

Ain't no mountain high enough: NDP teacher, coach reaches beyond his comfort zone and inspires others



Notre Dame Preparatory School teacher and coach Tom Klein climbs Poko Moonshine in the Adirondacks in upstate New York. (Courtesy Tom Klein)

By Elizabeth Lowe

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TOWSON - As a child, Tom Klein took his desire to climb outdoors and scaled trees. As a student at Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg, he visited a nearby indoor rock climbing center, and in the nearly 20 years since, his passion for climbing has taken off.

"Climbing takes you to far-off places in the world," said Klein, chairman of the social studies department at Notre Dame Preparatory School and head coach of the Blazer's cross country and track and field teams. "It's so much fun, great exercise." The 41-year-old has tackled mountains in locales as diverse as Ecuador, Mexico and France, and frequents the Adirondacks in upstate New York.

In 2012, Klein climbed the west buttress of Mount McKinley in Alaska, at 20,237 feet the highest peak in North America.

"That's the most significant climb I've ever done," said Klein, who is also a runner and cyclist. "It (climbing and endurance activities) gives me a lot of peace. It's almost like meditation at times. I love the adventure and it's motivating to me." Klein, who used to ride his bicycle from his home to the Towson school a few miles away, said climbing in extreme weather isn't as perilous as cycling on area roads. "This isn't as dangerous as it seems at first glance," said Klein, who bubbles with energy and enthusiasm for climbing. "I don't prefer to sit around and I like to be outside."



Tom Klein, 41, has tackled mountains in locales as diverse as Ecuador, Mexico and France. (Courtesy Tom Klein)

Steven Pomplon, NDP's director of social service and an assistant coach in cross country and track, has gone ice climbing with Klein.

"He's pretty inspiring to people on staff," said Pomplon, 29. "He's always challenging you beyond what you think your limits are. He's a very consistent guy. What you see is what you get. The girls have a wonderful role model."

On occasion, Klein shares his experiences with his students and student athletes. "I will mention things to them as it's relevant," he said, citing instances when his travels are germane to class discussions.

Summer Legambi, a senior who runs cross country and track, and swims, said hearing about Klein's adventures inspire her and keep workouts in perspective, particularly when it comes to tackling cross country.

"I think 'I guess I can get through this 5K, all we're doing is running this puny hill,'" Legambi said.

School Sister of Notre Dame Patricia McCarron, NDP's headmistress, praised Klein for his dedication and example.

"He inspires his students and runners to work hard, strive for personal excellence and learn and grow from those efforts," she wrote in an email.

For his next expedition, Klein is planning a trip to Europe next spring to ski from France to Switzerland.

"You can do anything you put your mind to," Klein said. "The discomfort you can overcome. That's my takeaway."

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