

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

## PASSION PROJECTS

# Realtor tests his mettle through extreme sports

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When Erwin Szeto began putting up the Christmas lights on his home last year, he did so grudgingly. Not because it was just another task to complete during a busy time personally and professionally.

He was less than thrilled because he is deathly afraid of heights, and even getting up on a relatively short ladder is not his idea of a good time.

It's ironic, though, because Mr. Szeto, 37, usually spends his holidays – and most of his free time – doing extreme sports activities around the world.

“I was on the roof, which sounds vanilla, but it's very difficult for me,” Mr. Szeto says of his Christmas lights experience. “My kids can't tell I'm afraid, but I'm doing it so then they can learn from my example.”

Mr. Szeto, who has two children (aged 21/2 and 10 months), owns a real estate business in the Hamilton area. He has his real estate and mortgage licences and has employees who work for him in both areas. He holds several properties and brands himself as “[Mr. Hamilton.](http://mrhamilton.ca/)”

He's been investing in real estate since 2005 after graduating from the University of Western Ontario's Ivey Business School. He says he did the bulk of his “silly stuff” before he had children in 2011 and 2012.

“I rode roller-coasters as a kid, as much as they scared me. And when I started this business, I had a lot of fears,” he explains. “With the extreme sports stuff, part of it is to challenge myself in all areas to learn to overcome my fears. I get the experience so then I can overcome things and they become easier.”

Mr. Szeto says the most nervous he's been during one of his pursuits was when he completed the [CN Tower EdgeWalk](http://www.edgewalkentower.ca/), where he shuffled around the iconic tower at 356 metres with nothing but a harness for safety. Participants are strapped to an overhead rail and then proceed to walk around the tower along a 1.5-metre ledge.

“It's really difficult if you have a fear of heights, because you need to continue to take steps,” he explains. “You're looking through this grated floor, and all you see is very far down.”

Mr. Szeto has also gone ziplining in the Caribbean, skydiving from 3,350 metres or 11,000 feet (“Much higher than the 4,000 feet I had in my head,” he says), and is in Costa Rica this month to learn how to surf.

“Surfing is supposed to be the greatest experience ever. It addicts people,” he says excitedly.

Mr. Szeto also participates in CrossFit (a boot-camp style workout where participants move from station to station completing different tasks), has completed such extreme races as the Tough Mudder (designed by British special forces, a unique combination of cardio, agility and strength that takes the racer through, well, mud) and Pursuit OCR (an obstacle course for adults).

For him, part of the thrill of the extreme events is doing them in far away places.

“When I’m somewhere, I’ll check TripAdvisor to see the top three things to do, and I’ll do them,” he says nonchalantly. “I was in Thailand a while ago and went scuba diving, because that’s the thing to do.”

Mr. Szeto says there is one extreme sports moment that will stand out more than any other – bungee jumping in Macau, China, while suffering from an aggressive bout of food poisoning.

“I had popped an Imodium just before doing the bungee. I had all sorts of excuses not to do it,” he explains. “And then, being a gentleman, I let my wife jump first. Once my wife jumped off, there was really no way out of it.

“I had all these excuses in my head for how I could get out of it, even after I paid. Then you just kind of take the leap, literally.”

Naturally, Mr. Szeto says, people have self-preservation wired into their heads. And for the bungee jump, his feet were strapped together, and he had to take baby steps until he got to the edge of the platform.

He had to fall off the edge by himself, without getting pushed or forced into doing it. “I just had to do it,” he says.

And that attitude transfers well into his day job as well.

“Everyone has fears, but it’s just usually in your head. And when you address those fears, things become easier,” he says. “Just like any other skill, the more you practise, the better you can become or the easier it gets.”

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