



The Eagle Mount Spring 2005
Special Edition
on opportunities for special people in Southwest Montana

Floating Free

Eagle Mount Swim Program gives participants with disabilities a sense of freedom

*Story by Kayley Mendenhall
Photography by Sean Sperry
from the Bozeman Daily Chronicle*



Photo courtesy of Bozeman Daily Chronicle

Louise holds her arms up to tell her mom how many head dips she's done.

As 6-year-old Louise Franks walked into the pool room at the Wingate Inn Wednesday, her big, brown eyes nearly popped out of her head and a bright smile took over her face.

Louise's mom, Tracy Franks, helped her out of her coat revealing her swimming suit and into a life jacket before letting her loose.

"Swimming is the best," Tracy Franks said. "She can't injure herself. It loosens everything up in the nice warm water."

Louise was born with congenital muscular dystrophy. Her arms and legs are extremely thin and she has little muscle development or strength.

But when she's in the pool, Louise can kick her legs and even pull herself up and down in the water while holding onto the pool edge. During Eagle Mount's eight-week summer swimming program, Louise's self confidence increased along with her muscle development, Franks

said. "It's the best thing in the whole world for her," she said. "It's been great to see what Louise can do."

For the past 15 years Eagle Mount – a nonprofit dedicated to providing recreation for people with disabilities of all ages – has been teaming community volunteers with clients to swim for an hour at a time, said Pat Whitlock, program director. Swimming is just one of many Eagle Mount programs, including skiing, horseback riding, ice skating, kayaking and golf. All programs are open to kids and adults, Whitlock said as she prepared for the 5-12 year old session Wednesday afternoon.

"It's a near weightless environment," she said. "There are so many properties of the water that make people feel good."

While swimming is therapeutic for Eagle Mount participants, the program is just as beneficial for the volunteers who make it happen, she explained. Many

of them, like Barb Asper, continue to volunteer year after year, watching the kids and the adults grow in the water.

"I have a passion for these kids," said Asper, who has volunteered for Eagle Mount for 17 years. "For some of these kids, it's really the only recreation they can do and have control over their bodies. It's like walking on air to them."

A few wheelchair-bound clients can actually take steps in the water, Asper continued, something they can't do on land. And those who can't swim independently enjoy the time in the water for other reasons.

Support System

Floating gently in Edie Bishop's arms, 6-year-old Storey Mills leaned her head back and smiles. Swinging Storey's body from side to side in a gentle motion, Bishop, assistant director of Eagle Mount's aquatics program, said she was working Storey's side muscles.

cont. next page

Founders tell the origin of Eagle Mount on page 3.

Eagle Mount property gets a fence facelift

A complete new fence, replacing sections which had existed on Eagle Mount property long before it was purchased for the therapeutic center, has been installed by a combined effort of volunteers and local businesses. "Because the barbed wire was in such disrepair it was a danger to both our horses and participants," explains Cheryl Christman, equine program director.

She explains the project also included the creation of a track around the perimeter of the property for hiking, riding and snowshoeing. In addition, it provides access to four pastures with automatic waterers for the horses. The fencing is three strand coated wire topped with a wood rail.

While the project is being spearheaded by the horse program's Top Hands volunteers, it is being supported by several local businesses that are donating either additional labor or reduced costs for supplies.

Precision Fencing Systems donated half of the labor to construct the fence, and Marks-Miller Post & Pole charged half price of the cost for the wood posts. Centaur HTP contributed 40 percent of the cost of the wire. Artcraft Printers and Helori Graff were major corporate sponsors. Kurt and Karen Thornburg donated additional fencing for improving the main entrance to the center.

The Top Hands who were directly involved in this project were Dick Blackwell, Daryl Henning, Konrad Reinke, Sherm Sollid, Maggee Harrison, Bobby Crowe and Marlene Moran. Additional helpers were Scott Hoag, Molly O'Brien, Will Brunner from Big Boys' Toys, and Art Perry from Dry Creek Iron Works.



Daryl Henning (left) and Dick Blackwell chat across a new section of fence.

cont. from previous page

All the little girl seemed to care about was the joy of being in the water.

"She loves swimming. It helps her circulation and her movement," said Sandee Mills, Storey's mom. "It's a time for her to feel freer ... Their bodies don't feel so heavy in the water."

