

# THE DAILY RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK'S SOURCE FOR LAW, REAL ESTATE, FINANCE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1908



Tom Mitchell of Bergmann Associates PC rappels down the side of First Federal Plaza in Rochester on Friday to support the Seneca Waterways Council of Boy Scouts of America. The fundraiser was held in conjunction with the Boy Scouts 100th anniversary.

## Local lawyers on the ropes for a good cause

BY JOHN FULMER

There may be no better way to draw attention to oneself than to dangle on a rope from one of city's tallest buildings.

A crowd of rubberneckerers gathered on Main and State streets Friday, pointing cameras and craning their necks while shielding their eyes from the brilliant sun and buzzing to each other about the spectacle.

Forty brave souls rappelled straight down First Federal Plaza — Downtown's pinnacle of copper-colored plate-glass — through much of the day, part of 21 Stories for Scouts, a fundraiser for the Seneca Waterways Council of The Boy Scouts of America.

Six lawyers were part of the volunteers and each raised \$1,000 for the event, designed to help the council promote urban scouting. Two of them, Kevin Mulvehill and Richard Tucker, work for Phillips Lytle LLP, which has offices in the building. Neither were experienced rappellers — although Tucker had done a little in the Army and Mulvehill had tried indoor rappelling. Both admitted to a touch of nervousness and apprehension.

Mitchell Nusbaum of Woods Oviatt Gilman LLP; Timothy Lynch and Laura Quatela of Eastman Kodak Co. and David Lippitt, a solo practitioner, also volunteered.

Before his big leap, Mulvehill said the coordinators set up some practice walls in the building, but he never had approached anything like his scheduled 300-foot drop. His girlfriend was not too crazy about his tackling the challenge, he said, "but I have faith in the Boy Scouts and that it will be done appropriately."

Tucker said his wife encouraged him to wear a Spiderman shirt. He scouted the rooftop location on Thursday and scoped out some of the gear that was being provided.

"It's windy up there," he said. "There's a good view looking out; looking down, it's a doozy."

His second doubts about the sanity of the enterprise were alleviated when he saw the sophisticated equipment on hand. He was impressed, and figured he'd be fine.

"The hand-pulley system gives you a great deal of control. It's obviously very safe," Tucker said.

The rappelling route went right past a conference room window in Phillips Lytle's office, and Tucker could watch coordinators testing the lines.

"It's like the kind of stuff you see on TV."

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The event marked the first of its kind in New York State and coincides with the Scouts' 100th anniversary. Several coordinators said rappelling is the kind of exercise that captures the true ethos of Boy Scouts. While no Boy Scouts were involved directly — too young when it comes to liability — the exercise exemplifies the kind of mental and physical challenge the organization feels Scouts should experience.

Over the Edge — the Canadian company that set up 21 Stories — specializes in what its website calls “a headline-grabbing fundraiser for nonprofit organizations.” Company President and CEO Paul Griffith and his team set up a staging area on First Federal's 19th floor, part of Bergmann's offices.

