

All marshmallows, No hassles

By Joshua Lindenstien

Camera Sports Writer

David Secunda admits his reasons for starting Avid 4 Adventure, Inc., were partially selfish.

After spending most of his career in the corporate world, working for venture capital firms, founding the online retailer Planet Outdoors and serving as president of the Outdoor Industry Association, Secunda decided he needed to spend more time with his family.

What better way, he thought, than to create a business where his family could join him at the office?

He did just that, and it's those same principles of reconnecting with the family that is driving Avid 4 Adventure's family trips to Arches National Park and Moab, Utah.

When he started the company two years ago, Secunda found that there was a segment of the population that desired to camp and take outdoors-oriented vacations. The problem for them was dealing with the logistics that went along with incorporating children into their outdoor lifestyles. Parents either left their youngsters at home to take their own vacations or they took the children, which made the vacation totally about the children. There was no way to have a family camping trip that carved out time for the parents.

"We kind of put those two things together for these trips," says Secunda, who has brought his family along on multiple Avid 4 trips.

Secunda started Avid 4, whose revenues he didn't disclose, with a group of seven other investors.

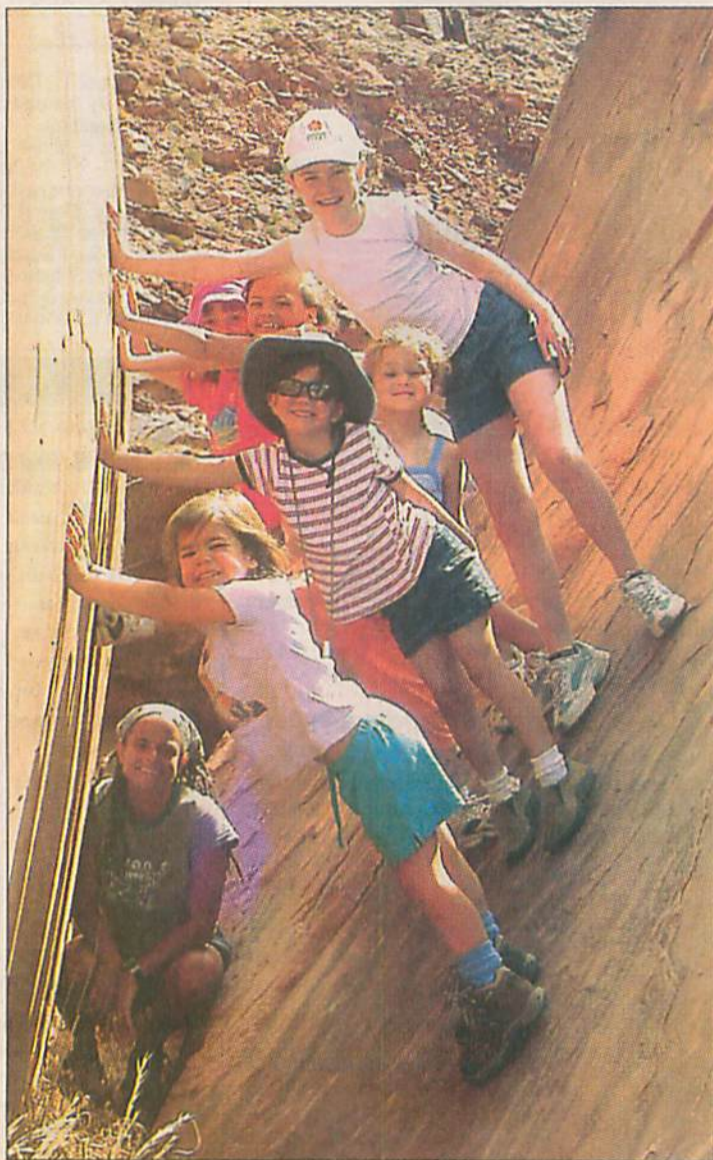
The company's main focus is school programs, in which Avid 4 sets up a sort of virtual outdoor environment at schools, and weeklong summer camps along the Front Range. Avid 4 had about 6,000 children take part in the school programs this past year.

But, for the past couple of years, it's the family trips that have been gaining attention.

Elaine Belansky's interest in the trips was first piqued when her 7-year-old daughter took part in one of the camps last summer and loved it. Although Belansky and her family had been camping on their own plenty of times, they decided to see what the Avid 4 family trips were all about.

She, her husband, Greg Frost, and their two children went on a trip to Arches over spring break in March.

Avid 4 Adventure takes care of tedious side of family camping



Courtesy photo

Instructor LynnAnne Madory, bottom, leads a group of children during an Avid 4 Adventure trip near Moab, Utah, last year.

IF YOU GO

WHAT • Avid 4 Adventure family camping trips to Moab, Utah, and Arches National Park

WHEN • Next trip is scheduled for June 22-25. Others planned for September and October

COST • \$175 per person includes activities for children, all tents, equipment and food

INFO • www.avid4.com

"One thing that attracted us to it was the way it was set up," Belansky says.

Typically, there are six or seven families on each three-day, three-night trip, the next of which is June 22-25 at Arches.

But unlike your average camping trip that begins with hours of Clark Griswold-esque set-up snags and swearing, camp is constructed when families arrive on the first evening. Rather than

pitching tents and gathering firewood, families can get right to roasting marshmallows.

There's a large tent waiting for each family, food has been purchased, the camp kitchen is set up and sleeping bags are unrolled. All top-of-the-line equipment — other than bikes — is included.

From 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. each day, Avid 4 guides take the children out biking, climbing, hiking, canyoneering or what-

ever else they conjure up. Parents, meanwhile, are given direction on activities they can go off and do themselves. Everyone reconvenes in the afternoon, and families take turns helping prepare meals.

Other than that, for \$175 per person, campers need to merely show up. At the end of the third day, campers high-tail it home while Avid 4 cleans up.

"The counselors did things that I don't think parents ever could have figured out for their children," Belansky says. "That made it really nice for Greg and I, because we were able to go for hikes. The other thing I liked is David's company does all the labor. It's a huge relief to have a staff that's in charge of all the logistics."

Chris Doyle, the director of the Adventure Travel Trade Association, says Avid 4's family trips are part of a growing trend in the industry. He says there's been somewhat of a "softening" of many adventure trips to include more people of all ages and physical prowess.

"It's not so much about physical adventure anymore," Doyle says. "I think the volume in family-oriented trips has blossomed in recent years. There may be an underlying societal trend where people are saying, 'I'm tired of being enslaved to my work. I want to be with my family.'"

This summer is the second summer Avid 4 has done the family trips. Secunda says the spring break trips are the most popular because of timing but there are also trips planned for Labor Day weekend and early October.

Another reason for starting Avid 4, Secunda says, were his personal beliefs in getting children involved in the outdoors. While the school programs are sort of the gateway for that, the family trips provide the support system that keeps them active in the long term.

"It's really these really memorable experiences that tend to bring a family together positively in an outdoor environment that they remember forever," Secunda says. "And then kids just get completely jazzed on the outdoors."