

Brother Martin senior towers over New Orleans

By Beth Donze
Clarion Herald

As a 2-year-old, Zack Langley would scale doorways and leap from his perch as far as he could.

So when Zack, a Brother Martin senior, received an invitation to rappel down the 26-story Benson Tower in downtown New Orleans, his response was a resounding yes.

"I could see the reflections in the windows of cars and (of) my family on the ground, way down there. It was cool," said Zack, recalling the high-altitude feat he accomplished last month alongside Saints executive vice president Rita Benson and others who raised at least \$1,000 for the Louisiana Special Olympics.

At 18, Zack was one of the youngest participants in the rappelling event called "Black and Gold over the Edge." To earn the perk, he raised \$1,500 for the Special Olympics in just 10 days after setting up a page on Facebook and soliciting donations from the Brother Martin school family. Throughout his 10-day push, Zack focused on raising money for the Special Olympics, and was only vaguely aware of the rappelling incentive.

"We didn't even think it was possible to raise that much money because we started way late," Zack said. "We did a fairly efficient job."

Also motivating Zack was his 7-year-old sister, Zoey, who was born with a developmental disorder.



ZACK LANGLEY

"She's too young now to compete in the Special Olympics, but we still do recreational sports with her, like special-needs basketball and softball," Zack said.

"(Special-needs children) take so much joy in all their activities, he added. "They remind me of myself and how I like sports. To see them have so much incentive and really want to be good at something is humbling, and some of these kids will surprise you with their work ethic, their enthusiasm and their athleticism."

On Aug. 26 – rappel day – Zack donned an industrial body harness and used the harness' hand-operated pulley system to do a two-story practice rappel between two balconies.

The longer descent of 26 stories, which ended up taking Zack about three minutes to complete, couldn't come fast enough, he said.

"I sat waiting (on the top floor) for a while – maybe 30 minutes – so I was getting a little anxious," Zack recalled. "Seeing

some of the facial expressions of the people going over before me didn't help."

Zack was able to control his rate of descent by pumping on the handle. Descending too quickly had the potential of jamming the pulley mechanism, which made Zack's "walk" down the building's glass-and-stucco face slower going than he would have liked. His favorite part was maneuvering over a ledge near the bottom.

"You had to rappel over this hump," Zack recalled. "With this equipment we really weren't able to have that free glide (down). It was more strenuous. At times you could build up momentum to pop out a little bit, but you couldn't do it consistently."

Adventure had 'Part II'

Zack's amazing day didn't end in the CBD.

After a ground-level lunch of gumbo, the group of Special Olympics fund-raisers climbed aboard a helicopter to ride to the Jefferson Parish Training Academy and Firing Range in Harvey. For two hours, they were guided through SWAT team maneuvers and emergency scenarios, and shot practice ammunition at stationary targets. The training gave Zack a new appreciation for the bravery of first-responders.

"It was neat to see what everybody that puts their life on the line every day goes through," he said. "The SWAT team told us that (when they train) they shoot each other with practice rounds that travel 300 to 350 feet per second. That doesn't feel

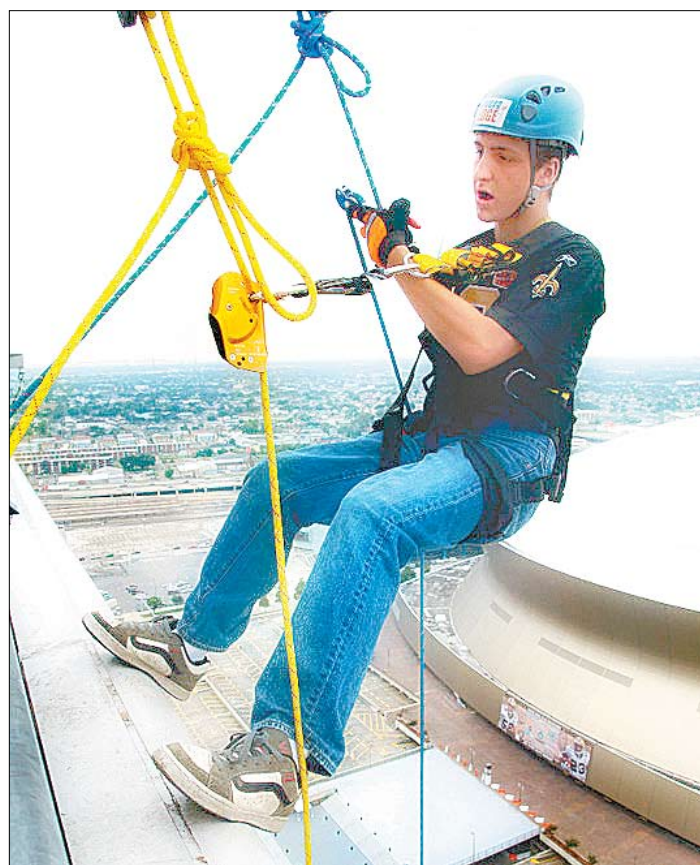


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Zack Langley, a Brother Martin senior, begins his 26-story descent down the Benson Tower in downtown New Orleans. Zack was given the opportunity on Aug. 26, after raising more than \$1,000 for the Louisiana Special Olympics.

good. It made me respect them even more and see their job in a different light."

Unconventional pursuits are nothing new to Zack, a graduate of St. Rita School in Harahan, and a resident of Montz. He has been a BMX freestyle bicyclist for the last two years, practicing aerial maneuvers such as spins and flips on a track in his back yard.

While he hopes to take up a far tamer interest in college – the cinematography program at the University of New Orleans – Zack said he would love to rappel again, and also try skydiving and paragliding.

"I have kind of desensitized my parents to these things over the years," Zack said.

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