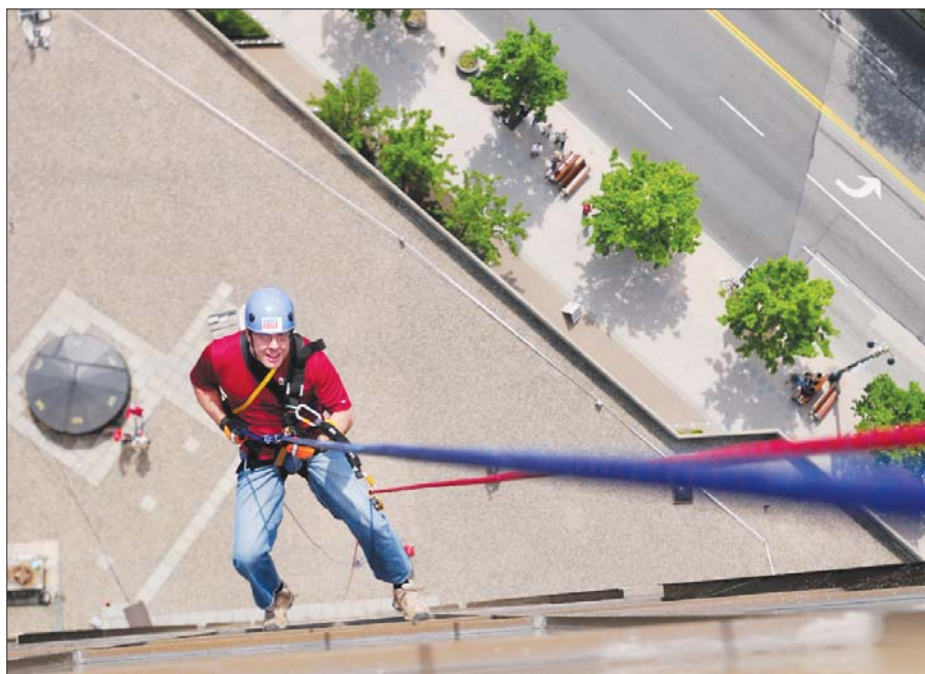
Over the Edge staffers in orange T-shirts hustled about preparing rappellers for the plunge, weaving around tables covered with brightly colored hooks and pulleys, multi-colored ropes and robin's egg-blue hard hats.

On the roof, two floors up and accessible only by stairs, Griffith grinned and said an “OSHA-compliant work site” had been set up.

Over the Edge's mission is to raise \$50 million in 10 years to help North American nonprofits. The company got its start six years ago and made its U.S. debut in 2008. Fifty such events are booked for this year. The Boy Scouts are one of his major clients, Griffith said.

“It's growing, and the reason is that things nonprofits have done in the past haven't worked in the past,” he said. “This is out-of-the-box. It's not run of the mill.”

Jeff Leenhouts, vice president of Home Leasing LLC and 21 Stories chairman, has two sons in Webster's Cub Scout Pack 463. He called himself a “Scouting dad” and said he wants to see more after-school activities made available for urban Scouts. His boys already have worked on community activities and benefited from the “neat skills” and values the Scouts promote, he said. Leenhouts knows resources have been lacking, but the event was a way to address that —



VASILY BAZUK

Vince Press of Bergmann Associates PC rappels down the side of First Federal Plaza.

and Friday's event was a good remedy.

“It's not a golf tournament; it's not a gala. There are hundreds of those,” he said. “It's one of those things that takes you out of your comfort zone.”

Seneca Waterways Council Director of Field Services Del Newquist was scheduled to make his own First Federal descent at high noon.

“There are no real skills involved,” he said. “The trick is you have to trust the ropes.”

Bergmann CEO Tom Mitchell — suited up in aerodynamic gear and heavy gloves awaiting his turn to scale down the building — said he was terrified of heights, but was ready to help a good cause.

“City kids need all the outlets they can get,” he said. “I couldn't think of a better way to contribute.”

Vince Press, Bergmann's public relations manager, encouraged Mitchell but originally hadn't volunteered himself. Mitchell and others at Bergmann told Press to put his money where his mouth was and, on Friday he, too, was suited up and ready to go, a last-minute volunteer.

“We shamed him into it,” Mitchell said.

Mulvehill and Tucker made the drop at 10 a.m., returning to the 19th floor shortly thereafter to chat, almost out of breath, with Phillips Lytle Client Development Manager Kathy Gibbons, who also admitted a fear of heights.

Mulvehill and Tucker, flushed with excitement, both called the experience awesome, and said the worst part was going over the edge. They laughed together, amazed by what had just transpired. Volunteering to rappel had started out as a joke in their office, “a ha-ha thing” they never before imagined doing, that now is a part of their resume.

Both also said they were surprised at how tired they felt.

“About three-quarters of the way down, you start to realize it,” Tucker said.

Just then, an Over the Edge staffer told him his arms would ache for a couple of days.

Tired or not, there was no mercy for the pair of volunteers: Both had to change their clothes and go back to work.

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