

CWA Member Spotlight, November 2012



After being laid off from the software industry, John Gross decided to make a big change. The product of this change is Toronto's True North Climbing Gym. Gross, a recreational climber who is still sending routes at 54, has grown True North into an established facility with a wide variety of service offerings. We recently caught up with John to get his perspective on True North and all things climbing.

CWA: Tell us a little about True North

JG: True North opened in Toronto during March of 2010. Our facility has a 12,000 sq ft footprint with 14,500 sq ft of climbing surface. Climbing areas include 51 top ropes (2 routes per rope), steep lead cave, large top-out bouldering wall, 8' natural boulder, and 2 slacklines. Our flooring consists of 6" foam padding (closed cell carpet-bonded foam atop open cell foam) in top-rope areas and 12" padding (2" closed cell atop 10" open cell in nylon covers) in bouldering areas.



CWA: What additional services does True North offer?

JG: Petzl retail dealer, shoe, harness & chalk bag rentals, instruction (Introductory lesson, Intermediate technique, lead climbing), weekly yoga classes, rowing machine, exercise bike, dumbbells

CWA: What has been the key to True North's success:

JG: Our staff. We have great people who love climbing and want to share that with those who are just starting out. And we have talented routesetters who work hard to put interesting and fun climbs up on the walls week after week.

CWA: What are you doing that no one else is?

JG: We were the first in our area to provide slacklines. The slackline posts are removable, so we can take them down to create large open areas when we have large events like a competition, or when we host the Reel Rock Film Tour.

CWA: What is True North's biggest challenge?

JG: Communication. It's hard to let those new to climbing know what they need to know about belaying, needing a partner, the waiver requirement and how to find us!

CWA: If you could tell a new gym owner one thing, what would it be?

JG: Do it! It's a fun business to be in, and while it's not a get-rich-quick scheme (more like a get rich in 20 years scheme), a well-built well-operated gym can do well. Building a new gym is very much like having a baby: months of anxious planning & waiting, lots of dirty messes you need to take care of yourself, many sleepless nights, and a great feeling when you see the first smile.

CWA: What is your favorite feature of your facility?

JG: I love our stalactite, which hangs down from the 36' ceiling and stops about 3' above the padded floor. It's big enough for 4 climbers to be on it at once, and has some great angles. And there is a view out the windows from the top!

CWA: If you could pick a favorite gym (other than True North), what would it be?

JG: Before designing our gym I took a trip to the Bay Area to visit several gyms there and collect ideas. I loved the Planet Granite facility in the Presidio. Like our facility it's in an old airplane hangar in a park built in what used to be a military base. It's a beautiful gym, and the adjustable cracks looked pretty cool!

For more on True North Climbing, visit <http://truenorthclimbing.com/>

Visit the Climbing Wall Association website at www.ClimbingWallIndustry.org.