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NEWSSTAND \$1

Middleburg girl vows to tackle Kilimanjaro

BY ALISA BOOZE TROETSCHER
Times-Democrat Staff Writer

Taylor Justice is determined to accomplish two goals: to climb Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania and to help save rhinos from extinction. She is 12 years old.

On Nov. 23, Taylor will begin an ascent of the highest mountain in Africa.

Accompanying her up the 19,341-foot peak will be the Green Girls, a group of ecologically-minded women organized by Ginna Kelly. Included in the contingent is the actress Mariel Hemingway.

Kelly is the founder of Climb for Conservation. The Mount Kilimanjaro trek is its kickoff effort to raise awareness about climate change and the potential extinction of rhinos.

Taylor intends to raise one dollar for every foot she climbs. The money will go toward protecting the African Black Rhino, which inhabits an area adjacent to Kilimanjaro National Park.

Taylor began climbing mountains as a baby on her mother's back in



Courtesy Photo

Taylor Justice

Colorado. Although she lives outside of Middleburg, her family maintains

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a home in Aspen.

Taylor and her mother plan to live there several weeks to allow her lungs time to acclimate to the altitude. To train, she will climb the snowy 11,220-foot Aspen Mountain.

Until then, she's hiking up Old Rag Mountain and in Sky Meadows State Park to get in shape for her trip.

And, she's stepping up her running regimen to prepare her respiratory system for the altitude change. She's accustomed to running about four miles a week, but now she's going further to achieve six to eight miles a week.

"I'm addicted to running," Taylor said.

One of the highlights in Taylor's hiking career is climbing 15,230 feet over Salkantay Pass at Machu Picchu in Peru this past June. At that height, breathing was like inhaling through a cocktail straw, she said. Because of the altitude, her legs felt like jello when she stopped for a rest.

The trip was exciting for Taylor, in more ways than one.

She and her companions were almost finished with the hike when a man fell 30 feet down a ravine. Both of his wrists broke. Bone poked through his skin and blood flowed down his head.

Taylor trained as a junior member of the Buttermilk Ski

Patrol in Aspen. She quickly scrambled down the steep slope, telling adults in her group to stay back.

With the man's wife, she assured her patient that he was going to be fine. Taking cardboard boxes the porters carried, she fashioned splints for each arm. Speaking in Spanish, she persuaded a porter to take off his T-shirt so that she could clean the head wounds.

Taylor went out with the ski patrol two full ski seasons, starting when she was 11.

The group held meetings every morning. Taylor's mother, Whitney Justice, remembers Taylor waking her up at 6:15 a.m. to drive her there. She was insistent about arriving on time.

Taylor is a goal-setter, and she already reached one important objective. She made the high honor roll as a fifth-grade student at The Hill School in Middleburg. This means that she earned A+ in all her classes all four grading periods.

Taylor achieved this in spite of experiences with being bullied.

"While I was studying and doing classwork, I blocked out bullying," she said, like a girl walking by and flipping her ponytail.

Taylor now attends seventh grade at Blue Ridge Middle School in Purcellville.

The only challenge of hiking up Mount Kilimanjaro that concerns Taylor is climbing a sheer cliff. She loves rock climbing though, and delights in climbing

the most difficult wall that a recreation facility in Aspen has.

In the wall are only cracks in which to insert fingers and toes. She does it five times in a row if the staff doesn't fuss at her.

Speaking of Mount Kilimanjaro, she said, "I'll make it up. I know it."

Taylor's second challenge is fundraising. Even before being invited to join the Green Girls, she knew about rhinos and elephants being slaughtered for their tusks.

"I never thought that I would make a difference and save them," said Taylor. She understands that she has to acquaint potential donors with the problem.

"Most people are aware of politics and the economy," Taylor

said. "People should take a minute to read my background story and maybe they will have a heart and know what is happening with the rhinos."

Although Taylor joked about needing to sell a lot of lemonade and cookies at roadside stands, she is committed to her objective.

"I can do it and I will do it and I will help the rhinos," Taylor said.

To raise \$19,341, Taylor created a web page soliciting contributions. She's emailing family and friends to chip in to her cause. Contributors pledged almost \$2,600 to date.

To read more about Taylor's mission, go to www.firstgiving.com and search for Taylor Justice.

Email the reporter: aboove@timespapers.com.

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