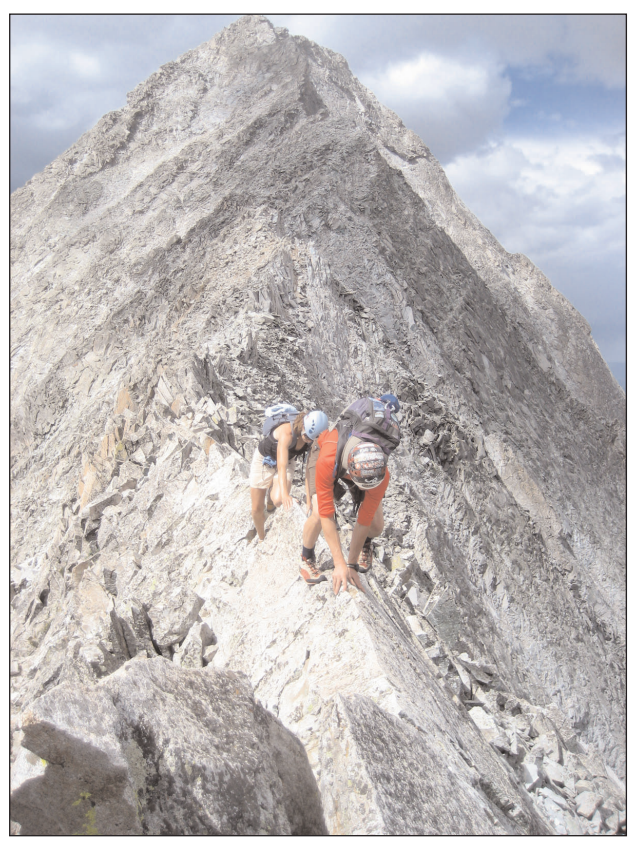
The couple will be climbing Everest unguided, but they will be accompanied by their friend Rob Casserley, a British doctor who has climbed Everest five times. They happened to meet the Brit in 2007 on Denali when he asked them to borrow a stove. Casserley will be planning many of the logistics for the Everest expedition.

The Chalks had considered climbing another peak in the Himalayas, but Everest called to them.

"That's one thing about Everest," Chalk said. "People are like, 'Why don't you climb another 8,000-meter peak?' You're at the highest point on Earth. You can't get any higher. And that's a big draw of it. There are technically harder peaks. But nothing compares to the altitude."

Everest fundraiser

What: Raising funds for Brandon and Kristine Chalk's Everest trip. Ten percent of proceeds from the event will go to the cause. There also will be a silent auction.
When: 5:30 p.m. to close Wednesday.
Where: e-town, Edwards.
More information: Visit www.brandonandkristine.org.



SPECIAL TO THE DAILY

Brandon and Kristine Chalk traverse a knife-edge ridge on Capitol Peak near Aspen in 2008. The Chalks say their mountain expeditions together have served to strengthen their relationship.