

Vaughan plans birthday party at 10,300 feet

At age 100, adventurer wants to scale Antarctic peak

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He is a world-class adventurer who now relies on a caretaker to help him with mundane activities like walking. But Norman Vaughan is determined to celebrate his 100th birthday by scaling the 10,300-foot mountain in Antarctica that bears his name. And listening to his surprisingly robust voice, it's easy to believe he just might do it, despite his congestive heart disease. At least his spirit is willing.

"I'm working on getting physically fit, to get rid of that thing," he said, kicking a steel walker at the foot of his lounge chair. If not, professional climbers taking part in the planned December expedition will pull Vaughan in a specially rigged sled dubbed the "Norm-Hauler." However he gets to the summit of Mount Vaughan, he plans to break out the champagne. It would be the first taste of alcohol for the teetotaler.

"The only liquor I've ever had was the taste of wine at communion," he said. "I told my mother I wouldn't drink until I was 100, and she said, 'That's all right.' " The mountain was named by Adm. Richard Byrd after Vaughan joined his 1928 South Pole expedition as part of a crew driving dog teams 1,500 miles across frozen terrain to collect geological samples and other research specimens. Vaughan was born Dec. 19, 1905. He first climbed to the summit of the mountain with his wife and others three days before his 89th birthday, slowed only by an artificial knee.

Since the 1994 climb, Vaughan has had triple bypass surgery. He uses a wheelchair to go long distances. But he's begun an exercise regime to condition himself for the upcoming climb, spending hours at a therapeutic pool, walking whenever and wherever he can, he said.

At least 16 people, including medics and climbers, have signed on, said his wife, Carolyn Muegge-Vaughan, 62, who is organizing the trip. She also is heading an effort to raise the estimated \$2 million cost of the excursion. So far, organizers have collected about \$33,000 through a 99th birthday fund-raiser, said Muegge-Vaughan, who also is seeking corporate sponsors, including a champagne company. "We have a long way to go," she said. "We've got a lot of different irons in the fire." Veteran mountaineer Brian Horner is among the climbers planning to take Vaughan up the mountain. Horner, who runs a survival skills school in Anchorage, doesn't believe Vaughan will be able to tackle the climb himself, because of his frail condition.

"I don't think we have enough time, seeing how long it takes him to make it up my stairs," said Horner, who participated in a failed expedition in 1993. "His brain is there completely, but his body is letting him down, which is a shame." Last week, Horner and other expedition members practiced on a local mountain, towing Vaughan on the custom sled equipped with a pulley system. Try expressing any doubts about his stamina, though, and Vaughan quotes his oft-repeated motto, "Dream big and dare to fail." He credits that attitude for enabling

him to complete the first climb on Mount Vaughan, a year after an initial excursion failed.

The 1993 attempt was to have included sled dogs. It was the last mushing expedition before a treaty to protect wildlife banned dogs in Antarctica. But the expedition was cut short when one of the team's two planes crashed, injuring the veterinarian on board. "(The 1994 climb) was the climax of our dream," he said. "We had to risk failure to get there. We dared to fail." This is, after all, a man with an enduring thirst for adventure.

Vaughan, the last surviving member of the Byrd expedition, taught himself to mush dogs at an early age. He quit Harvard to run a dog team for a medical missionary in Newfoundland and also qualified for an exhibition of the sport at the 1932 Winter Olympics.

Vaughan's dog ties spilled over as a search and rescue officer with the Army Air Corps during World War II, when he had 425 dogs under his command. He moved to Alaska, nearly broke and without a job, at age 67, picking up funds shoveling snow, washing dishes and working as a janitor. He eventually assembled a dog team and began entering the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, completing the 1,100-mile race to Nome on his third try -- at age 72. He ran the race 10 more times.

At age 92, he organized and participated in the first Nenana-to-Nome run that, like the Iditarod, commemorates the delivery of lifesaving diphtheria serum to Nome in 1925 -- a 775-mile excursion that has become a yearly event.



Norman Vaughan, in sled, and his team practice hauling the explorer up a snow slope at the base of Flat Top Mountain in Chugach State Park.



Mountaineer Brian Horner catches Antarctic adventurer Norman Vaughan just as his sled tips on a steep side hill in the Chugach Mountains in mid-March. Vaughan wants to celebrate his 100th birthday by scaling Mount Vaughan, the mountain in Antarctica named after him by Adm. Richard Byrd during their 1928 South Pole expedition.