The Mills family doesn't have a diagnosis for Storey. She was healthy until the age of 2 and then started losing her balance and muscle control until she could no longer walk.

"I used to work with her in the water," Mills said, "It's nice to have an hour break. And it's nice for her to have a break from me."

The swimming program gives parents of children with disabilities a chance to relax a little and to talk with each other, to gain support from each other's experiences.

Safety and Training

At the last session of the summer season this past week, Franks and Mills compared notes on a wet suit for Louise to help keep her warm in the water. Because some of the kids are so small, volunteers have to make sure they warm up in the hot tub from time to time.



Photo courtesy of Bozeman Daily Chronicle

Volunteers Linda (left) and Debbie reassure six year old Robert.

"Safety with everything is an issue," Whitlock said.

Eagle Mount volunteers go through a short training before they get in the pool with clients. Then, at the beginning of each session, volunteers are given a card profiling the client they will work with that day. The card explains the person's disabilities and medical problems. At the end of each session, volunteers note progress made and lessons learned.

"The first time you come it's a little overwhelming. A lot of the kids have a lot of limitations," said Debbie Canfield, a volunteer for the past year. "But they are so happy to be in the water."

Growing with the need

The swimming program is made possible by three local hotels – the Wingate, the GranTree and the Super 8 in Belgrade – that volunteer their pools. Ultimately, Eagle Mount would like a pool of its own on its 10 acres off of Goldenstein Lane.

"The organization has worked to raise money for a pool for several years, but is still at least \$1 million short for the building fund," Whitlock said.

"We do still want a pool desperately," she said.

It would be larger than the hotel pools and available at all hours, rather than the limited schedule provided by the hotels. Plus, she said, Eagle Mount could raise the water temperature closer to 90 degrees, which would be better for the therapeutic sessions.

But for now, Whitlock and Eagle Mount are grateful to the hotels for their help and to the 200 volunteers who keep the program going every year.

Between 150 and 200 clients participate in the year-round swimming sessions.

Watching her 7-year-old son Jacob, who suffers from cerebral palsy, splash in the water, Val Jorgenson said Eagle Mount programs are invaluable.

"He can't walk, but with Eagle Mount he can swim and kayak and he skis," she said. "It's wonderful to see him careening down a mountain or swimming under water."

"I think it frees his body," Jorgenson said. "The water supports him so he can do things he can't do on land."

Founders tell the origin of Eagle Mount

Eagle Mount began a very long time ago. Both Bob and I received a legacy to help disadvantaged people. Our mothers both spent much of their lives helping others. One was a welfare worker; the other volunteered in hospitals and nursing homes. - Greta Mathis



Founders Greta and Bob Mathis.

The seeds were planted for me in my senior year at Montana State College when I received a scholarship to a special child development school in Detroit. I studied all aspects of children's growth and development. I spent time teaching in the school's research pre-school and teaching and volunteering in the settlement houses in the poor neighborhoods—as well as attending juvenile court sessions. The professors were on the cutting edge of mental retardation and physical therapy. I was privileged to have studied under them.

After graduating from Montana State College, I was awarded an internship at the University of Illinois to teach in a research pre-school for disabled and disadvantaged children. The research was directed at determining if enriching the environment by recreation, special teaching methods, and nutritional enhancement would actually improve the behavioral and mental problems. The children ran the gambit of disabilities---developmentally, physically or emotionally challenged or all three. The teaching was

both challenging and rewarding. I formed strong bonds with the children. After a year of being privileged to work with them, I was "hooked." I knew I wanted to be involved with exceptional people---for the rest of my life!

While at the University of Illinois, I met and married the then Lieutenant Bob Mathis. He shared my dreams of helping these very special people. The children "rubbed off" on him too. Throughout his 34-year Air Force career, there were many opportunities for us to be involved. I helped to set up a special school, helping to teach and recruit volunteers. I volunteered and substituted in pre-schools in several of the places where we lived. At that time, many of the children and adults with disabilities were either institutionalized or kept at home.

Bob and I believed that visiting them, helping with recreation, having parties, playing games and reading to them would enrich their lives. We learned how much of a difference "hands-on" activities made in their development. We often talked about doing "something" more

significant when Bob left the Air Force. Our ideas began to take form several years before his retirement.

