

# Surmounting all of life's challenges

That's the message University of Toronto Mississauga grad Rob Follows will deliver at opening ceremonies

By Jan Dean

Would Rob Follows have climbed the Seven Summits? Been a successful businessman? Raised millions for charity? If he had not attended the University of Toronto Mississauga?

Impossible to say. But Follows, who delivers the keynote address at the university's spring reunion on June 2, 2007 when the university celebrates its 40th anniversary, is very clear about what the school did for him.

"It taught me to think creatively and have confidence in my ideas," said Follows. "I learned to think independently and I learned the discipline and rigour of research."

Knowing that he needed top marks to get into law school - since back in the early 1980s only 16 per cent of the openings at law school were allocated to white males as institutions struggled to equalize access to education and gender and ethnic representation of the legal profession, Follows opted to study philosophy - a subject he loved.

Back then the USSR was the enemy and the Doomsday clock was set at one minute to midnight. In a speech he gave on campus in his student days, Follows likened the situation between the United States and the USSR to two pyromaniacs with matches standing on chairs in a room full of gasoline.

He wanted to find out about the 'enemy' and at UTM he took courses on Russian history and politics. The paper he wrote used Marxist theory to criticize the USSR and won Follows a lot of recognition for his new way of thinking.

In 1982 he was president of World University Service of Canada at the University of Toronto - a development organization that had a touring co-operative that would bring goods produced in the third world to Canadians. Money from sales was directly funnelled back to the producers in the Third World. He brought that co-operative to the Mississauga campus to make students more aware of the third world, what they produced, and why it was important to support those kinds of ventures.

Speeches highlighted the connection between the money spent on the arms race and starvation in the Third World and how students could get involved.

That involvement prompted his selection to be part of a peace mission to the USSR called 'Towards understanding'.

"I was chosen because I was a business person, a capitalist, and I had won the award for writing the paper criticizing the USSR in Marxist terms. It was clear I understood their theory."

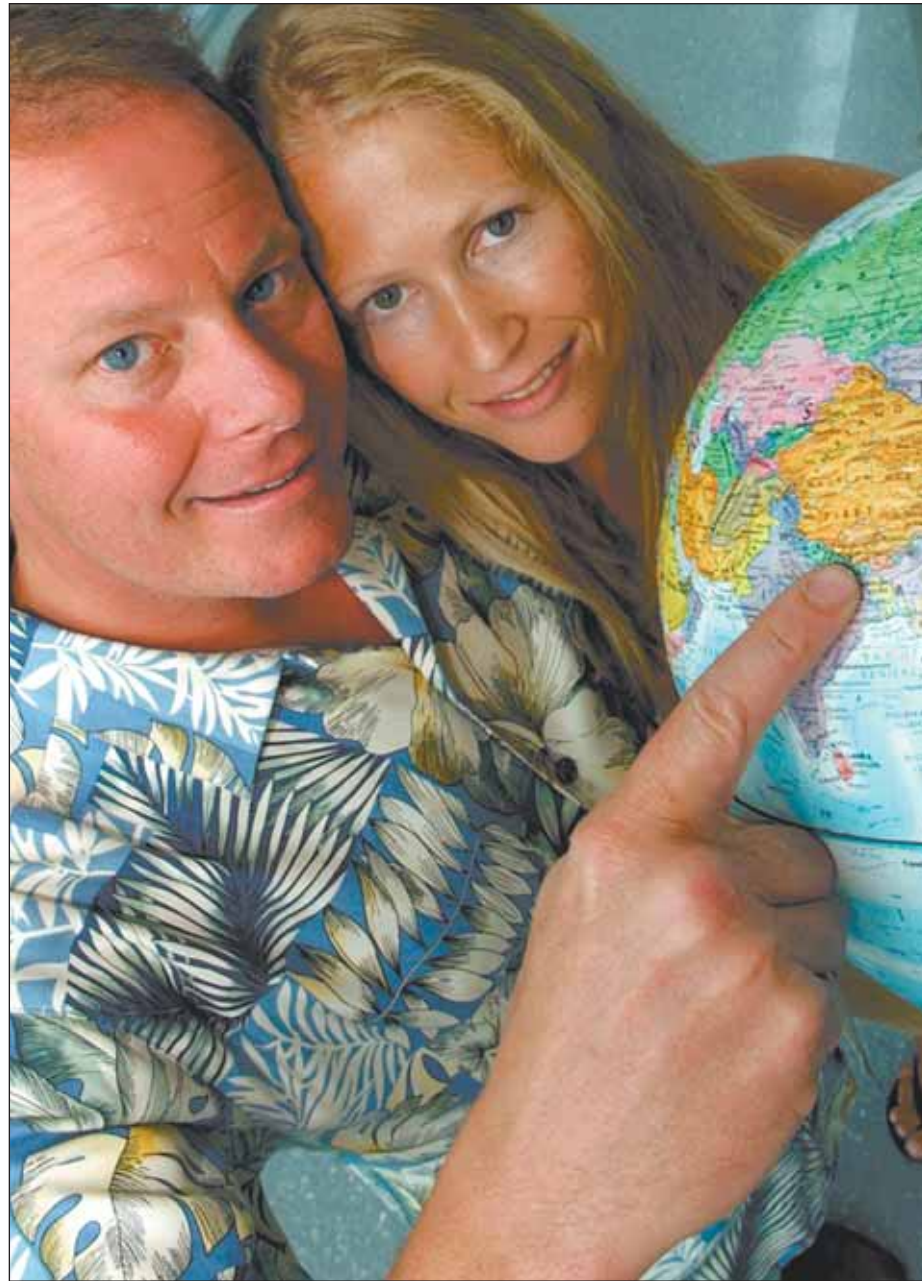
Then the Prime Minister showed up for part of it and Follows found the whole experience exciting.

