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Sct T-Storms  
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## Evergreen's Adaptive Adventures brings 'excitement, joy' to disabled

By Brittany Karford  
07/27/2006

Knees hugged tight to his chest, he fights the taught rope. The boat lurches forward. Swallowing the wake, Darin Cuskelly hangs on, holds on, until his ski finally planes, surfaces and skids across the water at Clover Basin Reservoir in Longmont.

And for a brief moment, he savors the breeze on his face.

"It's just a joy because it's one of the things taken away from the disabled," said Cuskelly, who lost full use of his left leg as a result of bone cancer. "But when I'm on a water ski, or on the snow, I feel the breeze on my face just like I am running again."

Through an Evergreen-headquartered program, Adaptive Adventures, Cuskelly can get the sensation any season of the year. The nonprofit organization seeks to enhance recreational opportunities offered to the physically disabled, allowing them to find new ways to experience their bodies through skiing, cycling, kayaking and more.

But instead of basing its programs in one area, the organization brings the programs to venues all across the state, and the country.

"We bring the excitement to them; that's why we're special," said Matt Feeny, co-creator of Adaptive Adventures. He hit the lake straight from New York, where he taught injured soldiers to water ski. "It just depends what you're into."

At 43, Feeny is into making a living out of playing hard. Even after his 1988 diving accident at Lake Powell, which left him a paraplegic for life, he returns to the same lake to water-ski three times a summer.

"It's ironic in a way," Feeny says. "But doing these sports now is certainly more challenging."

Feeny now calls Winter Park home, as close to Colorado's ski mountains as possible. Cuskelly, a fourth-grade teacher from Lakewood, first met him at a Vail ski camp.

"He wheeled up to me and said, 'Are you ready to step up to the plate?' " Cuskelly recalls, the "plate" being moguls, and the steep stuff.

"I never thought I'd do stuff like that," Cuskelly said. "Then again, I never thought I'd do stuff like this." He can't wait to send pictures of his first time water-skiing to his parents.

Back on the dock, the rest of the crew lounges lazily — some in wheelchairs, all in suntans — cheering on another first-timer struggling in the water.

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<p><b>Getaways</b> Parks and Rec Outdoors</p>	<p>"Let the boat pull you up!" yells Shelly Williams, a volunteer therapeutic recreation specialist and a regular in Feeney's gang. "Getting up is the hardest part of all."</p>
<p><b>Get Involved</b> Clubs Churches Happenings Area Links</p>	<p>Non-ambulatory riders can get up on a specially designed Kan water ski or a wakeboard built by Feeney himself. The board holds riders in a "cage," a metal framework with a hammock-like seat mounted onto a standard wakeboard. And for not being strapped in, riders can get pretty fancy.</p> <p>Feeney is known for his big air, which, along with his tan and sunglasses, has earned him the nickname "Hollywood." He spends 45 or so days each summer out on the lake.</p>
<p><b>Useful Information</b> Useful Links County Offices State Offices Representatives</p>	<p>"Essentially, it's more freedom," said Williams, watching Feeney throw big, clearing the wake.</p> <p>Freedom, networking, social interaction and accomplishment — that's what Feeney and his partner, Joel Berman, set out to foster when they created Adaptive Adventures in 1999.</p>
<p><b>Services</b> Subscribe/Renew Advertise with us Contact us Send us news tips Front Page</p>	<p>"I didn't know anything about people with disabilities until I became disabled," Feeney said. "But you can really achieve something in sports. It translates into all other facets of your life."</p> <p>He and Berman, a leg amputee, want to make the experience available to disabled people everywhere. They take their equipment and volunteers on the road, providing clinics and camps at little or no cost to participants.</p>
	<p>"We put on a program for them or put them in contact with people in their area," said Berman, 44, an Evergreen native. He built up Adaptive Adventure's headquarters there before moving to Chicago, where he has initiated a new branch with sailing courses. "We change the lives of the people we work with," Berman said.</p> <p>He remembers a cycling clinic they held in Lakewood this year, where a 12-year-old boy they taught disappeared on a bike. His mother went from ancy, to worried, to sick. The boy strolled up just before they sent out a search party. Berman can't forget his return.</p> <p>"He said, 'I've never been able to go anywhere alone where my mom didn't have to be,'" Berman said. "This kid had never experienced that once in 12 years of life. That's the kind of thing you want to be involved in."</p> <p>Berman still has a home in Evergreen, where Adaptive Adventures continues to hold a portion of its annual Rocky Mountain Cycling Omnium race each spring.</p>
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