Bob Mathis continues the story...

I knew that I would reach mandatory retirement in 1983 after 35 years in the Air Force. I started investigating the possibility of starting a foundation that would improve the lives of those with disabilities. Then about a year before I was scheduled to retire, I decided to leave early and get on with setting up a "camp" for people that needed our help. I wasn't sure where we would geographically locate. I knew I wanted to live somewhere in the Rocky Mountain region since I had visited both Bozeman and Albuquerque many times and had fallen in love with the mountains.

My first step was to come to Montana to perform a study of the needs of an area. We soon determined that Bozeman was a place that would benefit from

cont. next page

"The dream that Greta and I shared many years ago continues to grow and amaze us." - Bob Mathis



The Eagle Mount Dream Is Now a Growing Reality

(cont. from previous page)

programs for persons with disabilities. Meantime, while still in the Air Force, I started the I Am Third Foundation and prepared to have it declared tax-exempt by the IRS. Incidentally, the name came from Greta's father who taught Sunday School and was familiar with the I Am Third passage from the Bible: where Jesus explains that we should put God first in our lives and our fellow man second. A good way to remember this thought: keep yourself in third place.

In 1982, Greta and I moved to Bozeman and started to build the foundation. We still lacked a name for the organization or programs that the foundation would operate. However, after a large family gathering our nephew, Craig Gay, suggested the name Eagle Mount, from Isaiah 40:31, "They shall mount up on wings of Eagles..."

We were off and running...but had no staff, no board of directors, no program, and no money! After awhile, the IRS decided we could be trusted and made us a tax-exempt organization.



Our first program was downhill skiing.

The first steps

The first step in building the foundation was assembling a dedicated board of directors who would share our interest. Their only compensation would be to feel good about helping those with special needs. Naïve about raising money, a number of people thought we were a "pie in the sky" organization when we approached them for financial assistance. We slowly worked toward building the organization with a small group of committed board members. Then in spring 1983, I was invited to speak about our foundation at the Governor's Prayer Breakfast in Helena. My military career

had not taught me much about raising funds for a non-profit but I did know that we needed to publicize our effort.

Our son Harry called early that summer from seminary and said he wanted to come to Bozeman to help us get our programs started. We didn't have much money but now we had an executive director. Paying him would be another challenge. We were able to support Harry and his family with the earnings I was making while working on my brother-in-law's ranch and some help from my retirement pay. Additionally, I was raising some money.

About a month after Harry joined us, he announced that he had found the ideal person to run the programs. He said that Cyndi Fonda wanted to join us as she had a similar dream as ours. I took the matter to the board of directors. Somewhat stunned, one director said, "I will pay her first month's salary, and another said, "And I will take care of the second month." We were off and running, well at least walking.

Shortly thereafter, Cyndi and Harry came to the board and explained that a camp was unnecessary. They emphasized the need to start the programs first - that the first should begin that fall for handicapped skiers. We had picked up the pace a bit. We anticipated about 20 or so skiers for the winter of 1983-84. But after Cyndi and Harry went into action, 94 disabled skiers and over a hundred volunteers had signed up to help others enjoy the slopes. We had gone from planning to putting our dream into action.

By spring 1984, we had set up a horseback riding (hippotherapy) program with a number of riders. We borrowed horses and found a riding arena in Sedan, Montana, (some 20 miles away) where we could operate. A second successful program!

As we started showing people that we were being successful developing programs and also operating them, we found that more people were willing to help us financially. When I had spoken at the Governor's prayer breakfast, a state senator from Billings, Montana came over to me and said, "When you need some help, how about coming to see me?" So before we started the horseback program, I packed Cyndi and Harry into my car and

we headed for Billings. The upshot of the meeting with Senator Bruce Crippen was that he agreed to support Eagle Mount for as much as we needed for the next year. As he put it, "You need an angel to help you until you learn something about fundraising. I will be your angel for the next year." He literally saved us from extinction.



