

KNEE CARTILAGE TRANSPLANT PATIENT CLIMBS MT. EVEREST

EXPEDITION RAISES FUNDS FOR ORTHOPEDIC RESEARCH AT RUSH

A college football injury had laid John Golden low for many years, but physicians at Rush enabled him to reach new heights. This spring, Golden set out to climb Mt. Everest — and raise funds for orthopedic research and training at Rush in the process. Climbing on a transplanted knee, he came within a little more than 3,000 feet of the top of the world's tallest mountain before bad weather and an injury forced an end to his expedition.

By the time he was 38 years old, Golden had more than 15 surgeries on his knees (he's lost count), had spent nearly two years on crutches and was in constant, severe pain. Doctors told him he should buy a ranch house because his knees were too damaged for him even to climb stairs.

"I decided I've got to fix this," says Golden, 43, the chief information officer for Chicago-based CNA Insurance. "I have two young kids. I want to be able to play with them in the backyard."

After conducting a national search, Golden came to Rush and met with Brian Cole, MD, MBA, professor of orthopedics and head of the Rush Cartilage Restoration Center, where physician-researchers have pioneered safer, faster and less expensive ways to help patients reclaim lost mobility and to eliminate their pain. In May of 2005, Cole performed a double transplant to replace cartilage in Golden's left knee and lower leg. Thanks to this procedure, Golden was able to resume normal life activities like walking, climbing stairs and bicycling without pain.

After nine months of physical therapy, Golden felt ready for a

challenge and asked Cole if he could climb a mountain — something he'd never done even when he had healthy knees. "I said yes," Cole recalls. "At the time, I thought he meant a bluff in Wisconsin."

Instead, Golden consulted famed mountain climber Ed Viesturs in order to climb Mt. Rainier in Washington, which rises 14,410 feet above sea level. Viesturs is the only American to climb the world's 14 tallest peaks without supplemental oxygen. In September of 2007, Golden reached the peak at the end of a 10-hour climb that began in sub-zero temperatures and high wind.

"When I reached the summit, I broke down emotionally," Golden says. "It was the greatest feeling. I stood up there with my hands up, thinking 'I can't believe I did this.'"

Golden then set his sights even higher, and decided to climb Mt. Everest, located in Nepal and Tibet. The world's tallest peak, it rises to a height variously measured between 29,017 and 29,038 feet above sea level.

To prepare for his expedition, he embarked on a yearlong training regimen, during which he climbed an average of one mountain a month. He even recruited Cole and his assistant, Kyle Pilz, to join him on the 9,127-foot ascent of Mt. Shuksan in Washington.

"I thought, if he can do this, I should be able to do it, too," Cole says. "The climb was a life-changing experience. It was a physical and emotional challenge, but whenever I felt like complaining, I would just look at John and how he moved and climbed on that knee. Seeing that, any thought of complaining was not even conceivable."

The appreciation is mutual. "I hope the climb gave Brian a

deserved sense of appreciation for the great work that he did and that it will inspire him to even take it further," Golden says.

Now Golden is using his Everest adventure to draw attention to the orthopedic programs at Rush and generate financial support for them. Golden and Cole have established the LiveActive Fund for Orthopedic Research and Education at Rush. They helped organize and spoke at "Reaching the Summit for Orthopedic Research," an event held at Rush in March that was attended by about 180 people, including patients of Cole's and their families, friends and colleagues of Golden's, and members of mountain climbing organizations. The event, which included a silent auction, netted more than \$40,000.

Golden also sought contributions to Rush for each foot of Mt. Everest he would climb. As of mid-April, total pledges and gifts to date from Golden's network and other sources equal nearly \$150,000.

In April, he embarked on his Everest expedition. On Sunday, May 10, Golden and fellow mountain climber John Shea climbed from camp 2 to camp 3 on Mount Everest during a 10 1/2 hour climb, ascending 4,500 feet to an elevation of 26,000 feet. Climbers usually only advance up the mountain one camp at a time, resting overnight at each one, but Golden and Shea pursued an aggressive strategy to take advantage of a narrow window of good weather for climbing.

Ahead of them lay the final ascent to the peak of Everest, but by the time they reached the camp, strong winds were blowing. The next morning it was clear the winds were too great to make the final push to the



John Golden climbing Ama Dablam, a Himalyan mountain in Nepal, in September of last year as part of his training for the Mt. Everest expedition.

summit. On the way down the climbers were caught in a storm, and Golden fell, cracking three ribs. Overcoming his injuries and the whiteout conditions on the mountain, he and Shea made it safely back to base camp, but his injuries brought an end to his Everest expedition.

Despite the harrowing and disappointing conclusion, Golden found his expedition thrilling, and he hopes it will inspire others. "I was given the greatest gift," he says of his extraordinary recovery and equally extraordinary effort. "I wanted to do something to create awareness about what can happen when the great doctors at Rush connect with people; to make funds available so that Rush can do more research; and to watch people like Dr. Cole and others work miracles like they did with me." •

Golden has posted an account and photos of his climb online at www.goldenexpedition.com. The Discovery Channel will broadcast a program about his expedition in November.