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Gerardo Perez was the only of his four companions who was able to “summit” (reach the top) of Mt. Aconcagua (22,842 feet high) in January. *Photo courtesy of Gerardo Perez*



West Valley Operator Scales Tallest Mountain in South America

- Gerardo Perez has his sight set on Alaska’s Mt. McKinley – the tallest mountain in North America.

By JIMMY STROUP

(April 2, 2008) The “Seven Summits” are the tallest peaks on each continent. Gerardo Perez, a bus operator from East Valley Division 8, spent January reaching the summit of Mt. Aconcagua in Argentina, the first success in his quest to climb all seven.

“The summit is 22,842 feet but getting there was tough,” Perez says. “I was 20 feet from the summit – I could see it – and I had to stop and rest. I mean, I could almost touch it but I was so tired. You’re so high that when you walk only a few steps, you’re already tired.”

Perez has been mountain climbing – mountaineering – for about 10 years, but the outdoors have always called to him. His childhood home in Puerto Rico was by a river and he says he was always hiking the river trails, swimming and fishing.

“When I got to the U.S., I moved to



Gerardo Perez, an 18-year Metro bus operator, scales mountains in his spare time. He recently climbed Mt. Aconcagua in Argentina, the tallest mountain in South America. *Photo by Jimmy Stroup*

California and went for a hike with my brother-in-law in the Sierras," he says. "He thought I had some skill and encouraged me to go to Mount Whitney (14,495 feet) and give it a try. The first time, I didn't make it up. The second time, I made the summit, and from then on I was hooked."

Since becoming hooked, there isn't a mountain in California he hasn't climbed – most several times. Well, there is Mt. Shasta to climb, but Perez says he's got plans to check that off his list.

But Mt. Baldy? Check. Mt. Whitney? Check. Mts. Sangorgonia, San Jacinto and White? Check. He's even climbed Mt. Rainier in Washington state and scaled the tallest and third-tallest mountains in Mexico.

Baseball at 14,000 feet

Perez was unable to summit 20,320-foot Mt. McKinley the last time he tried because he was injured at 14,000 feet, felled by the National Pastime.

"Somebody [brought] out . . . a plastic baseball bat and ball – I don't know where it even came from," he says. "We were stuck where we were because of weather, so we started to play baseball to pass the time. I fell running to first base and pulled my hamstring really badly.

"It was the first climb in the history of Mt. McKinley where a person had to be flown off the mountain for a non-climbing injury. I've talked to the rangers who work there since and they tell me, 'You know, you're famous up here,'" he laughs.

The injury forced Perez to sit patiently on the side of the frozen mountain for 10 days while the weather cleared enough for a helicopter to fly him out. He'll be back in Alaska in May to re-attempt the North American giant and check off the second of his Seven Summits.

- [Continued:](#) Part II of Gerardo Perez's summit of Mt. Aconcagua.