Stephanie Conant swims with volunteers in 1987

The dream takes flight

With improvement in our cash flow, we were able to add an aquatics program that has grown over the years and is our only year round activity, offering therapy to between 150 and 200 clients. In summer 1985 we hosted the Sunshine Kids of Houston, Texas in the Big Sky community south of Bozeman. This was the beginning of the Big Sky Kids program for children suffering with cancer. The program has flourished and presently offers three cancer camps for different aged youth.

The Bozeman center also offers programs in ice skating, golf, kayaking, fishing and gardening as the need arises.

Along the way, a group in Billings heard about our skiing program and asked for help to start such a program at Red Lodge, Montana to service the young people there. This successful program launched another Eagle Mount center.

Very shortly thereafter, still another Eagle Mount Center was started in Great Falls. For a number of years, these programs have served hundreds of disabled people in Montana. Next came Eagle Mount-Missoula, and just this past year, Eagle Mount-Helena came into being.

The dream that Greta and I shared many years ago continues to grow and amaze us. The staff, the members of the board of directors, volunteers, and supporters have made our dream a reality.



Volunteer Sherry Blackwood (left), Davon Hill and Julia Nielson share a moment.

A new director begins a new journey

by Julia Nielson, Big Sky Kids program

When I became the new Big Sky Kids oncology camp director, I couldn't begin to imagine the journey I was about to begin. In my daily life it was easy to take things for granted, health, family, and loved ones. After getting to know the kids at camp a significant change in my life took place.

At camp, I joined the Big Sky Kids and members of their family without fully understanding what that meant. We came together from across the country, bringing different backgrounds and circumstances. Some arrived unsure of what to expect, some came with partly broken spirit, and some with lost hope. As the days passed, we rode horses, fished, camped under the stars, sang by the fire, beat drums, danced and laughed. We grew to understand each other, our differences set aside. I grew wiser, more appreciative, and witnessed that attitude is a conscience choice. These kids have chosen to fight and continue living. Life is a gift each day. We learned to recognize our strengths and respect each other for our differences.

The kids are faced with their biggest challenge; their lives are at stake. Many of us can't comprehend this unless we wear their shoes. Their lives have been interrupted by a terrible disease, yet their spirits are lifted each day. I have learned and grown from these kids. They have taught me lessons about life. Outside of the disease, they are like any other kids. They laugh, play, fall down, and pick themselves up. During an age when peer acceptance is so important, they have lost their hair and physical strength. When they look into the mirror, there's a stranger looking back. Many travel miles for doctor's appointments and the disease is a financial burden to families. Their lives have been interrupted.

Yet, these are extraordinary individuals, each and every one. The strength and courage to face such challenges are integrated into their daily lives. They have no choice. We smiled, laughed, and cried together. We shared our joys and sorrows. We spoke our innermost thoughts and fears.....together. It was

safe and it was beautiful. We arrived from various places, and left with our hearts filled with love, hope, and new friendships.

The battle is not over, but the journey continues. I will never forget, planting the tree at the end of our 10-day Adventure Camp. Fred Fischer, Eric's father spoke for all. "Eric has always wanted to be a normal kid. Yet, after the experiences we shared together these past 10 days, look at how exceptional we all are. I wouldn't change that." There is a piece of every child that resides in my heart. They have touched many lives without knowing it. By the end of camp, we all parted ways with restored hope and renewed spirit.

I've grown as a person tremendously. I have the Big Sky kids and everyone involved with the program to thank.



Trevor and Betsy.



Brett drums by the fire.



Camper Jozi and counselor Anya.

Ski surprise lifts Teresa's spirits, renews her life

a story of courage and inspiration by Jill Holder, ski program director

Would you like to meet an inspiration? Teresa Bradley, also known as "T," showed me the meaning of courage and confirmed my belief in the power of freedom felt while skiing.

A graduate of DePauw University and a former ICU nurse at an Indianapolis hospital, Teresa suffered a brain injury in an automobile accident in 1996. Prior to the accident, Teresa was very active. She skied and ran half-marathon races. Teresa, 39, needed those types of experiences again. Her sister Sherry Reid, a neurologist, learned of Eagle Mount's ski program for people with disabilities soon after she moved to Bozeman in the fall of 2003. When she learned that her sister and family would be visiting her from Indiana over President's Day weekend last February, she secretly booked two ski lessons for "T" with Eagle Mount.

