

Bend athlete-entrepreneurs 'Go Forth' in new web series from GoDaddy

BY DAVID JASPER

The Bulletin

It's not a whodunnit, but there are mysteries of a sort in "Go Forth," the new web series on YouTube.

The four-episode show from web host and domain registrar service GoDaddy features three pro athlete/entrepreneurs — triathlete Jesse Thomas, co-founder and CEO of Picky Bars; climber and climbing guide Lizzy VanPatten, founder of She Moves Mountains; and skier and base jumper Matthias Giraud, also an inspirational speaker — all of whom live and work in Bend.

In "Go Forth," each of the athletes strives to hit an athletic goal as well as professional aims related to their businesses. And therein lies the mystery, or rather, multiple mysteries: Will Thomas land new investors for Bend-based Picky Bars, which makes a variety of real-food bars geared toward athletes? These include a new nut-butter spread called Drizzle, which gets launched during the show. What kind of reception will customers give it? Will he rehab his injuries and get in race-shape for the Mt. Taylor Quadrathlon? After all, he did his last Iron Man Triathlon in 2018.

Similarly, viewers will find out if VanPatten hits her business goal, which is to double revenue from the previous year for her company, She Moves Mountains. It works "to create an educational space for women (cis, trans) and gender minorities to realize their strength through outdoors retreats and skills clinics," according to the official website. Her personal athletic goal: climbing Moonlight Buttress in Zion National Park.

And Giraud, whose nickname Super Frenchie is shared by a new documentary about his feats, is in pursuit of new sponsors and to diversify his income as an inspirational speaker and consultant. His athletic goal: generate visual content for sponsors while skiing and jumping in the Alps seems achievable. Then again, shooting of the show began prior to COVID-19 altering a lot of people's plans and goals.

The series is online now, and you should watch it. However, we did find out from Amy Jennette, senior director of Brand Marketing at GoDaddy, that "Action sports and outdoor adventure are a great metaphor for starting your own business and being an entrepreneur: the fortitude it requires, being self-reliant/self-confident and pushing toward your goals to make them come to life through challenges and obstacles. We began developing the idea that became 'Go Forth' back in mid-2019 with this premise in mind."



Courtesy GoDaddy/Submitted photo

Jesse Thomas, CEO and co-founder of Picky Bars, as seen in "Go Forth," a web series about Thomas and two other Bend athletes and entrepreneurs as they endeavor to hit new goals in business and sport.

In the early development stage, GoDaddy brought on Delve Creative, a Bend-based production and management agency, "to help drive this concept and bring the opportunity to life," Jennette said. "Delve was uniquely positioned because of their experience in talent-relations with athletes, as well as producing action sports content."

Professional skateboarder Tony Hawk, whose company, Birdhouse Skateboards, will turn 30 next year, serves as a mentor for the athletes.

The company chose VanPatten, Thomas and Giraud "because these three entrepreneurs are in various stages of owning their small business, so it felt like a good balance to follow them for a well-rounded peek into what it's like to be an action and adventure sports entrepreneur," Jennette said. "They all have amazing, unique businesses and stories that are also simultaneously relatable."

"It just turned out that (Delve) and GoDaddy liked Lizzy, Matthias and I, and it just turned out that that was great, because we're all in Bend," Thomas said.

Thomas did his last Iron Man Triathlon in 2018, "so it's been a while," he told GO! Taking a sabbatical from triathlons and focusing on his work in 2019, he incurred an injury while training in preparation for the Olympic Trials Marathon, requiring surgery and close to a year of recovery.

"By then it was early 2020, and I was re-

ally working full-gas on the business and was just kind of like, 'I'm not feeling like I want to get back to full-time racing again,'" he said. "I kind of retired, more or less, in my head, and hadn't really been public about it."

Participating in the quadrathlon was something he wanted to do "partially as a professional triathlete, and partially just for fun," Thomas said.

"I was supposed to spend an entire month down there working on it," VanPatten said, referring to her Zion climb. "A climb like that is something that you kind of chip away at, and COVID concerns started coming in

as soon as I got down there."

Spoiler alert: She Moves Mountains didn't have the kind of fiscal year she wanted for it in the show.

"Last year was horrible. The goals for the show were obviously to double the size of the business, and we lost everything except for our existence," VanPatten said.

"We were out of work for a really long time. We took a long time to get back to it, just because we were being really conservative," she said. "This year, we've essentially tripled the size of business in our first few months back at it, because, I think, one of the things people can do is be outside, and so our business is pretty primed for activities that people can do. And so we've been really, really busy."

Thomas hopes that viewers take inspiration from "Go Forth."

"It's corny or whatever, but I guess inspiration to be entrepreneurial and chase their goals," he said. "Regardless of what happens, you learn a lot and become a better person, I guess, going through it all."

VanPatten wishes the show — and articles for which she's been interviewed — would address the fact that it takes advantages and resources to be an outdoor entrepreneur.

"I just think that there's no conversations about the amount of privilege it takes to even be in the positions that we are in to start these businesses," she said. "I wish that some of these stories that talk about what it takes to be an outdoor entrepreneur could also approach it from an intersectional lens where it talks about, or at least acknowledges, the privileges that we all have had. ... It makes it sound like, 'Oh yeah, everyone can just go out there and make it happen for them.' It's like, no, so many things have to line up."

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