



Charity Begins at Home Toronto man raises \$22,000 for charity called Save a Child's Heart by climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro

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Not that long ago, Danny Roth considered loafers to be athletic footwear and an arduous climb to be the four flights of stairs up to his office in the Toronto Carpet Factory.

But there's nothing like a worthy cause to stir the inner do-gooder in most of us, and Roth, who owns Brandon Communications, was inspired by the work done by Save a Child's Heart (SACH), an Israeli-based humanitarian organization founded in 1996 that offers free, life-saving heart surgery to children in developing countries. He was invited to sit on the board of [SACH Canada](#).

When he learned about "Climb Your Heart Out: Mount Kilimanjaro 2011," a fundraising event with a goal to raise \$1 million for SACH, Roth decided to join the team of international doctors, supporters and volunteers aiming to ascend Africa's highest peak.

This year marked the 10th anniversary of the death of SACH founder Dr. Ami Cohen, who tragically died on Kilimanjaro after reaching the summit.

"I don't know whether it came about because I turned 40 this summer and because of that coincidental milestone birthday that I felt the need to do something different," Roth explains.

Encouraged by wife Jillian and son Billy, Roth decided to see if he could raise \$10,000 for SACH and reached out to his network of family, friends and business associates. He was stunned when \$22,000 in pledges came in.

Roth says what he likes about the charity is that it's easy to explain how the funds are used: each \$10,000 raised saves a child's life. About half of the \$1 million "Climb Your Heart Out" goal has been reached to date.

Before the climb, Roth spent four months training vigorously for the seven-day ascent. "I went to a personal trainer, started running, changed my diet, and a very pleasant byproduct was that I got healthy. I got really fit, and over the summer I felt better than I had in a long time.

"I had heard horror stories about how difficult and unpleasant (the climb) was," he says. "And I was leaving my wife and young son for two weeks, which is something I'd never done. I was doing something that, on one hand, was incredibly selfish, but I was doing it for charity, so that was the selfless aspect."

The 12 SACH climbers (from Canada, the U.S., Israel, Ethiopia and South Africa) arrived in Tanzania on Aug. 7. After staying overnight at a resort in the town of Arusha, the group visited an orphanage where they met a young girl whose life had been saved through heart surgery provided by SACH. They then set out on their journey with six guides and 40 porters, who each day set up camp — tents, kitchens and chemical toilets — and prepared their meals.

"The first four days were challenging, though I'd heard the first few days aren't that tough. Each day was so much harder than the day before," recalls Roth.

"We climbed five to seven hours a day and certainly there were times when the terrain was rugged and difficult. We had to climb the Great Barranco Wall, which is a vertical climb that was most challenging. Or you'd see the camp over a hill and think you were close, but it was another two hours away. It was a tremendous physical and mental challenge."

Each day they went through a different temperate zone; vegetation and wildlife changed in each, from jungle to grasslands and trees, to desert-like conditions, to barren and stark lava fields.

By the sixth day, the altitude was having an effect and the climb got steeper. The climbers arrived at camp at noon and were fed a hearty lunch and given a safety briefing, then napped before having a meal late that night.

The final ascent started at 11 p.m. in cold rain under a full moon. Seemingly thousands of trekkers came together on a single path where all other paths converged, says Roth.

"We started to snake up a path for the nine-hour ascent. It's a series of S-curves and we saw this long snaking path of head lamps. It got very surreal, a bit like a war zone. You'd turn a corner and someone would be sick to their stomach. You'd make another turn and porters would be carrying a climber down," he says.

"You had to stride at a super slow pace to guard against altitude sickness. It's not physically exhausting, but you are tense. It's black and the climb seems endless. It's so demanding physically and mentally. It's the hardest thing I've ever done."

The altitude can also cause climbers to become mentally disoriented, so Roth listened to a song mix his wife had made for his iPod and did mental exercises, like multiplication tables.

Of the original 12 in the SACH group, nine made one of the summits at Stella Point, 5,700 metres above sea level at the lip of a dormant volcano.

"I was physically exhausted, but the euphoria was unparalleled," says Roth.

Seven, including Roth, decided to go another 45 minutes to Uhuru Peak, the highest point.

"I spent 12 minutes at the top and my headache got pretty bad," he says. "It took us nine hours to climb up and three hours to get down."

Roth's experience was life-altering. "It changed my perspective. Part of this was to set an example for my son, Billy, about charity and philanthropy. If you don't have money to give, there are other things you can do. He saw dad take on a challenge nobody would have anticipated that he would. I hope it's a great lesson.

"I never imagined I'd ever be able to write a \$22,000 cheque for charity and it was a really special sense that I did my part."

Roth also developed a love for Africa and is tentatively thinking of returning in 10 years to tackle Kilimanjaro with his son, who will then be 16.

"If I can afford to it and I am in good enough health, I'd love to do it as a father-son experience," says Roth.

SACH DETAILS

- Save a Child's Heart (SACH) is an Israeli-based international humanitarian project that provides life-saving cardiac surgery and other life-saving procedures for children from developing countries at the Wolfson Medical Centre in Holon, Israel.
- SACH performs over 200 surgeries a year and trains medical professionals in developing countries. It has provided care to more than 2,700 children from Africa, South America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East.
- SACH Canada, with headquarters in Toronto, was founded in 2001 by A.E. Diamond and is led by Dr. Bernard Goldman, who received the Order of Canada for his contributions to cardiac care. He is former head of cardiovascular surgery and surgeon-in-chief at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre.