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Lines: The CWA Newsletter

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Welcome

Dear Colleagues,

We have been busy here at the CWA office with conference preparations and working out the details of the new certification program.

Early-bird registration for the 2008 Climbing Wall Summit closes tomorrow! Please take the time today to register and get these great rates. You can register for the conference on the web site. The next registration deadline will be April 15, 2008.

The CWA is very excited about this year's workshop line-up. In addition to seven pre-conference workshops, the CWA will be running a two and a half day Climbing Wall Instructor Certification course. For more information, please read the "Certification" article below. For information on all the pre-conference workshops, including the certification course see the Summit web site.

Thanks to everyone who has registered for the conference so far. By participating in these events, we can exchange vital information, improve our performance, and strengthen our ties. The Summit will serve to help the sport of climbing grow in positive directions. Remember - together we're stronger.

Best Regards,

Bill Zimmermann,
Executive Director

Climbing Wall Instructor Certification

Certification programs are not new to the climbing world. Most developed countries with mountaineering traditions, including the United States, have developed certification programs. Most national and international certification efforts involve defining sets of prerequisites, experience, training, and competencies that candidates must demonstrate prior to receiving a certification.

Most often the curricula, certification standards, and training processes are overseen and maintained by an independent agency or organization to ensure consistency, quality, and to safeguard the credentialing process. The guiding community has successfully offered certifications in many disciplines including alpine climbing, rock climbing, and ski mountaineering for years; and the indoor climbing community has successfully provided quality training programs for climbing gym clients since the beginning.

But until now there has not been a recognized certification path for indoor climbing instructors at facilities like camps, YMCA's, Boys and Girls Clubs, fitness facilities, universities, and even climbing gyms. The lack of definitive, recognized training seemed more and more like both a threat and an opportunity for the climbing community. We have a vested interest in maintaining and supporting high-quality climbing instruction where ever it occurs. We also felt the CWA was the organization to lead the way in this effort.

Last winter, a working group of the CWA and the AMGA began development of a certification program and curriculum. We investigated certification programs in Canada and Europe, assessed their strengths and weaknesses, and developed a program appropriate for the US market. The first climbing wall instructor certification course was offered in Boulder, Colorado in April 2007 at the Boulder Rock Club and was taught by John Bicknell, AMGA President. The course, offered as part of the 2007 CWA Climbing Wall Summit, filled completely and was a huge success! This year we will be offering the certification course again at the 2008 Summit.

The certification program sponsored by the CWA is a two-step program. The first step is the Climbing Wall Instructor Certification itself – an eight hour course of training and evaluation. The second step is a Climbing Wall Instructor Provider Certification which will be provided for the first time at the Climbing Wall Summit in May 2008. The program has also been designed to allow CWA members such as wall manufacturers, climbing gyms, and others to become certification program providers. This type of system will allow the climbing community to position itself as a training resource for the growing sport of climbing.

The program has been carefully designed so that instructors or aspiring instructors with appropriate prior experience and training can complete the course and evaluation over a day or two. We have trained and evaluated almost forty candidates with a pass rate of eighty-seven percent. The program is intended for current climbers and instructors who teach or wish to teach novices in an indoor setting.

The audience for the Climbing Wall Instructor (CWI) Certification Program includes: climbing gym staff, guides, college recreation staff and student leaders, experiential education program instructors, camp directors and staff, youth leaders, fitness facility staff, and even recreational climbers seeking to improve their technical climbing and teaching skills.

The Climbing Wall Instructor Program has seen a very successful trial period. We are encouraged by the results and the feedback from the students and instructors so far. We will be releasing the proposed certification standards for public review and comment sometime soon, so as a CWA member or subscriber you will have the opportunity to share your views. You should see the program approved and launched in the second quarter of 2008.

Legal Matters: The Culture of Fear and the Climbing Gym

In the words of Boston Globe columnist Ellen Goodman, there is a "disharmonic convergence" these days in which parents want their children to experience what the world has to offer, while at the same time they are fearful of what the world can do to them. Many parents go to great lengths and expense to protect their kids, including the use of cell phones, GPS, and surveillance software and devices.

In itself, there is nothing wrong with this. Parents have a responsibility to protect their children from known dangers. (A no-brainer: when an 18-year-old with a "reputation" started hitting on my 13-year-old daughter, he was shown the door quickly and unceremoniously.) These days, however, dangers seem to many to have multiplied exponentially.

The reasons for the culture of fear range from war and terrorism to the economy, gas prices, the mortgage crisis, violent crime, drug-resistant strains of bacteria, lead-based paint, and schoolyard bullying, just to name a few. One might think that parents who encourage their children to learn the sport of climbing, or take part in other fitness and recreational activities, have overcome this fear, but that is not always the case. Sometimes parents have an unrealistic belief that the climbing gym and its employees have anticipated everything that can go wrong and have measures in place to prevent these things from happening - in short, that the activity of climbing has been made "safe."

