

Learning life lessons on two wheels

By **Cody Rheault**
Correspondent

When Tom Lyons was a child he couldn't have cared less about his bicycle. If you know him today, you would find that hard to believe. Then, it was no more than a mode of transportation and a way to hang with his friends. But today it has become an extension of himself — one he uses to encourage and inspire local kids to be and do more.

As a kid Lyons played a number of sports including soccer, basketball, and baseball. None held his attention for long. When he was 10 he began to explore life on two wheels. Slowly a passion started to build in him; his free time now consisted of riding to learn. At 12 he received his first real mountain bike — a Cannondale M400 — and it wasn't long before he discovered jump tracks, gravity trails, and the adrenaline-inducing sport of downhill racing.

Tom found himself inspired by mountain biking legend Hans "No Way" Rey, a German pioneer in the sport of free-riding. After school he would study the sport icon by watching his films and practicing maneuvers in his driveway. By then, he knew what he wanted to do.

Lyons' passion in the sport led him into the competitive world of downhill mountain biking. For six years he competed for his spot among the

pros and placed third in the Oregon State Downhill championship his junior year. But over time injuries and serious emergency room visits took their toll on his body. A broken pelvis — among many injuries — pushed him to life off the hill and pursuing another dream he'd held since he was young.

From the age of 12, he knew he wanted to be a teacher. But the world of cycling hadn't taken hold of him yet. Facing retirement from downhill racing, Tom saw a new way to give back with what he had learned over many years.

His new direction led him to a lead instructor position at the Lumberyard Bike Park in Portland, and Life Cycles in Eugene. For the next three years Tom would focus his efforts in teaching the new generation of mountain bike enthusiasts through private lessons and classes.

"This was a way to get out and have fun, but be safe and still go to work the next day," he told *The Nugget*.

He would take them out to trails a couple times a week to practice skills, and soon became a personal mentor to many. He would help prepare meals, study courses, work on bikes, and help them recover from injuries.

"Everything just clicked," he said. "It was clear how to combine these passions, do what I love, and give back to the local community." It also gave him, "a chance to help teach some up-and-coming youth a lot of the lessons I learned the hard way."

Former students Rhys Ewing and Jack Hill are seasoned professionals in the world of downhill racing. Rhys won the NWCup series last year, and Jack Hill continues to be a prominent threat to the CAT 1 podium.

Lyons says finding two of his passions and learning how to integrate them to work toward a bigger purpose helped shape who he is today.

"There is nothing more rewarding than getting to directly influence and help local youth who share your



PHOTO BY CODY RHEAULT

Mountain bike racer and teacher Tom Lyons has brought his passion for life on two wheels to classes through Sisters Park & Recreation District.

passion," he said.

Lyons, 32, is now a resident of Sisters and has taken his last 18 years of experience to the local youth. Teaching classes out of Sisters Park & Recreation District, he recently took over from former instructor Thomas Wilkonson and personally wrote the new seven-week curriculum.

A certified Level 1 instructor through the Professional Mountain Bike Instructor Association, Tom has taken his role as a local mountain biking instructor as a service to the community. He has also donated two years and over 200 hours of his time to the construction and maintenance

of the SPRD Bike Park 242.

Classes were held twice weekly for both beginners and experienced students this spring term, with classes held at the Bike Park or on the Peterson Ridge Trail system. For the first few weeks Tom focused on teaching students the basics of bike handling, operations and controls, as well as incident response and personal goals.

Each student coming into the program with expectations are met with Lyons' dedication to see it through. He values the one-on-one instruction with his students and prefers

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