

NATIVE *foreigner* M A G A Z I N E

Post-travel INSPIRATION

Find out how returning travelers are making a difference in the lives of others.

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COVER PHOTO: Photo of Mt. Everest by Stephen Lioy. See more of his photos on page 66.

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STRETCH EXPER

From the outside, it looks like a typical office building — rectangular, brown façade. In most respects it is like every run-of-the mill building, until you step inside one particular office. In that instant, you realize that looks truly can be deceiving.

Inside **The Prouty Project**, you won't find gray cubicle walls or drab decor. Instead, the splashes of bright color and large open spaces represent everything this company is about: innovation. From ropes courses to mock search-and-rescue missions, the Prouty Project is using unconventional practices to stretch the minds of business leaders.

But what is truly remarkable about this small business is the impact its employees are making outside of the 9-to-5 grind.

The Prouty Project, which is a strategic planning and business development company located in Minneapolis, Minn., has been stretching the abilities of not only its clients, but also its community members. Led by four senior consultants, the team at The Prouty Project is spreading its non-traditional ideas around the world through international excursions.

While the Prouty Project was stretching its clients to think about its com-



CONDITIONS



panies, leaders and teams, Prouty wondered what its own employees were doing to stretch themselves. From this question emerged STRETCH Expeditions.

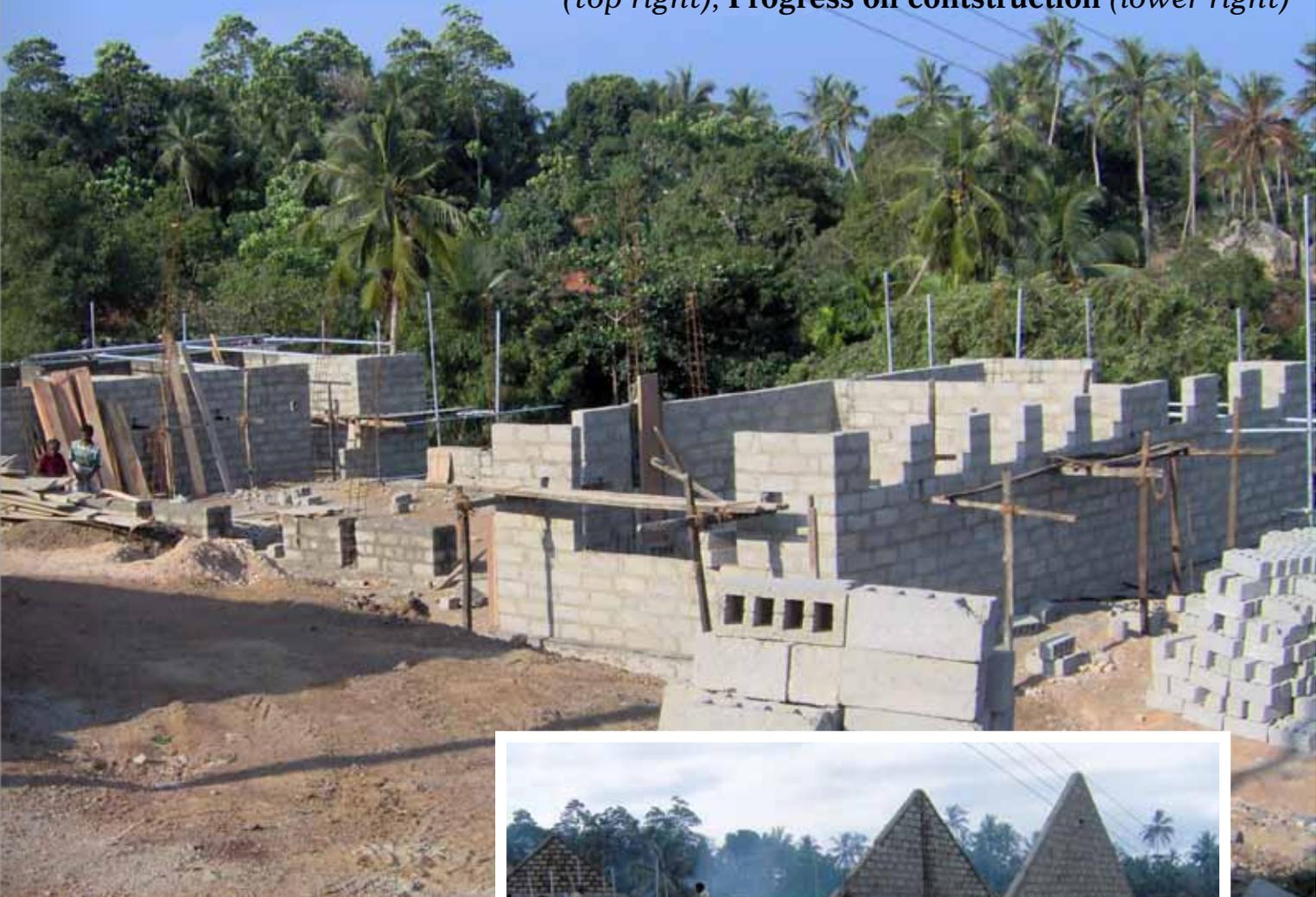
These expeditions began in 1999 when Prouty Project founder, Jeff Prouty, decided to tackle the grueling physical strains of Mt. Kilimanjaro. Prouty, who was accompanied by colleagues and clients, became part of the first STRETCH Expedition. The Prouty Project has organized a physical or service-based project every year since that first climb. The objective of each expedition is to create a “once in a lifetime experience every year.”

