



Secunda returns to roots, launches A5 Outdoor Adventures

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He's baaaack. After three years of playing investment banker, consultant, dad and a host of other things, David Secunda has returned to his outdoor education and outdoor industry roots by launching A5 Outdoor Adventures.

With Secunda as the only full-time employee (he does have several key staff under seasonal contracts), A5 Outdoor Adventures is a program designed to provide kids, who are increasingly sedentary, an experience that gets them off their butts through a variety of non-competitive outdoor recreation activities.

Beginning with a pilot in-school program at the Flatirons Elementary School in Boulder, Colo., the programming will expand this summer to include a summer outdoor base camp, a family adventure camp, and then in the fall, after school instruction in addition to increased in-school events.

"The inspiration for this venture had its seed in work I was doing with OIA way back when," Secunda told SNEWS. "Even then, we were looking at ways to get kids active and outdoors. The idea kept percolating and after selling Planet Outdoors, I conducted focus groups with parents to find out what they were looking for, and with schools to find out what they needed."

Secunda has put together an impressive list of sponsors for his in-school programming. Perception has agreed to sponsor the paddling tank and provide boats and Harmony paddles. Raleigh bicycles is sponsoring the portable mountain biking course and providing 33 mountain bikes, some with training wheels for the youngest students. Black Diamond is sponsoring a portable climbing wall, and Kelty is providing shelters for registration,

backpacks to tote all the gear and tents to hold the outdoor classrooms in.

"We will be going into a school for one to two weeks, and during the time we are there, every child in that school, one grade level at a time, will rotate through our curriculum," Secunda said. "There are 12 in each group within each rotation, each group with an instructor and a parent volunteer."

His first program at Flatiron will introduce 300 elementary students to paddling, climbing and mountain biking, as well as expose them to Leave No Trace skills taught in the Outdoor Education classroom – read very large Kelty tent.

"When I talked to school administrators, what they really wanted were programs that the entire school could run through, like being on a field trip, but without leaving the school campus to save the time and money," Secunda added. "By setting up a base camp on school campuses for a week or more, we are able to deliver what the schools want, and more."

Secunda's vision for inspiring youth to get outdoors doesn't stop at the classroom, though.

"In the fall, we will start offering after-school programs, and this summer, we are providing family courses and day camps," said Secunda. "Basically, for one fee, the family can show up on a Friday morning to our base camp and find the tents set up, all the food purchased – essentially all the logistics taken care of. They don't have to worry about anything other than arriving."

"In our focus groups, parents told us that it was the logistics, and the fact even when camping, neither parent felt they could really enjoy any alone time together, that kept many families from heading outdoors together," added Secunda. "So, we've removed that barrier too, by providing instructional programs for the kids during the day so the parents can go off and do their own thing."

Secunda plans to expand into other metropolitan regions beginning in 2005 by launching his A5 Outdoor Adventures programs in Denver, Colo., and also in and around the San Francisco Bay Area.

"My goal is to expand regionally, taking outdoor recreation into a fuller realm, rather like sports camps which we have seen rolled out very successfully across the country," he said.

"Ultimately, our mission is to inspire lifelong active outdoor lifestyles and environmental stewardship through experiences that provide personal development," Secunda said.

For more information about the program, go to www.goA5.com.

SNEWS View: Secunda has come full circle and good for him – from running the outdoor recreation department for the University of Colorado to founding the Outdoor Network, to executive director of the Outdoor Recreation Coalition of America (ORCA, but now called OIA to avoid confusing the association with a whale, thankfully), to founder and CEO of Planet Outdoors (a now-defunct dot-com), to, well, this. Secunda's idea has strong merit and we hope it takes root and begins to grow into a regionally-based nationwide program that inspires more kids to get outdoors and play. Boulder is the proving ground for now, but next year, should all go smoothly in 2004, Secunda will be seeking and needing more sponsorship dollars and partners to aid with the expansion efforts, and we hope he finds them. Schools are begging for the kind of roving camp that Secunda has conjured up, but to go nationwide will require a very cohesive and organized network of closely linked metropolitan-based teams. That's definitely a tall order and proof that Secunda is dreaming big again. And we're glad.

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