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Local surgeon climbs Mount Everest

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Lafayette surgeon Greg Konrath did something no other Lafayette area resident has ever done on Saturday: reached the summit of Mount Everest.

He is believed to be the first Lafayette-area resident to scale the world's highest mountain of 29,035 feet. The Journal & Courier has no records of another resident making a successful ascent. Konrath was unsuccessful in 2004 because of illness.

He and other members of Team Everest, the group that climbed with Konrath, are in Nepal on the south side of the mountain. They made it to the base camp early Tuesday and were expected to leave camp late Tuesday.

"I am very, very proud of him," his wife, Ana, said Tuesday. "This is a very hard thing to accomplish.

"I talked to him when he was in Camp 2 a few days ago. He is very happy."

Carol Vice, Konrath's nurse at Lafayette Orthopaedic Clinic, said the staff is "excited" about the surgeon's feat.

"We've been following this closely," she said. "The first time I was really on needles and pins four years ago. This has been a lot more fun."

She said Konrath is expected to return this weekend to Lafayette. She said he has patients to see next Tuesday.

Konrath dedicated the climb as a fundraiser for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Wabash Valley. Donations continue to be received in Konrath's name.

"We couldn't be happier to find out he is safe and was able to reach one of his personal goals and dreams," said Pam Brettnacher of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Wabash Valley. "Once he gets back and settled in, we hope to incorporate some kind of event with Big Brothers Big Sisters to celebrate."

Konrath left for Nepal on March 29. After settling in, he and other members of Team Everest began training. They acclimated themselves to the thin air and frigid conditions.

Their ascent began about May 7 from the base camp.

Here are excerpts of Saturday's cybercast from Alpine Ascents, the company that organized the climb and helped with training:

"Here's the word you've been waiting for: All members and Sherpas of the second contingent of the Alpine Ascents Everest Expedition are **ON THE TOP!** They got through the traffic jam, across the traverse, and up the Hillary Step to the true summit of the highest mountain on earth.

Well done, team!

"Now they have the big job ahead of them of getting down safely. We'll be following them down and letting you all know when they are safe back at the South Col.

"Yahoooooo from Base Camp!"

Here is an excerpt from a Sunday posting:

"Hello friends, family, and loved ones. Yipppeeee! We did the summit and we came down to where the oxygen is much thicker. We're very happy to be here. We're all in good shape ... Do please stand by for further adventures of Team Everest."

It is estimated that more than 2,400 people have climbed Mount Everest with about 210 deaths.

Konrath's goal is to climb the "Seven Summits" -- the highest mountain on each of the continents. He has climbed five of the seven. Remaining are Mount Kosciuszko in Australia and Mount Elbrus in Russia.
