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Sharing Jackson's Joys With People of All Abilities

by Tony Banning

Jackson, Wyoming sits in the shadow of the Grand Teton Mountain Range in a valley so scenic it's long been a favored getaway for captains of industry, political titans and Hollywood elite. Average folks visit too. Each summer, droves of tourists ramble through the quaint Old West downtown, fish in the area's blue ribbon streams, pedal along the many mountain bike trails and raft the rivers surrounding the town.

In any season, Jackson is a place of great beauty and Western adventure. Now, through the efforts of community members like Kurt Henry, people of all abilities can readily access its wonders and thrill at its adventures.

Henry is director of Teton Adaptive Sports, Wyoming's only chapter of Disabled Sports USA. It's a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping a variety of people—from children with cognitive disorders to wounded war veterans—enjoy Jackson Hole. As such, it reflects the spirit of

community cooperation that permeates this small town. Jackson may be peppered with glitzy second-homes and up-scale restaurants and retailers but it is still a close-knit, neighborly community.

Henry explained that Teton Adaptive Sports started five years ago as an extension of the adaptive ski program that has existed at Jackson Hole Mountain Resort since the 1980s.

"The ski programs [at Jackson Hole and Grand Targhee Ski Resort in nearby Driggs, Idaho] are all in-house," Henry said. "They coordinate everything." The former ski bum, who was one of the first Jackson instructors to work with the disabled, said, "Our initial goal was to support the programs at Jackson Hole Mountain Resort and Grand Targhee.





This kayak is paddled with pedal power.

Adaptive Steep and Deep Camp at Jackson Hole.



SIT SKIERS: HANNAH HARDWAY

We had three primary objectives in the beginning, and they all had to do with raising money. We needed to help buy equipment, pay for instructor training and fund scholarships.

“We can do some amazing things if we have the right equipment. I’ve had people on a ski hill who have had spinal chord injuries and couldn’t do more than move their heads, and now they’re skiing. That’s really cool, but it’s also very expensive and you can’t really expect the ski resorts to provide all the funding.

“Of course we have to have instructors who know how to operate the adaptive gear which can be quite complicated. We also want these experiences to be affordable for locals, of course, but also for our visitors. In the summers especially we have a lot of regular, working folks coming through Jackson on their way to Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks. We wanted to help everyone enjoy what we get to enjoy all the time.”



People of all abilities can enjoy Jackson’s scenic wonders with assistance from Teton Adaptive Sports.



This summer Teton Adaptive Sports offers opportunities for people of all abilities to canoe in both Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks.

Two years ago, Henry's organization set about expanding its services to include summer sports—camping, canoeing, rafting, cycling and hiking. He enlisted the services—and basic equipment—of others in the community, and for the first time Teton Adaptive Sports began organizing its own outdoor adventures.

“That’s one of the great things about being in a place like Jackson. The locals all know each other. I was pretty apprehensive about moving out on to water activities. Skiing is dangerous. Water sports are dangerous times ten. I went to Aaron Pruzan at Rendezvous River Sports for help. We’ve known each other for years. He taught my son to kayak. I told him I had to make sure we had some expert training. Aaron went to the American Canoe Association. They have an adaptive part to what they do. So with a very generous grant from the Community Foundation of Jackson, we were able to send an instructor to that organization’s training sessions and also buy an adaptive seat that stabilizes someone in a raft, kayak or canoe. We didn’t have to buy any boats. Aaron was generous to loan us all we need.”

Henry pointed out that the majority of Jackson rafting outfits take people with special needs down scenic trips and whitewater as well. “They are pretty comfortable with what they’re doing.” The rafting companies do charge for their services. However, as a nonprofit, Teton Adaptive Sports (TAS) offers free summer adventures including time on the water.

This summer the roster of activities includes a bike rally, camping trips, scenic river floats and at least two Paddle Days in Grand Teton National

Park. “We’ve had great support from the park,” he said. “They have given us a special-use permit for String Lake. It has shallow water and is the warmest lake around here. It’s cool for these guys to get in a raft or kayak. Out on the lake you can let them row and take charge of the boat.”

This summer TAS also debuts a climbing series. “Ryan Burke, our summer program manager, was certified by the American Mountain Association to do that. He’ll be doing some gym climbing and also taking participants onto some outdoor climbing sites.”



This custom watercraft seat provides extra support and stability. Here, a stroke survivor uses it.

Adaptive athletes also have a chance to learn to fly-fish while exploring Yellowstone National Park from a kayak. The four-day wilderness adventure begins August 30. Throughout the season, TAS organizes hikes and overnight stays at a yurt in Rock Springs Canyon. Like most of the scheduled adaptive activities, these trips require reservations and space is limited.

“Anyone is welcome to take part in what we’re doing as space allows. There’s no charge for any of our events or activities,” Henry said. “We are also happy to customize things for folks who are coming to town. If they’re visiting Jackson at a time that doesn’t fit in with one of our scheduled activities, we’ll do our best to put something together just for them as much as our time and the resources allow. Most of all, we want to get the word out about this great opportunity for people of all ages and abilities to enjoy what Jackson has to offer.”

Visit www.tetonadaptivesports.com for more information. ■

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ATTENTION Art Lovers

by Tara Galen

Jackson Hole's astonishing beauty begs to be immortalized. Landscape painters have been attempting to capture the Tetons' grandeur ever since the government sent a covey of artists to document the wonders of this region in the mid-1800s. The love affair continues today.



