

Outdoor Role Models: Where Is Generation Next?

What could a former San Diego gang-banger and an 11-year-old girl raised in the shadow of Whistler Mountain possibly have in common? Plenty, as it turns out, particularly if both are part of the continually evolving outdoor marketplace. In fact, Outdoor Industry Foundation feels Juan Herrera and Kerry-Anne Hamilton—the odd couple in question—are uniquely positioned to lead the next generation of industry role models. Both are part of OIF's inaugural class of Outdoor Idols (www.outdooridols.org). Joining them are Logan Binggeli, Emily Harrington, Rush Sturges, James Bonnett, Travis Macy and Emily Jackson.

OIF, a non-profit arm established by Outdoor Industry Association, launched Outdoor Idols to help boost the industry as a whole. The goal is to raise the profile of young outdoor athletes who exemplify the ethos of the industry. In turn, they can serve as trendsetters and role models for the next generation of outdoor enthusiasts. OIA plans to name new Outdoor Idols every year, utilizing them as ambassadors in a variety of outreach programs. A panel of 20 journalists, ath-

letes, industry leaders and Outdoor Idols alumni will choose winners annually.

"From LeBron James and Dwyane Wade to Tony Hawk and Kelly Slater, every other industry has heroes—role models that inspire youth," says Ali Steimke, OIF's program manager and part of the brain trust that conceived Outdoor Idols. "By promoting heroes in our industry, whether they are climbers or paddlers or mountaineers, we have an opportunity to share the benefits of the active outdoor lifestyle with the youth generation."

Steimke gets no argument from Marla Streb, one of the outdoor industry's most respected athletes. Introduced to competitive mountain biking at the late age

of 28, Streb turned pro in 1993, and quickly became a champion—both in her sport and in business.

"The outdoor industry needs role models for kids just like all the other sports," she says. "Now that our sports are becoming more legitimate, people are respectful and don't shun us as 'just those extreme athletes.'"

Timmy O'Neill agrees. An outdoor industry veteran, he has used his status as a world-class climber to promote his sport, his career and healthy lifestyles. O'Neill, who learned his love of the outdoors from his family as a kid, fully realizes his responsibility as a role model.

"Role models are important to the intellectual, physical and social well being of every child," says O'Neill. "The early guidance I received to explore the wild places outside of my immediate sur-

roundings—and more importantly my comfort zone—provided a solid base for me from which to interact with others and to understand our connectedness to the planet."

Herrera, for one, is very familiar with the value of a role model. Though he grew up just a stone's throw from Southern California's beaches and mountains, the great outdoors seemed a world away as a child. Abused by a foster family, he ran away at age 14, and took to the mean streets of San Diego.

"I come from a background in which many have already given up or are not alive," Herrera says. "I was involved with gangs, and had many problems with fighting and violence."

But Herrera found sanctuary at the Toussaint Teen Center in San Diego. There he met Chris Rutgers, the Executive Director of Outdoor Outreach, a California non-profit organization focused on helping at-risk youth by immersing them in the outdoors. For Herrera, gaining a positive role model transformed his life.

"Role models are at the top of my list," he says. "They can be negative like a fellow gang member or an alcoholic parent. Or they can be positive, and turn your



Kerry-Anne Hamilton (right) with coach Vanessa Stark

Booth #61041 | Mezzanine Level | Behind TNF | www.DISEGNA.COM

DiSegna
d'Italia