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## 2010 Aspen Medical Products Most Inspirational Athlete Award: Paul Fejtek

Presented annually to an athlete who never ceases to inspire those around him (or her) through strength, athleticism, ability and true dedication to the CAF mission.

By Lauren Hinton

Standing at 29,029 ft. above sea level, Mount Everest, the highest mountain peak on earth, attracts experienced climbers with a magnetic allure to take on the challenge to be on top of the world. Few make it to the top, and historically, of those who do, one of every ten perish. This is the risk that Paul Fejtek and his wife Denise took on Sunday, May 23, 2010.

Not only did Paul and Denise Fejtek summit Mount Everest, but Paul did it with a physical challenge. This was the finale of a bigger conquest – Seven Summits for CAF. Everest was the crowning achievement in the Fejtek's Seven Summits for CAF – a risky yet rewarding endeavor to climb all the world's seven highest summits while raising funds for the Challenged Athletes Foundation®.

"It was exhilarating, and somewhat surreal to stand on the very highest point on Earth," says Paul. "It was also quite rewarding and empowering to look across the horizon and realize the achievement of our Seven Summits goal that we worked so hard for so many years to complete." This extraordinary accomplishment which began in 2002, as well as his philanthropic spirit and dedication is why CAF is honored to recognize Paul as the 2010 Most Inspirational Athlete.

Paul, who was born with Brachial Plexus Palsy, which is a paralysis of the arm due to an injury to the brachial plexus (a network of nerves that originates in the upper spine), grew up like any other kid. He acknowledges his mom as his greatest motivator and the one who instilled the attitude that he now embraces "to live his life to the fullest."

"From a very early age my mom got me involved in all kinds of sports in an effort to strengthen my arm," says Paul. "With her constant support and encouragement, it also provided the added benefit of building my self confidence. Realizing I could achieve just one small goal encouraged me to set another bigger one, and then another."

Now, thanks to Paul and Denise's Seven Summits for CAF and their Everybody to Everest group, a unique team of 25 fit and altruistic individuals who challenged themselves to reach the legendary Mt. Everest Base Camp, more than \$108,000 has been raised for CAF. "The mission of the Challenged Athletes Foundation is important to me because I have experienced first-hand how sports can invigorate the human spirit, especially within those individuals with physical challenges," says Paul.

"CAF and their athletes including 'One Arm Willie' Stewart have been a huge inspiration to me," explains Paul. "I figured that climbing the Seven Summits and Mt. Everest for CAF would be a good way for me to return the favor and hopefully inspire others to go after their dreams, no matter how big their obstacles may be."