The National Museum of Wildlife Art

The National Museum of Wildlife Art hugs the National Elk Refuge on the north side of town and adds a special dimension to any Jackson visit. There are more than 5,000 pieces in its impressive holdings including rare works by Thomas Moran, Albert Bierstadt and other early artistic Jackson visitors. The ADA-compliant building includes 14 galleries, an experiential children's area and a café. Constructed of natural rough-hewn stone, the 51,000-square-foot facility blends seamlessly with its environment and affords lovely views.

It's also easy to own a depiction of Jackson's beauty. More than a dozen Jackson Hole galleries represent a wide range of artists. Work depicting wildlife and the West dominate their offerings. Throughout the year, special events also focus on Jackson's artistic side. The Jackson Hole Arts Fair, a family-friendly attraction draws a wide range of artists and artisans twice each summer. Painters, photographers, toymakers, graphic artists, glass blowers and more set up in Miller Park. This year's events, held July 16 through 18 and August 20 through 22, also serve up an abundance of food and hands-on fun.

Each September Jackson Hole is home to one of the West's premier cultural attractions—The Fall Arts Festival. Ten days of activity center around a juried art show that attracts the nation's finest Western and wildlife artists. Events range from quick-draw plein air competitions to historic ranch tours, a Taste of the Tetons food fair and a showcase for Western interior design and fashion. A cowboy jubilee concert and art gallery brunch are also featured. Save the date for an event that reflects the best of Jackson Hole, Wyoming. This year's festival will be held September 9 through the 19th. ■

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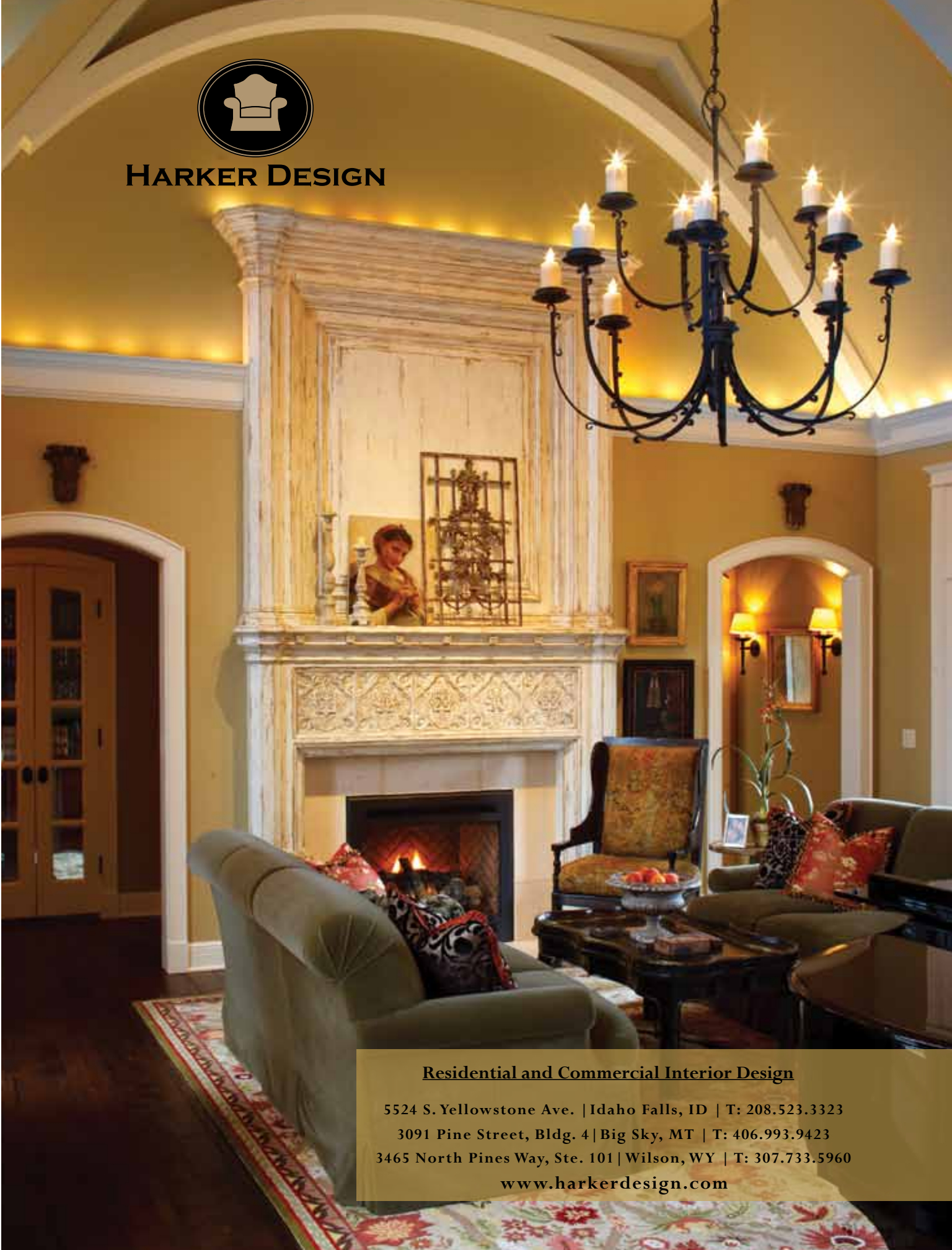
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