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Richard Mithoff conquers Africa's Mount Kilimanjaro

by Wendy White Polk

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Former El Pasoan Richard Mithoff likes big challenges. Really big, as in a 19,340-foot mountain big.

Mithoff, a Houston attorney and son of retired El Paso ad exec Dick Mithoff, reached the summit of Tanzania's Mount Kilimanjaro at 2:45 p.m. July 12. The climb with five other people took seven days.

"It was really a blast, we had a good time," Mithoff said. "It was physically demanding, but we had good weather and a good climb."

He said the last few days were the most grueling, requiring some freeclimbing and scrambling in the wall leading to the crater.

"That made it a challenging climb," he said, "and we climbed through some snow. But we made it and we stayed healthy."

Mithoff said he started hiking and climbing as a kid, exploring El Paso's Franklin

Mountains with his best friend.

"I grew up in El Paso and always loved the mountains," he said.

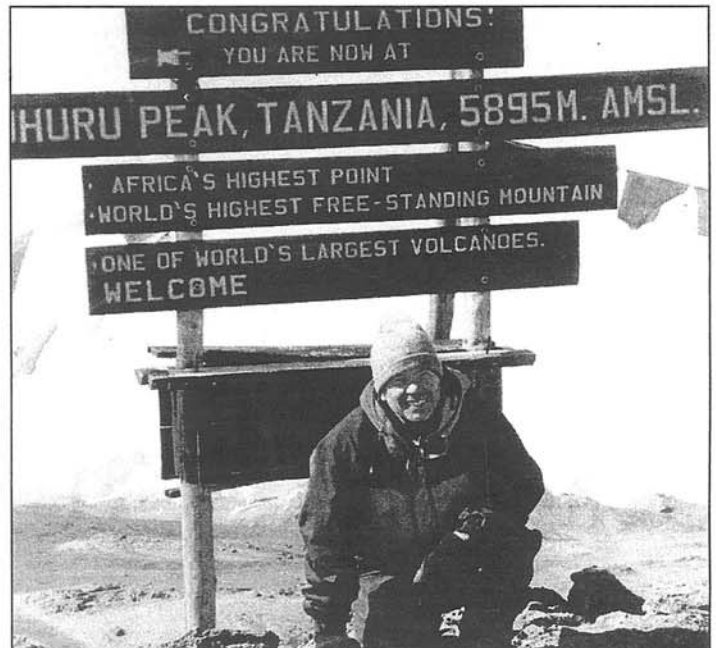
Mithoff, 54, started training for the Kilimanjaro climb earlier this year, and climbed a 14,000-foot Colorado mountain a few months ago.

Mithoff says he was just your average hiker until the director of the natural science museum in Houston told him that David Breashears, who made a successful IMAX movie about Mount Everest, was making a new film about Kilimanjaro.

"I said I'd like to invest in the movie. He said 'If you invest in the movie, you can climb with the film crew.' The next morning he told me 'You're on,'" Mithoff said.

He didn't see the crew on the mountain, but after the climb they got together and he spent a lot of time talking with the filmmaker.

Mithoff, called "one of the nation's highest profile litigators" by the National Law Journal, has a national reputation



Richard Mithoff at the top of Africa's Mount Kilimanjaro.

for winning multimillion awards for clients in medical malpractice and product liability suits.

In 1998, he joined with other attorneys in securing a \$2.2 billion judgment in the tobacco litigation on behalf of all Texas counties and hospitals.

Mithoff donated \$10 million of his fee to fund children's health programs in Harris County.

So is he ready for the biggest challenge of all, Mount Everest?

"I might consider Everest," Mithoff said, never one to turn down a tough fight.