We often discuss safety in climbing, I think, without having a good understanding of what the word means in context. Is the statement - "You can never be too safe" - true in the sport of climbing? We all know that things can go wrong and accidents can happen in spite of our most careful preparation and vigilance. Kids goof off on the walls or ropes, employees get distracted by the telephone or some other activity in the gym, climbers forget to clip on, knots come untied, equipment fails - the list of "oh, no" moments goes on and on.

The law recognizes that in climbing, and in other recreational activities, there is such a thing as "too safe." The doctrine of inherent risks assumes that there are certain risks in an activity that cannot be

eliminated without changing the fundamental nature of the activity. In climbing, ropes courses, or zip lines, that risk is the risk of injury from falling. In horseback riding, it is the risk of injury from being thrown or kicked by an unpredictable animal. In kayaking or white-water rafting, it is the risk of drowning. In football, it is the risk of crippling spinal and joint injuries caused by impacts with other players or the ground. (In golf, for me at least, it is the risk of being brained by one of my son-in-law's wild shots.)

In each of these activities, the risk is inextricable from the activity itself. For example, the risk of drowning in white-water rafting could be eliminated by mounting the raft on an undulating platform inside a dry building, but the result would no longer be white-water rafting. The only way to completely eliminate the risk of being kicked by a horse is to never go near a horse. The only way to completely eliminate the risk of falling in climbing is to devise some sort of mechanism so that the participant "climbs" without ever leaving the floor.

These risks cannot be eliminated, and the operator should not try to do so. Instead, it is the responsibility of the operator to implement procedures to reduce the risks, and to educate climbers and parents to the fact that the risks can be reduced but not eliminated. Climbing cannot be made "completely safe." Parents who think this way are doing the next generation no favors. Again quoting Ellen Goodman: "Teens are never really on their own. We may be protecting them right out of the ability to make their own decisions. Including their own mistakes. Meanwhile, we may be raising a generation with low expectations of public privacy, trained by Big Mother to accept Big Brother."*

The other aspect of the culture of fear is, of course, litigation. Parents who have been jolted out of their belief that climbing is "safe" by their child's injury - and some adult climbers as well - want to assign blame, to make someone pay. There are occasions when this is appropriate, but when a participant is fully aware of the inherent risk and is injured because of that risk, the law can and does protect the operator. That is why we urge operators to do things by the book, to educate, to staff adequately, to be in the right place at the right time, to inspect equipment regularly and replace it when needed, and to have zero tolerance for horseplay on the walls.

Our brave new world seems to be lacking in bravery in some quarters. However, with careful preparation and planning, solid procedures, and well-trained and attentive staff, you should be able to navigate this new zeitgeist and introduce new generations of climbers to our great sport.

To your success in 2008.

Robert Angell, Esq.

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Disclaimer: The information provided above is offered for the general guidance of members of the Association and is not intended, and should not be construed, as the provision of legal advice in any pending or anticipated matter. Please consult your legal counsel for advice regarding any such matters.

*Goodman, Ellen, Big Mother Meets Big Brother. Copyright © 2007, The Boston Globe.

Member Profile - Evolve

Since its inception in 2004, Evolve has made its mark in the sport of climbing. The US-based company has gained a loyal customer base with their attentive service, new and innovative shoe designs, and celebrity endorsements. Evolve also supports the interests of the climbing community. In 2007 and 2008, Evolve designed the HERA and Quest-AF shoes with a percentage of the proceeds going to the HERA Women's Cancer Foundation and the Access Fund. Evolve is CWA's newest manufacturing member.

With customer service as their number-one priority, Evolve caters to individual needs, producing vegan-friendly shoes, split-sized climbing shoes, and a slew of other custom modifications. Evolve has developed several approach and climbing shoes all of which feature Evolve's patented TRAX Rubber.

The rapid growth of the company was bolstered even more with the addition of Chris Sharma, Lisa Rands, Chris Lindner, and several others to Team Evolv. By sponsoring these athletes, Evolve has been able to extend their presence across the globe.

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Reader Poll: 2008 Climbing Wall Summit

Who would you like to see as the key-note speaker at the 2008 Climbing Wall Summit?

Send your responses to polls@climbingwallindustry.org

About the Climbing Wall Association, Inc. (CWA). The CWA is a 501(c)(06), non-profit, trade association incorporated in May of 2003 for manufacturers of climbing wall equipment, builders of climbing walls, operators of climbing walls, and others involved in the climbing industry.

The CWA is the only trade association addressing the needs and interests of the climbing wall industry and climbing wall operators. The mission of the Climbing Wall Association is to support the growth, health and independence of the climbing wall industry, and to promote the sport of climbing.