

# BUSINESS

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BARTON GLASSER / For the Camera

Isabelle Bascom, 11, left, and Emily Guy, 11, right, attempt to climb a rock wall blindfolded as A5 instructor Lara Coleman, rear, looks on at Friends School on May 14. A5 Outdoor Adventures recently began a pilot program and spent one week at Flatirons Elementary and one week at The Friends School.

# School of rock

Business offers mountain climbing and other outdoor activities

By Sarah Toland  
For the Camera

There's a reason dodge ball, soccer and tetherball are popular options for today's kids. Not many parents or schools have the expertise, expense or time to take children on sporting excursions.

Even in an outdoor hotspot like Boulder County, flag football remains a more convenient choice for busy parents and educators than taking the tykes up on mountain bikes or scaling over rock faces.

Although David Secunda fits the category of busy parent, the Boulder businessman has every intention of taking the kids mountain biking and rock climbing — and not just his own. In January, Secunda launched A5 Outdoor Adventures, a traveling school course and summer camp that allows elementary-age students the opportunity to experience outdoor sports and education.

At the core of A5 Outdoor Adventures is what Secunda calls

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# The get out gang

## Boulder startup gives students a taste of outdoor sports

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the Outdoor Intensive, a one-week, on-campus outdoor education program for public and independent elementary schools. During the last week of April, Boulder's Flatirons Elementary became the first school to experience Secunda's outdoor immersion program.

All six classes, 330 schoolchildren from kindergarten through fifth grade, had one full day to climb a 25-foot rock wall, mountain bike through a skills-intensive course, splash in kayaks atop a 50-by-25-foot pool and listen to the ideology of ecological recreation in the fresh air of an outdoor classroom.

These four "outdoor education stations" — a climbing wall, an above-ground kayaking pool, a mountain biking course and a classroom that teaches the philosophy of the national nonprofit Leave No Trace — all comprise A5's Outdoor Intensive.

Secunda, 40, describes his program as a base camp for outdoor education that can be set up at any school for an immersion experience of one week. Elementary students have one full day to rotate through each station, spending about an hour at each activity.

Secunda, who has worked in the outdoor industry for 20 years, developed the concept for the Outdoor Intensive last fall after researching trends in physical activity among schoolchildren in Washington, San Francisco and Boulder.

After assessing surveys, interviews and focus groups from parents, teachers and school administrators, the 25-year Boulder resident came to the overwhelming conclusion that today's kids are more sedentary than ever before, spending more time indoors, watching TV and playing video games.

Secunda also documented a significant decrease — nearly 60 percent at ages 12 to 13 — in youth participation in team sports, mainly due to the in-



BARTON GLASSER / For the Camera

Hannah Hortick, 10, right, Lucas Horton, 11, center, and Peter Hassan, 10, participate in A5 Outdoor Adventures' pilot program at Friends School on May 14. A5 Outdoor Adventures exposes school-aged children to outdoor activities such as kayaking, mountain biking and rock climbing.

creasing competitiveness of preadolescent organized sports.

"In general, parents are concerned about their kids, who are indoors watching TV and playing video games and playing less team sports," says Secunda, who worked as an entrepreneur-in-residence for local venture capital firms until this past winter. "Almost universally, all parents said they used to camp and hike before they had kids. The challenge now is purely logistics: Just to get out of the house is a challenge."

Most schools, Secunda says, also face problems with lack of budget and sport-specific training, obstacles that prevent them from using gymclass to teach kids intense outdoor sports like rock climbing and kayaking.

The Outdoor Intensive provides a staff of certified instructors, an array of equipment — from harnesses to mountain bikes — and the necessary

knowledge and preparation to ensure the safety of its young participants. Secunda's contractual employees, many of whom are educators themselves, are certified or specialized in the area of their instruction, and all are trained in first aid.

The Outdoor Intensive is available for school programming twice a year, from April to May in the spring and from August to October in the fall. In 2004, Secunda will pilot the program only to Boulder-area schools, but the former executive director of the Outdoor Industry Association intends to launch the Outdoor Intensive in the Bay Area in 2005.

When not slotted for the Outdoor Intensive, A5 Adventures will function as a summer day camp. Starting this June and running through mid-August, Secunda has scheduled nine one-week camps for elementary-age children. The camps will meet every weekday at 9 a.m. at the Watershed School on Third Street and Canyon Boul-

levard, where groups will depart for a day of climbing, kayaking, hiking, mountain biking or studying the Leave No Trace philosophy of recreation impact mitigation.

Each camp has a different theme, with some offering a sport-specific focus in climbing or biking while other weeks will provide educational concentrations in areas like outdoor photography, journal making/writing and earth education. Although the number of students per camp is not fixed, Secunda's ratio of children to instructors is an individualized seven to one.

"For a parent, (the camp) is unbelievably simple," says Secunda, who has contracted with Whole Foods to provide packed lunches for campers. In addition, A5 also will pick up and drop off its students at their homes during camp days.

"We've tried to simplify (the camp) to the point where it is incredibly easy and meets all (parents') needs," says Secun-

da, who has two young children himself.

A5 Outdoor Adventures won't be marketing the camps extensively; instead, Secunda plans to rely on the publicity of the Outdoor Intensive in schools to attract potential campers and their parents. To date, A5 has run 450 children through its Outdoor Intensive, taking students from both Flatirons and Boulder's Friends' School, which debuted the program the second week of May.

"(The Outdoor Intensive) was an amazing experience for our kids," says Polly Donald, head of Friends' School. "It was amazing to have (Secunda and staff) come and give the students access to something they may never have an opportunity to do. I think every one of our students exceeded the expectation of what they thought they could do. I'm planning on having (Secunda) back again next year."

Mark Sparn, principal at Flatirons, shares Donald's enthusiasm. Sparn says the school was initially concerned about safety logistics, but after witnessing Secunda's program, the school administrator says he was pleasantly surprised.

"What (Secunda and staff) were trying to do is make sure all the kids in the school were aware that these were lifestyle opportunities," says Sparn, noting that for some of his students, the Outdoor Intensive was their first attempt on a bike. "I think it's a great concept."

"The idea of inspiring kids to become involved in active outdoor lifestyles is at the core of this entire business," says Secunda, who operates A5 Outdoor Adventures out of his home in downtown Boulder. "Everyone from faculty members to parents to kids is just so psyched (by the Outdoor Intensive). Parents have almost been in tears at the accomplishments their kids have made in one day."

For more information on A5 Outdoor Adventures, visit [www.goA5.com](http://www.goA5.com).