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This executive's lunch breaks include aerobatics

John Rost is an entrepreneur with an insatiable appetite for adventure.



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The next time you find yourself thinking that you would really love to do x, y or z (fill in the dream), but can't because of x, y or z (fill in the excuse), repeat these words: John Rost.

Rost is the founder and president of Fiesta Auto Insurance, one of the fastest

growing companies in the United States, so he's a busy guy.

But when he's not at his Huntington Beach headquarters, you can find him rappelling down waterfalls in the jungle.

Unless, of course, he's out climbing volcanoes.

Or talking to audiences about how he became the 35th American to climb the highest peak on each continent.

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KEVIN SULLIVAN, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

John Rost, founder of Fiesta Auto Insurance, stands with his RV-10, which he hand-built from a kit in his garage.

ROST

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Or building an experimental airplane from a kit.

Or setting world records in that airplane.

Or jumping out of that airplane on the runway because it's on fire and, hours later, jumping onto another airplane to make the business meeting in Chicago.

"I'm sitting there on my flight thinking, 'I'm nuts,'" Rost says of the fire incident. "It's not normal."

There are others who agree.

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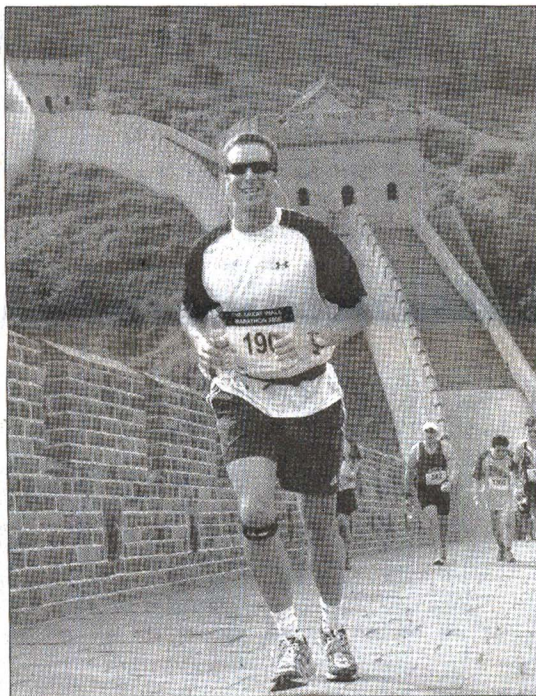
He recently spoke to an audience of adventurers in Australia about his exploits and a woman came up to him after it was over.

"You must be a very self-ish person," she told him.

"And I understand what she meant," he says. "I don't have limitations, for whatever reason. And I'm not always sure if it's a good thing."

Rost, 46, is the father of three. He remembers visiting his children's elementary school before climbing Everest in 2004. The students gave him pictures they drew. It wasn't until later that he realized nearly every one of them drew a picture of him, not holding the American flag victoriously on the summit, but falling off the mountain.

The scary thing is that it's that very risk that attracted Rost. He had read the best-seller "Into Thin



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOHN ROST

John Rost smiles while running the Great Wall Marathon in China in 2005 despite having only ever run five miles at one time. His girlfriend invited him; she was running marathons on all seven continents

Air," Jon Krakauer's account of the most disastrous single climb on the highest mountain in the world. Eight people died. Most people read the page-turner with fear in their hearts. "I thought, 'That sounds cool.'"

But it's not like he's foolish, he insists; he did use supplemental oxygen on Everest, after all.

And he always wears a parachute when he flies upside-down.

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Rost and his little sister,

Suzanne, were raised by a single mom who spent their childhood pursuing degrees in social work while working part-time jobs. They were latchkey kids, first in an apartment in Queens and then in a motor home in Mesa, Ariz.

When Rost, who had a reputation for ditching school, told his guidance counselor he wanted to go to college, he was handed literature on trade schools.

Rost didn't see his dad much. He was a fighter pilot in Vietnam, which might



Rost holds pictures of his three children after climbing Mount Everest in 2004. Rost climbed all Seven Summits in 20 months, becoming the 35th American to do so.

"I don't have limitations, for whatever reason."

JOHN ROST

guy who spent four sub-zero nights in the death zone on Everest during a snowstorm. "I remember thinking, 'How absurd, you're about to do something that could be the last 24 hours of your life.'"

It was just a thought, though. Of the seven on his team, Rost was one of three to summit. Six climbers on other teams died trying that season.

"He is very calm about risking his life," his sister says. "I keep wondering, What else is there?"

Well, the Virgin Galactic space flight, for one. Rost plans to pay the \$200,000 fee for the suborbital ride. He also wants to ride a camel from Morocco to Egypt. "And somewhere along the way it would be fun to get into submersibles at the North Pole," he says, in the same way that someone might say it would be fun to get apple picking in the fall.

He cuts out pictures of whatever adventure he is chasing at the moment and tapes them to his bathroom mirror so he sees them every morning. Right now there's a picture of the next airplane he wants with the caption "coming soon" and the number of Fiesta businesses he wants to open. He has 120 in 15 states. By 2016 he wants to have 2,600.

"I'm living it," he says. "I believe it."

So do I.

explain the missing fear gene.

After graduating from Northern Arizona University in 1986 with a finance degree, Rost set out on his first real adventure: He had a guy fly him above the Arctic Circle and drop him off with instructions to return in a week. He trekked across the tundra with a shotgun, fishing and hunting and looking out for grizzlies.

Four years later he had his own pilot's license. And by the time he started Fiesta Auto Insurance in 1999, he was using his lunch break to practice aerobatics over the ocean.

His sister said she was "terrified" when she found out Rost was building his own plane. "I remember him tearing apart a toaster once when we were kids and he couldn't put it back together."

But build it he did, from a \$200,000 kit. He put it to-

gether nights and weekends in his Huntington Beach garage. And once he built it, well, why not fly it as fast as he could?

The single-engine RV-10 was finished in the summer of 2007. He has since set two world records: Long Beach to Dallas in 6 hours, 41 minutes and 52 seconds, and Phoenix to Chicago in 7 hours, 2 minutes and 58 seconds.

On his way home from the second record, somewhere over Kansas, ice began to freeze on the plane's wings, making them heavier and heavier. The plane could snap into a spin at any second. Rost sent out a Mayday and was lucky enough to make it to a small runway, landing blind in a snowstorm.

"It was the most scared I've ever been," he says. It took half an hour for his hands to stop shaking.

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That's saying a lot for a