

Business

SECTION



Dow Up 28.74 Close 10,493.19	S&P Up 5.52 Close 1,191.08	NASDAQ Up 11.93 Close 2,042.58	AMEX Up 4.42 Close 1,454.56	NYSE Up 27.84 Close 7,140.96
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> Stocks E2-3
> Steering patients E5
> Legals E5

Friday, May 20, 2005

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Karen Cafferini, Business Editor (219) 648-3103 kcafferini@post-trib.com

Post-Tribune

BANK CALUMET LADIES' LUNCHEON



LESLIE ADKINS/POST-TRIBUNE

Susan Ershler (left), a mountain climber and retired corporate executive, greets Mary Diamonds of Palos Park, Ill., on Thursday at a luncheon at the Center for Visual and Performing Arts in Munster. She was the guest speaker at the annual women's event.

'Vision drives activity'

Lessons of business helped woman conquer Everest

By **MICHELLE L. QUINN**
Post-Tribune correspondent

MUNSTER — After countless hours of training, hiking and visualizing the top of Mount Everest, one thought kept Susan Ershler pushing toward the peak: "Remember the Rum Doodle."

The Rum Doodle is a restaurant in Katmandu, Nepal, where any person who has successfully climbed to the top of the world's highest peak eats and drinks free of charge for life, Ershler told a packed room during Bank Calumet's annual Ladies' Luncheon at the Center for Visual and Performing Arts on Thursday.

But free eats weren't what Ershler was after. The 49-year-old former sales executive, who on May 16, 2002, became part of the first husband-wife team to ever reach Mount Everest's summit, watched her husband sign the wall of the Rum Doodle because he'd already successfully climbed the mountain years before.

Getting to sign her name on that wall became the driving force for Ershler who, with husband Phil, attempted to make it to the top of Everest in 1999 but didn't quite make it because his corneas froze at 27,600 feet.

"Vision drives activity," said Ershler, of Seattle, who employed everything she ever learned as a successful businesswoman into the climb. "For so long, a snapshot of Phil and me standing at the top was what I saw, and after the first climb, I felt so lost, but I was driven to go back."

Ershler said if anyone told her 15 years ago that she would have reached the top of the other six highest mountains in the world by 1999, let alone Everest, she'd have laughed the person out of the room. But with the guidance of her husband, a climbing guide by trade, it soon became a manageable goal.

"Phil is my best friend as well as a mentor to me, and I can't imagine having accomplished the climb without learning from him," she said. "He loves taking people to the top of the mountain."

Ershler said to prepare, she projected the future by imagining the snapshot of her and Phil at the summit as well as writing 29,035 — the height of Mount Everest — on Post-It notes so that she would see the number every day as her goal, just like she would when she was a sales executive reaching a \$300 million sales goal. She then prepared physically

by spending her weekends hiking 100 times over the course of the year.

Once they got to Nepal, the Sherpas who went with them were an invaluable part of their team, which solidified for Ershler that a team is much more powerful than one person.

She compared the Sherpas to her former team members at a West Coast phone company helping her move up the ladder to vice president.

Karen Olthof, wife of Olthof Homes owner Fritz Olthof Sr., wished her husband would have seen Ershler's talk: At age 65, Fritz Olthof is planning his own Everest climb.

"I knew it was going to be like this," Karen Olthof said of the conditions Ershler described, which were cold, bleak and dangerous at best. "But she hit the nail on the head: You have to take everything one step at a time in order to make it."

Ershler is no longer in the corporate world, instead focusing on writing a book with her husband and speaking at a lot of engagements. Any other goal they set for themselves may pale a little in comparison, she said, but what they got out of it more than makes up for it.

"Everest gave me the confidence to do other things I thought were out of my reach," she said.