

Foul weather, illness and an avalanche near the rooftop of the world thwarted a 10-man expedition on Mount Everest this week.

Petaluma stockbroker Jerry Price's bid to become the first person to scale Everest's summit ended when he fell just above Camp II at

Base Camp, Price, diagnosed with pneumonia, was forced to be airlifted back to Kathmandu, Nepal, according to a message Wednesday from the expedition.

Price, 52, the expedition's former mayor of Belvedere, developed severe bronchitis and was forced to return to the ground at 17,600 feet.

Price and his team members ascended to Everest Summit, just 278 feet from the top, but an avalanche and lack of time forced them to turn around — "an act of cowardice," the expedition leader said.

Price, three different members of the expedition, Americans on Everest, made it to Camp IV, the highest camp at 26,000 feet, but was turned back by "hostile" weather.

Price and high winds, which hit 100 mph when the jet stream hit Everest's flanks, have made this a trying season. "No team was able to put a climber on the summit," said the message from Price to Hoffman's wife,

Wednesday, the nine mountaineers assembled at Base Camp and Price formulated a "quick, alpine-style" ascent by a small group of four climbers.

Price and his team were left to wait for any climbing, as the expedition was due back to the ground in two weeks. "We were awfully tired," Hoffman said over the phone.

Price said 15 people have died on Everest since 1922, when westerners first tried to climb the peak on the Nepal border.

woolly critters Wednesday at the Pozzi Ranch.

Only 12,000 more to go.

It's shearing season on the North Coast, a time when scraggly sheep are rounded up for their annual summer buzz cut. The bleating sheep go into the barn shaggy and bedraggled, and come out looking like recruits at boot camp.

Cornett and his shearing partner, Carl Nelson of Windsor, will work seven days a week through early July to fleece flocks in Sonoma and Marin counties. Cornett, a 30-year-old Tomales rancher with the agility of a wrestler, is the leading shearer for the big sheep ranches in the North Bay.



Cornett's shearing record is 449 lambs in nine hours, and he said he can do 50 to 60 more sheep a day after learning a few tricks during the three months he worked on shearing crews in New Zealand.

"We will shear 14,000 sheep this season,"

Cornett said. He's sheared in recent weeks, just as his muscles toned and back ached from long days and weeks of shearing. Sheep-shearing is no

Displaced palms cause Hwy. 12 jam

Moving day for eight palm trees caused a traffic snarl along Highway 12 Wednesday morning when crews spent several hours hauling the plants to a new home just a few feet away.

The canary date palms are moving about 20 feet farther away from the shoulder of the road as part of a \$1.7 million Caltrans project to widen Highway 12 between Llano Road and the bridge at Laguna de Santa Rosa.

Crews started working at 8 a.m. and finished the bulk of the work before 3 p.m. The westbound lane was blocked near the entrance to Sebastopol for most of the day to make room for a crane to haul the trees, and eastbound traffic was slowed as well.

Each tree weighed between 20 to 25 tons and had to be pulled from the ground with the crane. Crews then dragged the plants up a slope, where workers will replant them today and Friday.



Neon Palm Nursery owner Dale Motiska checks the roots of a palm Wednesday at Highway 12 near Sebastopol. The tree is one of eight palms that will be replanted to make room for a highway widening project.

CHAD SURMICK/PRESS DEMOCRAT