

community

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Scaling The Peak

Athens Man in Party Climbing Mexican Mountain

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A highly specialized team of experienced mountaineers which is scaling a snow-capped, 18,700-foot mountain in Mexico this week includes a young man who grew up in Athens.

Climbing Orizaba, third highest peak in North America, won't be an easy task. But for Lucian Spataro, 23-year-old son of Dorothy Spataro and Lucian P. Spataro Sr., both of Athens, reaching the top of the volcanic mountain is a secondary goal.

He will be one of three divers on the team sent on a

record-making plunge into a lake.

What the young climbers, all in their 20s, are shooting for is a high-altitude dive which they believe will set a world record.

"Not even the Navy has ever dived that high up," said expedition business manager Spataro.

Divers said they hope to find out about the effect entering water at such an altitude has on divers.

Diving is tricky at high altitude because the effects of nitrogen on divers' bodies at various high points is not what it is at sea level, Spataro said.

The Navy's diving tables to help divers avoid the bends are based on dives at sea level. The team hopes to "adjust" those tables for high altitudes.

Team members said they don't know what they will find at the lake — it could be five feet or hundreds of feet deep.

A variety of diving gear and respirators will have to be lugged up the mountain because the men will need to improvise at the scene. Special respirators will be needed because the mountain is semi-active and belching sulphur, Spataro said.

That particular problem is

actually working for them, though, because of its side effect. The volcanic heat keeps the lake from freezing over despite its altitude.

The divers said most lakes this high above sea level are frozen year-round.

Team members said they have trained for months by running with full packs in the Santa Catalina Mountains.

The expedition will use four-wheel drive vehicles for the major approach across rough high-altitude lava fields, where a base camp will have to be set up at about 13,000 feet and radio communications

organized.

A smaller group will set out for a 17,000-foot elevation, where another campsite will be dug into ice and snow.

The team will push on to the summit, where they plan descend into the crater, using oxygen masks and sulphur-protective respirators.

Spataro lived in Athens 12 years after his family moved to Athens from Arkansas in 1967. He is a graduate of Athens High School, attended Ohio University and graduated from the University of Tuscon. He is now doing graduate work in Tuscon.