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Section: Scene

New life for Norway

Greg Marshall, Of the Record staff

It's a big summer for the Norwegian Outdoor Exploration Center. Founded by Tom Cammermeyer, a native of Norway, nearly 30 years ago, the organization will host a summer art show, concert and fundraiser Saturday, June 6, at Swaner EcoCenter and the **Newpark** Plaza. Festivities run from 4 to 6 p.m. About 100 students have contributed pieces to the silent auction, and young musicians will take the stage in the **Newpark** Amphitheatre. About a dozen Main Street galleries plan to exhibit some of the student work in the coming weeks.

The event, billed as the first-ever summer fundraiser for the NOEC, is free to the public and will feature tours of Swaner and an appetizer buffet.

The organization has been in talks to move into an office at Swaner. It is currently based out of the Rikka Events Center since it moved from the Main Street Mall in January.

"Moving to Swaner is a big deal for us," said Cammermeyer. "We've been talking about this for 14 years, and the Swaners have been huge supporters."

Cammermeyer envisions a symbiotic relationship between Swaner's educational programs and the Exploration Center's hand-on activities, a "win-win" when it comes to teaching kids about the wonders of the natural world.

The Exploration Center has plans for a busy season. Cammermeyer and other mentors will offer a three-day excursion in the Uinta Mountains in July through the University of Utah. Cammermeyer also is availing himself to family and group excursions this summer.

The NOEC, which works with 10 schools in Coalville, Kamas and Park City, plucks kids 9 to 14 from the classroom and sends them to snowshoe, cross-country ski and hike with outdoor experts. Excursions are free for participants.

Until three years ago, Cammermeyer funded excursions, in large part, by hosting popular summer camps for kids and turning to corporate sponsors. He decided to stop offering the camps to focus on working with more kids, especially those at risk or in need, in Summit County schools. The back-to-basics approach has succeeded. In winter 2009, Cammermeyer and his team of mentors shepherded about 1,300 students on day-long field trips. That's nearly three times more than in previous years.

"It's huge," Cammermeyer said. "And the response from teachers and counselors has been huge. We want to get the philosophy out there that all of nature has value," as do all kids, he continued.

The summer fundraiser, called simply "Nature," will help plug the fiscal void in the absence of summer camps. "The organization used to be mainly funded through summer camps," said David Patterson, NOEC assistant director. "But now, we're reaching more kids and doing it in a more inclusive way. We want to show that our goal is to be an integrated part of the community. We want our volunteers and parents to make this part of Park City."

Sustainability is another important goal for the NOEC, said Kate Bush, the co-chairman of the board of trustees. "We want to raise money in advance to begin to plan for the future," she said. "In general, we're shoring up our financials so we can afford to continue."

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