

## CWA Member Spotlight, February 2013



*University outdoor programs have taken off in recent years. At the forefront of this movement is the Outdoor Adventure program housed in Campus Recreation at University of Nebraska – Lincoln. Led by Kyle Hansen, the program boasts guided trips, a climbing (wall) area, challenge course, and a multitude of other student-led adventure opportunities. They are currently breaking ground a new Outdoor Adventure Center.*

**CWA:** Tell us a little about the history of Outdoor Adventures at UNL

**KH:** The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Outdoor Adventure program began in 1971 running trips and renting outdoor gear. The University built our first climbing wall outdoor in 1976 to aid in teaching climbers before heading out of trips. In the fall of 1997 a 38' indoor climbing wall was built by Eldorado Climbing Walls. The wall features 6 top ropes and about 2200 square feet of climbing surface and was located in the corner of one of the multi-purpose courts Campus Recreation Center. We also operate our Challenge Course/ Leadership Development Center and run an on campus bike shop doing repairs and rentals while continuing the tradition of trips.

**CWA:** As a small part of a large organization, how much support does your program receive?

**KH:** We receive tremendous ongoing support from the students all the way to the Chancellor for the programs, services, and opportunities offered through the Outdoor Adventures program. This support is exemplified by the construction of a stand-alone building to house the Outdoor Adventures program. The students voted to support a campaign to improve recreational facilities on campus with 72 percent approval rating and the funding to pay for them. The vote brought out the largest student turnout for a vote in 30 years.

**CWA:** What unique challenges do you face as a university multi-use facility?

**KH:** Having our climbing wall in a shared/ multi-use facility causes us to close periodically throughout the year (ex. Volleyball Matches, sports tournaments, clinics, camps, and floor refinishing) that add up to 30+ days where programming and open hours are impacted each year not tied to climbing activity.

**CWA:** What advice would you give to someone starting a university climbing program?

**KH:** One of the top priorities needs to be working with climbing staff to develop their skills. Staff need to have solid base of climbing knowledge as well as the ability able to explain and enforce policies in a way cultivates the culture you want in your program.

Find a person that is running a gym or program that you would like to emulate and have conversations with about what they are doing that makes them successful and consider how that might fit your facility or program. And go to the Climbing Wall Summit!

**CWA:** What are the challenges of staffing a wall with student workers?

**KH:** Like every other industry, our biggest challenge is staffing. Unique to a college campus is our workforce graduates and moves on every four years. The plus side is that we have access to high motivated and bright young adults that are looking for a challenge and unique working experience. A challenge we face with our student work force is they keep graduating. We are always in a training mode trying to help develop and train our staff. The plus side of this challenge is that our senior staff are involved with training new staff, however we again invest in training them how to train new employees.

**CWA:** What is the biggest lesson you have learned in the climbing industry?

**KH:** Our organization's most recent discovery (and we are still discovering) is how intentionally we need to be to have a facility and staff that can welcome and serve the wide range of users we desire to see in a collegiate setting. We have our "Climbers", we have folks that want to learn and develop (push into and progress to outdoor climbing or just stay indoors), those pursuing competitive climbing, climbing with friends as a social activity, and there certainly interplay between all of these groups. Six top ropes and no dedicated bouldering makes this a challenge to pull off at the level we aspire to reach.

**CWA:** What is the biggest opportunity for university climbing areas?

**KH:** Lifelong skill development- climbing can go with you beyond the gym or crag. Transferable skills: What you do, learn, take, and put into climbing can have impact on other facets of your life beyond just being a recreational activity. (We have ability to introduce sport of climbing to young adults seeking lifetime activities.)

**CWA:** What's next for UNL Outdoor Adventures?

**KH:** In the spring of 2014 we will be opening a new stand-alone building for Outdoor Adventures. The building will have a new climbing center with a dedicated bouldering area and



25+ climbing lanes. This building will also house our trip and gear rental program, bike shop, and classrooms.

*For more about UNL Outdoor Adventures, visit <http://crec.unl.edu/outdoor>  
Visit the Climbing Wall Association website at [www.climbingwallindustry.org](http://www.climbingwallindustry.org)*