

## Antarctic adventurers with a cause

They're cold, blistered and frost-bitten, but a team of Hamilton businessmen are closing in on their goal of reaching the South Pole

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**DIANA MEHTA**  
FROM TUESDAY'S GLOBE AND MAIL  
DECEMBER 16, 2008 AT 3:52 AM EST

Andrea Peckart received a birthday phone call from the Antarctic the other day. It was from her older brother Steve, one of four middle-aged Hamilton-area businessmen braving strong winds and brutal temperatures to raise money for children's programs in their communities.

The South Pole for Kids expedition, made up of Ms. Peckart's brother, Steve Stipsits, and his friends Fred Losani, Peter Turkstra and Mark MacLennan, set out for the Antarctic on Nov. 27 and has raised \$456,000 to date during a 200-kilometre journey on cross-country skis.

"It's had its ups and downs. Steve's got a bad cough, but they're within sight of the [South] Pole," Ms. Peckart said.

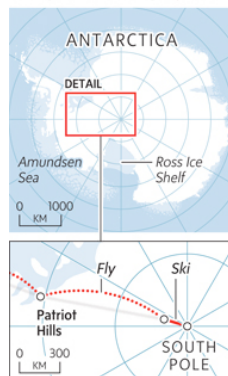
But only three members of the team, plus their guide, will reach the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station. Mr. MacLennan had to be airlifted out on Friday due to badly frostbitten fingers.

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### *Skiing to the pole*

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Four businessmen have gone to the end of the Earth to raise money for children's programs.



NINIAN CARTER/THE GLOBE AND MAIL  
SOURCE: SOUTHPOLEFORKIDS.CA



"I'd rather be out there on the ice," he said from his hotel room in Punta Arenas, Chile, where he said he will wait for the others.

According to Mr. MacLennan, skiing toward the Earth's southernmost point was easily the hardest thing he has ever done.

"When we were out on the ice, it was hell on Earth," he said. "There's nothing but emptiness - just white, and then blue sky."

The team, led by an American guide, spent up to 10 hours a day trekking across a frozen plateau, making short stops every hour or so to fuel up on high-energy snacks. Each member had to guard against sweating while skiing, and then freezing when stationary.

"It's a very delicate balance," Mr. MacLennan said.

While pushing on in 24-hour daylight, counting the number of times they planted their ski poles into the ground was often all the team could do to mark the passage of time, he added.

Mr. MacLennan was the rookie on the expedition, the only one who had not been to the North Pole with the rest of the team in 2006. Not finishing with the rest of the group "hurt a lot," but just being on the excursion has had an effect, he said.

"I used to be a couch potato and now I'm doing things I never would have done before," he said.

The cost of the expedition was borne entirely by the team.

The money raised will be allocated to a list of charities and programs helping city children.

Team members also encouraged pupils at elementary schools in Hamilton and Wentworth to raise their own money through something called the Snowflake Campaign.

All cash collected will go toward anti-poverty initiatives such as breakfast programs or school trips, said April Morganti, officer of innovation and partnership with the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board.

Thirty-seven charities have applied to receive donations so far, but the final decision on who gets what will be made by the team members when they return.

Until the excursion members fly home - they hope on Dec. 21 - Shelly Losani will continue worrying about her husband's health in the harsh Antarctic weather.

But she knows little will stop him from trekking toward his goal on heavily blistered feet.

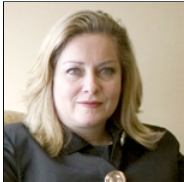
"They're very cold, they're very tired, but the push is on to get there," she said.

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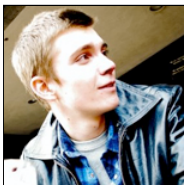
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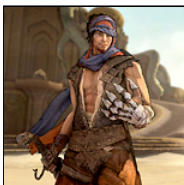
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