

Giving Back to Colorado

Volunteer opportunities that can make a difference in the lives of fellow Coloradans and the outdoors

BY MATTHEW SECKING

Colorado is all about healthy living, athletic endeavors and experiencing the outdoors. There is nothing an athlete loves more than, besides participating in their sport of choice, convincing others that they should get out and play, too.

That's why across the state, volunteers give freely of their time to ensure that their hobbies and lifestyles catch on with those who may not otherwise be exposed to these pursuits. By no means meant to be an exhaustive list, below are several organizations that are doing their best to ensure that the rest of us have places to recreate and mentors to teach us about how to most safely participate.



Photo courtesy of BCM

BCM staff are given one week per year to volunteer their time to a charitable organization. What does it say about BCM that most choose to give their time right back to BCM?

Big City Mountaineers, of Golden, pass on their love of the backcountry to "at risk" youth from urban environments. BCM's mission statement reads: "...to provide urban teenage youth in need of positive adult mentoring with challenging and safe wilderness experiences led by qualified adult volunteer guides." BCM marketing manager Andrea Nance believes that all adults have a responsibility to the youth of their communities, a responsibility to provide positive role models. "I do make a difference in someone's life," Nance says. "I learned so much more than I

thought I would. I can be a positive influence." A BCM adventure consists of a multiday backpacking experience in the backcountry with each group consisting of five adults and five youth participants. This one-on-one experience allows for a lot of interaction between the leaders and the kids. BCM espouses a T.E.A.M. philosophy: Trust, Endure, Achieve and Meaning. The first step in the process is Trust. This is taught through experiencing something new in the company of adult strangers. Endure is the process of experiencing physically and emotionally difficult days of hiking and teamwork. Achieve contains activities that lead to a sense of accomplishment in the teen. The final component, Meaning, teaches the youths that meaning is the way in which BCM shows the teens how backcountry experiences parallel the experiences they will face in their own lives. www.bigcitymountaineers.org

Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado, based in Denver, assemble community volunteers to become "active stewards" in Colorado's natural environment. Volunteers can spend their volunteer time battling invasive plant-life one weekend and restoring a natural wetland the next. The work being done at VOC is catching on. The group's website suggests signing up early for volunteer projects because registration lists fill quickly, and there are waiting lists associated with most projects. In a volunteer testimonial, Tim Gaines says, "It's contagious—that's why VOC works. VOC is good at what it does—and it's not just the project, completing the work. It's



Photo courtesy of VOC

the way it spreads, the way it infects people. You come out on a project with a friend and get hooked. Then you bring out another friend and they get hooked. The circle grows." Jerry Severns, outreach marketing director for VOC, says that the bulk of preserving Colorado's landscape is up to everyone, but especially those who make up those areas. "Trail runners, hikers, mountaineers, they're the ones that need to be volunteering," Severns says. www.voc.org

Special Olympics Colorado, based in Denver, provides year-round athletic training and competition opportunities to individuals in the community who are developmentally disabled. The Special Olympics U.S.A. National Games will take place in Ames, Iowa, July 2-7, 2006. On August



Photos courtesy of Special Olympics Colorado

13, the Summer Classic will take place at Colorado Academy in Lakewood. Events include Bocce, cycling, softball and tennis. Coming up on November 12 in Denver is the Fall Classic, which includes bowling, floor hockey and equestrian. Special Olympics Colorado marketing manager Terri Takata-Smith sees members of every community getting involved. "Volunteering provides an opportunity to interact with and discover the talents and heart of these individuals," she says. Takata-Smith jumped at the chance to work

Jerry Severns of VOC sums up Colorado's willingness to volunteer with this anecdote. "We had a 400-person Earth Day project and 600 people showed up. There is absolutely enthusiasm."