



NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2006

# north

OF THE CITY

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# On top of the WORLD

BY CHRIS TRABER

Impossibly accomplished, they are an attractive, enviable and seemingly inseparable couple.

He, at 45, has a curriculum vitae heavy with blue chip acronyms, including chairman, CEO, founding partner, BA, LLB and soon, PhD. Montreal born and Toronto raised, he's a self-made and highly successful man. It would be safe to suggest he's a multi-millionaire, considering he has donated \$2 million to his favoured charity.

She, at 32, has an equally impressive pedigree, including an honours BA in classical music and a career as a concert pianist. She's a model, television actress and has the lithe frame and red carpet allure to work as a stunt woman and body double, recently standing in for Claudia Schiffer. A British-born adventurer, she has cycled the length of Viet Nam solo, peddling from Saigon to Hanoi, explored the jungles of Indonesia and canoed the lower Zambezi River in Zambia.

Together, they have homes in King Township, the United Kingdom, the United States and Mexico. They share a passion for globetrotting and horses — on which she show jumps and he plays polo.

Individually, they are Robert Follows and his new bride, Katrina.

Collectively, they're on top of the world.

Literally and figuratively.

Wed in 2004 atop Antarctica's Mount Vinson at 16,066 feet and -60 C, the Follows are the first couple from the Americas to climb the seven highest summits on the world's seven continents. And, as if their life together wasn't novel enough, they hold the distinction as being the first couple to get engaged, married and have their honeymoon on three of the seven summits.

Earlier this year, they stood together on the highest point of the planet, scaling Mount Everest in Nepal. Closer to heaven than anyone else at that moment in the rarefied atmosphere at 29,035 feet — 5.5 miles above sea level — they embraced each other and their shared spirit of philanthropy.






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“It was really a two-year journey,” Katrina says. “It was overwhelming. I was so happy, I cried to the point where my goggles froze.”

Personal achievement aside, for the Follows, who have also conquered the peaks of Kilimanjaro (19,563 ft.) in Tanzania, Aconcaqua (22,841 ft.) in Argentina, Elbrus (18,481 ft.) in Russia and McKinley (20,320 ft.) in Alaska, Everest was a benevolent milestone.

During a business career that began at age 12 when Robert managed an all-season maintenance service, to age 17 when his bartending business employed 60 mixologists, he has been blessed with dogged determination and a decidedly different perspective on life.

In essence, none of life’s obstacles, not unlike the mountains he climbs, are too high.

“Money and material things will never make you happy,” he says in the library of the Kingsbridge Conference Centre in King, where not too long ago he received a prestigious Top 40 Under 40 leadership award. “Realizing that is number 1. Recognizing that we have the freedom to



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Scaling Antarctica's Mount Vinson, where Robert & Katrina Follows wed.

**'Recognizing that we have the freedom to create our own reality, to program our self conscious, is an affirmation that you can grow into the person you want to become.'** — Robert Follows

create our own reality, to program our self conscious, is an affirmation that you can grow into the person you want to become."

He has followed his own advice.

He wanted a bachelor degree from the University of Toronto and earned one. He wanted a law degree from Osgoode Hall Law School at York University and earned one. So, too, with the masters in corporate philanthropy from Oxford University's Templeton College. The PhD from Oxford is a work in progress.

Addicted to nature, he sought the winsome and wild lifestyle offered by Banff, Alta. He enjoyed travel, so he opened a travel company. To support his habit for ski lift tickets, he represented a food company. In short order, he earned the firm a 50-per-cent market share.

He founded an award-winning promotional marketing agency in 1981 and sold it to St. Louis, Missouri-based Maritz Inc. in 1992. He headed Maritz Canada, boosting annual sales over the \$100-million mark. He moved to Missouri to lead global account strategy and international market development. From there, he headed to Mexico City to turn around Maritz's Latin American operations.

Today, he is the retired chairman emeritus of Maritz Canada. He is also

founding partner of STS Capital Partners, specialists in international mergers, acquisitions and corporate finance. The firm donates a substantial portion of its fees to Altruvest Charitable Services, a non-profit organization focused on giving capacity-building tools to charities free to increase their ability to maximize donations and cause-related achievement.

It's no surprise Robert is Altruvest's founder, chairman and lead supporter. In fact, the trek to the world's highest peak was under the banner of Everest for Altruvest, a \$1-million fundraising initiative to help the charity's vision fund.

Outwardly enviable, the Follows' lifestyle is premised on enjoying themselves. That they do, living in King during the summer and in their other homes as seasons dictate. They also want to ensure their good fortune will be residual for generations to come.

Robert attributes his brand of success to an untraditional upbringing, one in which he, his brother and two sisters lost their mother when he was two years old.

"I don't know how much of it is genetic or environmental," he says. "A lot of my motivation is about the big picture, about being philosophical. I believe in life planning."



Accordingly, and not the least bit morbidly, he suggests everyone should do "death bed" planning.

"Project yourself to your death bed," he says with an easy smile. "Look back on your life and what do you want to see?"

"Look at all the dos and look at all the bes. What do you have to do to be what you want to be?"

A life plan, written from your destination's point of view, is as prudent as a business plan, he says.

"A good CEO can tell you where their business will be in a week, a month, five years," he says. "We don't tend to do that with our lives and life is far more important than business."

The Follows devote at least one day each month to life planning. The seven summits can now be crossed off and new heights added. Among their goals, they list family, personal growth, relationships with friends, Altruvest, the spiritual, the physical and adventure.

"We're not human beings having a spiritual experience," he says quoting a favourite philosopher. "We're spiritual beings having a human experience." [i](#)

For Altruvest information, visit [www.altruvest.org](http://www.altruvest.org) or call 905-696-5141.