



# PROJECT KILIMANJARO: THE CLIMBERS

## **Pamela Hilmes, Geoscientist, ExxonMobil**

Pam Hilmes has worked in the oil industry for the past 30 years. She currently works as a user support geoscientist. A graduate of Sul Ross University in Alpine, Texas, with a B.S. in Geology, Pam is 54 years old and a native of Houston. She and her partner Becky Pope have been together for 19 years.

Pam's quiet demeanor tempers her telling of a heart-rending childhood. Her father died when she was eight years old, and Pam the third grader was sent by her mother to live with relatives in another state. She was sexually molested by a great uncle during that time; she says, very simply, "After that things were never the same." Poor self esteem and depression led to alcohol and drug abuse very early in her life.

Amazingly, Pam was able to graduate from college and even begin her career while being addicted to alcohol and other drugs. When she was in her late 20s, seeking help for emotional issues, a therapist told her, "I can't help you until you decide to stop drinking." Pam went to AA and just recently celebrated 25 years of sobriety.

Being physically active has always been Pam's strength—and a source of great joy. She liked mountain biking, barrel racing, and other adventurous pursuits. She and Becky have been active together with biking and hiking and outdoor recreation. But just recently, Pam was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis; now she must learn to keep her body exercised in other ways. It has been "a big loss" to have to give up some activities, biking especially.

Nevertheless, Pam is climbing the mountain. It was her idea, along with Becky's, to put their "someday" adventures on the calendar and get them done. It was her idea to raise funds to find a cure for ovarian cancer by climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro since Becky was diagnosed in September 2008 and again in 2010. Becky is now NED (no evidence of disease) and she and Pam will climb together.

