

# Foundation provides outdoor school opportunities in Sisters

By Erin Borla  
Correspondent

When Camp Tamarack originally opened its doors in 1935 it was designed as a camp for girls to learn strong leadership and outdoor skills. Now today, 82 years later, it has a new life with similar ideals. Students, both boys and girls, aged 8-13 from all across Central Oregon are participating in Outdoor School and summer camps.

That new life didn't come easy. Five years ago, Camp Tamarack was essentially defunct. Through loss, the life of Camp Tamarack has begun again.

Seven years ago this summer, Charlie Anderson and his family had suffered a terrible loss — the loss of a brother and son, Tyler Anderson. Tyler, who loved the outdoors, found his passion rock climbing and mountaineering.

His family wanted to do something to honor Tyler's memory. Together with friends they began On Belay TY, a foundation dedicated to getting kids who normally wouldn't get the opportunity to experience nature, outside. In climbing terms, "on belay" means "I've got you."

"Tyler was a kid that struggled to find where he belonged until he took a trip outdoors with his school," said Anderson. "When he discovered the outdoors he found his place — his passion. He was lucky to find that hook early in high school."

After high school Tyler spent part of his year doing canopy tours in the U.S. and the other part of the year as a mountain guide in South America. He loved the communities he visited and their culture as much as the experiences outside.

"People would want to go somewhere to climb, and he would show them so much

more," said Anderson. "(He would) teach them about the culture and the place."

Tyler lost his life in a mountaineering accident in Peru in 2010. On Belay TY also supports wilderness and first-responder training in Peru.

Anderson has been in Bend for the last 11 years, where he worked as an elementary school teacher. For the first few years of the foundation he worked with a friend who also taught school in Los Angeles. They identified a small group of at-risk students in 3rd and 4th grade and started the Tyler Anderson Youth Camp. Those students traveled to Bend with the two teachers and spent time camping and being surrounded by nature.

After the first two years of camping and renting small homes for the students, the instructors challenged themselves to think bigger. They reached out to the then-essentially defunct Camp Tamarack and asked if they could rent the camp for a week — then one thing lead to another and the foundation ended up purchasing the camp.

Anderson remembers trying to think of all the things the camp could become.

"I asked myself, what could this camp be?" he said. "I remember being a parent chaperone to outdoor school for my kids and what a positive impact that had on my kids and their classmates in 5th grade and thought — could we bring outdoor school to more schools in Central Oregon?"

That did it. The vision for Camp Tamarack's new life began — to bring outdoor school and overnight summer camps back to Central Oregon and have them be affordable for as many families as possible.

Four years ago, the first season Camp Tamarack hosted



PHOTO BY TIFFANY TISDEL

Sisters Middle School 5th-grade Outdoor School at Camp Tamarack.

Outdoor School, only 26 percent of Central Oregon 5th- or 6th-graders participated in Outdoor School. This year, 98 percent of Central Oregon students of the Outdoor School age participated — 32 of the 34 eligible schools did so at Camp Tamarack.

"In the 15 weeks of Outdoor School we saw just over 2,200 students this season," said Anderson.

They also have seven sessions of summer camp for ages 8-13 and anticipate seeing over 750 campers. Camp Tamarack has a session specifically set up for Type I Diabetics. This special camp

allows for students who have Type I Diabetes to have a traditional camp experience.

"Each participant can bring a friend and we have volunteer nurses on staff from St. Charles throughout the week," says Anderson.

All camp attendees participate in ceramics, print-making, adventure team activities, pickleball, canoeing, paddleboarding, swimming, orienteering, cooking, sewing and much more.

Camp Tamarack offers a high school mentorship program. The camp hosts approximately 350 high school students from Central

Oregon schools as Outdoor School High School Leaders. Those students receive training, work with two different sessions of Outdoor School during one week of the school year. Each mentor receives high school elective credits as well as potential college credit through Central Oregon Community College.

Last year Oregon voters overwhelmingly approved Measure 99, which ensured the use of Lottery dollars to send 5th- or 6th-grade students from every district to Outdoor School.

See **CAMP** on page 23

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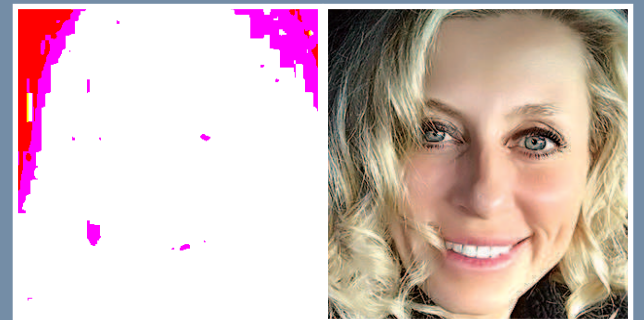
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HOPE's Medical Director Jessica Slaughter at 31 (left) and 43 years young (right)

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