

GLOBAL EXPEDITION SET TO ARRIVE MONDAY

by Bill Curry

March 7, 2004 -- According to an ancient Chinese proverb, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." Perhaps no one understands that proverb's significance better than Dario Schworer and Sabine Schworer-Amman, the founders of ToptoTop Global Climate Expedition. Together the Swiss husband-and-wife team

-- expected to arrive on St. Thomas on Monday -- has embarked on a monumental journey to climb the highest mountain on each of the seven continents in order to publicize the growing problem of climate change.

As if that wasn't difficult enough, the couple will travel from continent to continent using only muscle power or the wind. That means they'll be cycling, sailing or climbing their way around the world. The entire journey, which will take at least four years, is estimated to comprise 50,000 miles of sailing, 15,000 kilometers of cycling and 230,000 meters of climbing!

While the expedition, which started in May 2003, is an almost unbelievable undertaking, Dario and Sabine are well suited to their task. Accomplished skiers, mountain climbers and sailors, the Schworers feel equally comfortable high in the Himalayas or out on the open seas. Although Dario and Sabine are the only expedition members who plan to complete the entire journey, they will be accompanied by two to three additional members throughout the various legs of their journey.

Just what does ToptoTop hope to accomplish with its incredible adventure? According to the ToptoTop Web site, the expedition's primary goal is to motivate people to take action against one of the new millennium's greatest challenges: global warming. With intense media coverage, the expedition hopes to bring the issue to the fore and force people to start thinking seriously about the planet's future. Talking about global warming to schoolchildren throughout the world is just one facet of the group's program.

Funded by the United Nations Environment Program, ToptoTop has members from 18 nations. In addition to mountain guides and experienced sailors, its membership includes medical personnel, journalists, lawyers and even Web page designers.

A monumental task

An expedition of this magnitude takes an inordinate amount of preparation and planning. To make sure that they could accomplish their task, Dario and Sabine in March 2002 embarked on a preparatory tour in which they climbed the highest points in each of Switzerland's 160 counties. During the 160-day, non-stop trip, the expedition team cycled nearly 3,000 kilometers and climbed 96,000 meters.

Buoyed by the success of their Swiss adventure, the Schworers and the other members of the expedition team began their seven-continent journey in May 2003 by cycling out of Lausanne, Switzerland. Their destination was Croatia, where they would meet their 50-foot sailboat, Pachamama. An Inca word meaning "Mother Earth," Pachamama also suggests a lifestyle in harmony with nature.

While in Croatia, the expedition team helped clean beaches in Dubrovnik, spoke with schoolchildren about global warming, and donated firefighting equipment to Telascica Natural Park.

From Croatia, the expedition sailed to Italy, then on to Tunisia in Northern Africa, Malaga in Spain, and the Canary Islands. Mechanical problems that surfaced in preparation for the 30-day trans-Atlantic sail forced the group to stay in the Canaries longer than anticipated. The members made the most of their time by doing



ToptoTop's Dario and Sabine Schworer.

extensive environmental education at schools in Tenerife and Gomera.

The ToptoTop team is scheduled to arrive on St. Thomas on Monday. On Tuesday evening, there will be a reception at the Fort Christian Museum hosted by Sen. Louis Patrick Hill, who chairs the Senate Planning and Environmental Protection Committee. The guest list includes government officials, members of environmental groups and prominent figures in the sailing community.

According to Jean Braure, a ToptoToP member and longtime St. Thomas resident, the team is expected to spend about two weeks on the island. During that time, he says, the group members are tentatively scheduled to speak at All Saints Cathedral School and conduct cleanups at area beaches.

From St. Thomas, the expedition is scheduled to travel to Panama, Hawaii and then Alaska, where Braure, a 68-year-old sailor and mountain climber, hopes to join the Schworers in their quest to climb Mount McKinley.

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