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### "Urban Ape"

*Timmy O'Neill scales new heights in film debuting in Seattle tonight*

By **Bridget Buddill**  
April 26, 2005

King Kong is no longer America's only "urban ape." Scaling the side of buildings Spiderman style is one of many feats climbing pro Timmy O'Neill performs in his newest film, *Return2Sender*, which premieres at 7 p.m. at the Neptune Theater.

O'Neill is hosting the show and promises audience a gripping visual adventure, as well as a gear giveaway from sponsors such as Montrail, Patagonia, and Clif bar.

Tonight's screening is the only Washington showing of *Return2Sender* in its 14-city tour of the western United States, and features O'Neill climbing not only some of the world's most monumental rock faces, but also climbing them faster than anyone in history.

The film shows O'Neill grappling California's El Capitan, the largest monolith in the country. Scaling it in less than a day is considered a respectable climb -- but O'Neill reached the top in just three hours, 24 minutes.

"I'm a fast person and hyperactive by nature, always move, move, move. I dream fast," said O'Neill.

Without any fear of heights, climbing guru O'Neill also makes "slack-lining" (walking a one-inch nylon strap) at Bridger Jacks Towers in Utah look like a cake walk -- only this cake walk takes place 1,000 feet above ground.

Not every climb is easy and O'Neill has suffered falls of more than 100 feet on multiple occasions. One fall came while touring the mountains of Pakistan and another off El Capitan. Neither those falls nor their resulting injuries deterred the emphatic climber from seeking the next big wall.

"When you're falling for that long, you have time to take a deep breath, exhale and breathe in again. It's relieving, until you come in contact with the rock, and then you're just in shock," said O'Neill.

The film was honored with a number of awards, including Best Adventure Film, at last weekend's Adventure Film Festival in Boulder, Colo., where O'Neill resides.

The only aspect of his climbing career that may be more extreme than surmounting structures such as Milwaukee's Pabst Brewery is his nonstop comic

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Climber Timmy O'Neill, who will be premiering the new climbing film *Return2Sender* tonight at the Neptune theater, tries out the rock wall at the UW Waterfront Activities Center.

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routine.

"Yeah, climbers, we're real witty," said O'Neill, chuckling and spontaneously breaking out into a beat-box demonstration.

Aside from being a constant one-man sideshow, O'Neill's easygoing personality acts as a tool in making rock climbing, a seemingly exclusive sport, accessible to anyone willing to tests his or her limits.

"There isn't a need to be specialized. There is a need to be open, to be ready and willing for experiences that can enrich your life," he said.

He hopes to attract experienced climbers, outdoor enthusiasts, and anyone interested in reaching a perspective outside of his or her everyday routine.

"Climbing is not about comfort. It's about attaining something for yourself," said O'Neill regarding his hopes for what message viewers will gain in watching Return2Sender.

O'Neill began his climbing career scaling tombstones and mortuary walls within the confines of Fernwood Cemetery, in his hometown of suburban Philadelphia.

"We were mavericks looking for something different," O'Neill said of himself and his childhood friends.

Passion turned into a profession when a 19-year-old O'Neill hopped aboard a Greyhound to Wyoming. There he began working in a gift shop at Yosemite National Park and exploring the park's endless climbing opportunities that enticed his eager fingertips.

With friend Dean Potter, also a pro climber, O'Neill experimented with new approaches to climbing, and together began ticking off speed records one by one. A drive for intensity and need for individualism inspired O'Neill to continue testing his epic climbs.

"These are the experiences that enrich your life," said O'Neill.

This fall O'Neill will appear in the Discovery Channel series "Urban Explorers," on which he travels nationwide climbing various urban structures, including a trip up the Cold-War era Titan 1 missile silo and the underground tunnels of Chicago.

After the Return2Sender tour is complete, O'Neill looks forward to more climbing, which he believes keeps him in check with reality.

"I think of climbing in terms of life and more life. I'm more alive with rock climbing," he said.

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