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How Jerry Fogel Conquered Colorado's 14K Peaks



Jerry Fogel

The sun is just coming up over Snow Mass Mountain over Aspen and beginning to melt the four inches of snow that had fallen the night before. **Jerry Fogel**, his brother, and a friend have just climbed the 14,000-foot mountain and are beginning their descent back down the snow-packed mountain. Then, all of a sudden, the three men slip and take off like a bullet down the mountain toward rocks that could have quickly taken their lives.

"That was one of the stupidest moves we ever made," Fogel said, recounting the handful of times his life had been risked while attempting to pull off a lofty goal to climb every 14,000-foot peak in Colorado.

Fogel, current co-chairman of **Kessinger/Hunter**, spends his day-to-day still garnering business for the Cushman & Wakefield-affiliated firm. Over the course of his 40-year career, he's worked up an impressive rap sheet: assembling two city blocks for the Kansas City Star and Knight-Ridder Company, co-brokering a 401,000-square-foot build-to-suit for Pure Fishing within a few short months, and has even formulated clean air policies for the Kansas City metro.



After climbing every 14,000-foot peak in Colorado, Jerry Fogel celebrated by taking a trip to the base camp of Mount Everest.

But throughout his career, Fogel spent time training and preparing to hike every one of Colorado's 54 14,000-foot peaks with his brother, who had moved to the area and wanted to remain close with Fogel. He accomplished that goal - number 1137 to do so, in fact - in 2002 at age 62.

"Certain things in your life you want to be able to tie a bow around, and say that's done," Fogel said. "And I did that. I can wake up at night and smile and say I did that. That's pretty cool."

To celebrate, Fogel and his wife took a 48-hour train ride through China to Lhasa, Tibet, where they stopped at the Rongbok Monastery, the final village at which Sir Edmund Hillary said his prayers with monks before becoming the first person to successfully climb the mountain in 1956. He and his wife hiked the six kilometers to the base camp of Everest at 17,300 feet.

"It was just beautiful, and you had this huge sense that there are things that are almost insurmountable in life, and that would be one of them - to climb that big sucker," he said. "Someone asked me once if I had ever thought about climbing it. I don't think I needed to. I don't know whether I could have made it - that didn't influence my outlook. What did influence my outlook was my respect for how hard it is to even get to the base camp. It's hard."



As Republican chairman of Jackson County, Jerry Fogel helped bring the Republican National Convention to Kansas City in 1976. Above, he stands next to President Gerald Ford, at the convention in Kemper Arena.

So what did accomplishing such a feat teach him about himself?

"I've never been a quitter. Sometimes the really hard things in life are really rewarding to do, and I find that in business as well," he said.

Take for instance, in 2002 when Fogel spent almost two years assembling land for the Kansas City Star's print pavilion by closing streets, vacating alleys, and taking utilities out of the ground.

"It was a year and a half of very difficult work because we had no power of condemnation," Fogel said. "I had to convince all these property owners they needed to sell that real estate to me and I wouldn't tell them who the buyer was. Could I do that again? I don't know."



One of Fogel's toughest assignments was to assemble two city blocks for the Kansas City Star in 2002.

He draws parallels between scaling a mountain and doing business.

"You just have to take one step at a time," he said. "That's the single greatest benefit of all that climbing; To know what it is to persevere. You can't be afraid to take some risk - even just the risk of failure. You may not be good enough. You may not be able to do it. Whether it's the work you're doing, you learn you have the capability or capacity to fight your way to the top of the mountain. That's what mountain climbing has done for me."

Focused on Kansas City's industrial market, Fogel said the sector is strong and getting stronger, especially with the advent of the intermodal.



BNSF Intermodal in Edgerton, Kansas

"That changed the paradigm," he said. "It's changed it because it's made us more of a regional distribution point, much stronger than we were before."

It doesn't hurt that the automotive industry - especially Ford and GM - are booming, begetting other businesses like suppliers. Technology is having a substantial impact as well, feeding industrial real estate by making logistics more efficient.

He recounts a meeting with Coleman years ago, when the company was scouting for locations for its 1.1 million-square-foot build-to-suit.

"We were out in Johnson County where they were going to build the intermodal, but it was still growing corn. It was literally cornfields. We go out there on this dusty old road, we come up over this great crossing and there are great big ribbons of steel - the railroad," he said. "It was late in the day, I caught this stunning visual out of my eye and stopped the car, and it looked like the rails went into the horizon. It looked like two lanes - four ribbons of a highway. I said, 'Do you guys know what's over that horizon? Everyone looked out and saw this stunning visual and said no. I said, 'That's China.' And they just howled."