They talked about world poverty, the industrial military complex and brainstormed about how to make a difference in the world. His idea was a development race and while it didn't get much attention, the two months he spent touring the USSR was an amazing experience.

And while attending the University of Toronto Mississauga he started his business in his parents' basement to finance his own education. A business he eventually sold to start his charitable foundation.

Follows would likely have been a success no matter where he went to school, but he chose the Mississauga campus.

He is still a business man, working with STS (Success to Significance) Capital



Rob and Katrina Follows: The world is full of great adventure



Rob and Katrina Follows beat Everest (above), just one of seven peaks challenged by the Mississauga couple.

Partners, a firm he co-founded. It's a boutique international mergers, acquisitions and corporate finance firm designed to help successful mid-range people (\$10 million to \$400 million) sell their businesses to strategic buyers.

He also works extensively with Altruvest, the non-profit he founded to help other non-profits improve their governance.

Along the way there has been a Ph.D in philanthropy at Oxford, and marriage to Katrina Sandling.

## Do some life planning

When Follows and his wife Katrina give the keynote speech at this month's celebrations their topic will be life planning - a subject that Follows is passionate about. There just aren't that many resources around to help people plan their lives.

He keeps a life plan file, reviews it regularly, and updates it. Not something a great many people do, and yet it's much in keeping with the University of Toronto Mississauga motto - *Tantum nobis creditum* - which translates to 'So much has been entrusted to us'.

Follows believes that life is a tremendous gift. It's precious and it's important to live one's life to the fullest. And how can you live your life to the fullest unless you sit down and figure out what you want to experience and accomplish?

Reviewing his life plan with then-fiancée Katrina started the two of them on mountain climbing - something they had never tried before. Planning those lofty goals enabled them to tie their exploits into fundraising for Altruvest.

Since becoming the first Canadian couple to climb the Seven Summits - the highest peak of each continent - the fearless duo have taken on a new challenge - going pole to pole for Altruvest. They did the North Pole last month and plan to hit the South Pole for Christmas. It's another life experience and another way to raise money for charity. Follows is very clear about his goals. "Making a billion dollars isn't part of my life plan - but raising \$1 billion in new philanthropy is. I want to be a catalyst."

## Spend time on important things

He has united his business practice and focus on philanthropy in his company, STS, believing that helping people find their own definition of significance and sell their business or control in their business to free them to spend their time and capital on something that is really important to them is a way of generating millions if not billions of dollars for philanthropy.

Follows' advice to students applies to everyone. "People should set really big goals in lots of areas of life," he said. "Plan big and dream big - work really hard and stay focused and go for it. I encourage people. If an ordinary couple like us can climb Everest and if a business guy like me can study philanthropy and become one of the world's experts in philanthropy, then you should be able to set any goals you want. It's all about focus and planning. One thing I know for sure is that if you do life planning you can fit ten times more interesting things in your life."

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