

THE WILD GIRLS

BY CALISTA SPRAGUE



If you're female and love the outdoors or you would like to learn more about hiking, kayaking or climbing, you need to know about WILD, Women's Initiative for Learning and Discovery. The Columbus non-profit is run by women for women to "open the doors to the outdoors," by building the confidence, skills and camaraderie to successfully enjoy outdoor activities.

Sanna Morevek, a lifelong lover of all things outdoors, founded the organization. "It was born out of the idea that we should have a safe space for women to come and learn," Morevek explained. She had been working for Outside World Columbus, a now defunct adventure retailer, when a friend mentioned that the area needed a women's outdoor group.

She started by running women's classes through Outside World and hosting an occasional women's trip. Morevek wanted to give women a chance to learn adventure skills and share experiences in a supportive environment. "People sometimes ask, 'What if I'm on my period?'" she said. "In a group with both men and women, women may not ask those legitimate questions."

She also wanted to make outdoor activities more financially accessible. "The whole idea is to provide low cost outdoor education experience." She explained that a four-day trip with a national retail chain could run \$1,200 to \$2,000. "For most people that's just not an attainable way of getting outdoors."

She applied for non-profit status last year, once it was clear the interest and



WILD members read their map on a recent hike.

needs were substantial, allowing WILD to receive grants for purchasing gear and providing better education. Morevek points out that the expense of gear is a major hurdle for getting women involved in outdoor activities. "It can be quite expensive to purchase a backpack or kayak, especially if you're not even sure you will like doing it."

The women pay their own way for the trips, but for a small rental fee, WILD offers them access to the expensive gear, much of which is necessary for safety as much as for fun.

The skills clinics and trips run the gamut from beginner basics for nearby parks to advanced skills for adventures across the Southeast, so women can sign up for education and experiences at any level. “It’s really neat because everybody learns from each other,” Morevek said. “You’ve got young energy and you’ve got people who have years of experience.”

WILD BENEFITS

A diverse group of women from their teens to 70s joins WILD for a variety of benefits, including physical fitness, social connections, lifelong learning and adventure. “Some of them come because they want to learn certain skills,” Morevek said, “and then we have women who are very, very knowledgeable, who come because they really enjoy being able to spend time connecting with other women. It’s just an all around good experience for everybody.”

Self described “WILD girl” Kathryn Anderson joined after moving back home to Columbus after college. “Most of my friends were gone,” she remembered. “I



WILD members take advantage of bonding time around the campfire.

have always loved the outdoors, but most people don’t hike or camp by themselves.” She attended a clinic on cold weather camping and was surprised how much there was to learn.

“I grew up camping, so I went into it thinking I knew everything I needed to know about the outdoors,” she laughed. “I just wanted to meet other girls who were outdoorsy, but I learned more from Sanna than I thought I could. I learned about building emergency shelter, an emergency fire and what to do if a bear comes into your campsite.”

Along the way, the women gain confidence in addition to the outdoor adventure skills. Last year Anderson went on her first backpacking trip. “I grew up car camping where you just pull up to the campsite with the cooler and tables and all. I had never been

backpacking, where you have everything you need in your pack and you hike for miles and miles.”

Her first trip was no small feat. A WILD group went backpacking in North Carolina, and the hike was 25 miles. Even armed with all the information from the clinics, Anderson admitted she was nervous before the trip. “I’d never done

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Beginning Backpacking 101
March 14, 16 & 17

Appalachian Trail Magic Weekend
April 5-7

Rafting the Nantahala River
June 21



WILD members gain confidence in their camping skills like pitching a tent and building a campfire.

anything like that before, but there was just such a good support system. We did it, and it was amazing to wake up on the top of a mountain, drink coffee and watch the sunrise.”

Watching women connect and grow is gratifying for Morevek. “I had a woman do the clinics and a backpacking trip with us who had just turned 40 and had never spent a night away from her children in the 18 years since her oldest was born. She said, ‘It’s not only great for me to gain confidence and relearn about me as a person, but it’s important for my husband to have that time to connect with our children.’”

Morevek pointed out that backpacking is physically challenging and can be mentally challenging as well. “Watching someone completely bloom and become so confident is an amazing feeling. She got through the trip, and she was a whole new person.” That same mother now uses her newfound skills to take homeschool groups on hiking trips, widening the reach of WILD’s education.

WILD JR.

In addition to her full time position as program director at the Chattahoochee River Conservancy and her volunteer work running WILD, Morevek is a single mom. “Really it all started with my daughter. When she was born, I always had this idea that I wasn’t going to let being a parent stop me from the things that I love doing.”

Morevek, who hails from California, took her daughter hiking on Mount Rainier and kayaking on Puget Sound. “She would drag her Barbie’s hair through the water, and we would go exploring to find sea lions.” When her daughter was only seven, Morevek took her on a hike covering half the state of Maryland along the Appalachian Trail. “She’s just a phenomenal little hiker.”

This year WILD will add programs for mothers to bring their children for training and trips. “I just think that it’s so important for kids to be able to explore and learn, and for parents to feel safe and confident bringing their kids out without being fearful the entire time. It’s a great bonding activity and a great way to get fresh air without any electronic devices in front of us.” ☺

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