From running the Paris Marathon to teaching English in Vietnam, each of the expeditions is designed to stretch the limita-

tions of participants. Individuals, who often meet as strangers, quickly learn to break down barriers and work together as a group. Personal and professional backgrounds aside, participants share a strong desire to use their skills to achieve a common goal.

John Evenstad, a Business Development Executive with Genesis10 in St. Paul, is one such person.

Visit to refugee camp in Sri Lanka (top left); Starting construction on community center in Sri Lanka (top right); Progress on construction (lower right)



Evenstad signed up for his first STRETCH Expedition in 2006 to help with Tsunami relief efforts in Sri Lanka. Not quite sure how to communicate and be of service, Evenstad realized one of his most striking physical attributes — his height — could play a part in the reconstruction efforts. During the workday he handed cinder blocks to people doing the



masonry, but in his free time he was able to interact with some of those most affected by the Tsunami.

While the physical work was exhausting, one of the most difficult aspects of the expedition was speaking with families who had lost loved ones. “The hardest thing from an emotional standpoint was when we went to a site where people had been displaced and were living in a wooden building,”

Evenstad recalled. “I inquired about a picture of a young boy that I saw. The family told me it was their son; he had died in the Tsunami. The mother had been holding onto him and her other son but was being swept away by the water. In a split second she needed to grab onto something, and make a decision on which son she would save, and which one to let go of.”

These types of personal experiences have inspired Evenstad to continue to partake in STRETCH Expeditions. “My world view has changed,” Evenstad remarked. “I think about all of the things we complain about and think

they’re so petty.” He has since been to Peru to help build a birthing center for pregnant women and most recently joined the group in the Galapagos

**John Evenstad gets
berry bushes in the
left); Medica**

Islands for a reforestation project.

Coordinated by volunteer organization **UBELONG**, Prouty Project participants spent more than a week in the dense jungles of the Galapagos. Housed in a wooden building with five rooms, the accommodations were far from the lavish resorts that some vacationers might envision. Instead of enjoying plush king-sized beds and central air-conditioning, Evenstad and the other group members slept in bunk beds surrounded by mosquito nets.

The goal, however, wasn’t to soak up modern-day amenities. Those who signed-up were ready to get their hands dirty...although perhaps not quite as much as what they actually did.

Workdays, which usually spanned from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. with a one-hour lunch break, were spent in the jungle clearing non-indigenous raspberry bushes. The bushes, which had started to run rampant, not only killed off the natural vegetation, but also



...ing ready to cut rasp-
...ne Galapagos (bottom
... Clinic in Peru (right)



forced turtles away from the area. As a result, the turtles were forced to nest in lower areas, leaving their eggs unprotected and accessible to prey.

“The goal was to get rid of the raspberries and plant coffee trees, which are indigenous and start to reverse that impact,” explained Evenstad. “Over a three-day period we went through a progression of cutting the raspberries, clearing them and then planting coffee trees.”

While the physical hardships and primitive conditions might dissuade some from participating, Evenstad remains driven to serve based on the connections he makes with the locals. “I knew since the first trip that I liked to connect with the people. It’s been a little difficult because

I like being able to build things with my own hands and not lose touch with the earth, which I think you can get caught up in, in our society.



of the language – I don't speak Spanish and I didn't speak Sinhalese, the local Sri Lankan language. But wherever you go, you find that connection."

Connections and interactions are especially important when you are counting on other team members to complete a task. For some of the more physically strenuous excursions, team members stretch their physical capabilities beyond what they may have ever deemed possible.

For Prouty Project Executive Vice President Peter Bailey, these expeditions have not only tested his brawn, but have also expanded his international

reach. Whether he is offering construction aid in the Peruvian Amazon or helping physically challenged participants compete in an adventure race, Bailey has learned something about himself and his life through each of these expeditions. "I like getting back to simplicity. I like being able to build things with my own hands and not lose touch with the earth, which I think you can get caught up in, in our society. I think that's where traveling helps me stay grounded."

No stranger to crossing borders, Bailey has visited more than 45 countries and understands the importance of bridging cultural gaps and changing perceptions through first-hand experiences. Working in Indonesia for two years in the 1990s, Bailey was well aware of negative stereotypes many natives held toward U.S. citizens.

Being the only American in a town of 50,000



Starting construction in the Amazon (left); Dancing after work (right)

people, Bailey felt an obligation to present himself in a positive, respectable light. “I had a responsibility to my company and to my country to be a good American,” Bailey remembered.

Now, through both his international business focus and the STRETCH Expeditions, Bailey is able to continue to learn about other cultures and leave pieces of his own behind. Since joining the Prouty Project in 2008, Bailey has already participated in three expeditions and will lead this summer’s sailing expedition through the British Virgin Islands.

This next challenge brings together the skills of 24 individuals over the course of six days. Teams of six people on four 50-foot yachts will be forced to test their nautical skills by sailing

at night and maneuvering around obstacles, in addition to communicating in Morse code and working under pressure.

Like previous expeditions, sailing through the Caribbean is sure to present a unique set of challenges and

rewards. Perhaps one of the most important rewards being a sense of camaraderie.

Those who were once strangers, turn into lifelong friends as a result of these expeditions. As Bailey states, “There is a bonding that can happen when you’re overseas doing good work with a humanitarian or egalitarian — all of us are pulling together, making it work together — experience.”

As the team at The Prouty Project knows, travel brings people from different cultures, professions and backgrounds together. But, most importantly, travel stretches your mind, your body and your soul. As the quote painted on their office wall says:

“A mind stretched by a new experience, can never go back to its old dimensions.”

~Oliver Wendell Holmes *