"T" arrived at the Eagle Mount ski hut with a range of emotions: surprise, anger, fear and excitement – all directed at her sister for this surprise gift. Ever so slowly, decisions were made and, finally, with her ski boots on and an unsteady gait, I asked "T" what she wanted most from this experience. Her reply was "I don't want to fall."

Together, Wayne, Pepe, "T" and I sought solutions to help her ski. Her wishes and her safety were our top priorities. It was determined that the best ski device to use were the "ski legs." Every step of the process was a mile marker: up on skis; gliding on skis; chairlift loading and unloading; and finally, skiing down the slope. With each small success, came more of a smile, greater self-confidence, and less fear until we saw absolute joy.

A family says thanks

Two weeks following T's exciting winter weekend on the ski hill, Jill Holder received the following letter from her sister, Dr. Sherry Reid. "I will hold the letter and the memory close forever," says Jill, who was sent the appreciative message on behalf of the family.

"I wanted to thank you again as well as Wayne, Pepe & Lee. I truly appreciate what you did for Teresa - more than I can ever say or words can ever express. She has been flying high since then and tells everyone she meets. Just a year ago while she sat in a lodge watching everyone else ski she had given up.

Amidst sobbing and tears, she told me she was done. She was tired. No one needed her and she was ready to go. My heart has agonized for her every day since. However, after skiing with you, the sparkle in her eyes has come back.

When she finished skiing on Sunday, I showed her the picture of the skier using a bamboo bar (a less restrictive device) in the Bridger Bowl ski pamphlet. She studied it closely for about five minutes. Then very carefully she tore the picture out and slipped it into her pocket. She cannot wait to ski next year and now has something to look forward to.

That would never have happened without you. From the bottom of my heart and from all of my family – thank you – and thank you for the gift of life that you have given T."

We skied with her husband, her ten and eleven year old daughters, and with Sherry. They occasionally had a little trouble keeping up with us. "T" had well-earned bragging rights by the end of her second day. We all could see and feel the magic in our time together; we asked her to come back; she promised she would and gave us a rose. 🌹



Bi-ski give freedom to skiers of all ages.



Jill, left, and "T" share a first day laugh as "T" builds her confidence before taking to the slopes.



Saturday Nights Out for participants and parents



Nic Hansford (left), and Chloe Quinn (right) read a picture book with high school senior David Lambers.

It's Satirdau Night Out at Eagle Mount. A new pilot program invites participants to spend one night a month having fun at the Eagle Mount Center.

This unique pilot program sponsored by the Sweet Pea Lions club provides participants an opportunity for social interaction as well as an night away from their

parents, " explains Vicki Lucette, SNO coordinator. "And for the parents it is a special Saturday Night Out for them. These parents seldom get an evening away from the responsibility of caring for a child with disabilities."

Respite time for parents of these children is a hard thing to arrange for in the Gallatin Valley,

according to Vicki. She further explains, "There are very limited child care or respite facilities specially equipped to handle special needs children. And while Eagle Mount programs provide a short break for parents during the time their child is in a therapy session, SNO is the first structured program with a key objective of giving parents enough time off to

Help Support Eagle Mount Every Time You Shop

Here are two new ways to help support Eagle Mount - Bozeman that won't cost you a penny.

iGive.com is an easy way to feel good about shopping online and give back without costing you any \$\$\$!

- Visit and join www.igive.com for FREE
- **Choose Eagle Mount - Bozeman** as your recipient cause.
- Shop online at the iGive.com Mall and visit any of 400+ stores.
- Eagle Mount receives a check for **up to 14% of your purchase.**

The **Albertson's Community Partners** program allows you to donate every time you shop at Albertson's or Osco stores.

- Go to www.alberstons.com/cp
- Click "Shoppers login or register"
- Follow the instructions and **choose Eagle Mount - Bozeman** as your recipient cause.
- Use your card at any Albertson's or Osco store.
- Eagle Mount receives a check for **up to 4% of your purchase.**



A year end letter

by Linda Griffith, Chief Executive Officer

As the holiday season approaches we rejoice in the knowledge that so many people have had their lives forever transformed through the extraordinary experiences abundant in our programs. Although the participants are the most obvious recipients of the benefits, our volunteers, staff and investors continually tell us how their involvement with Eagle Mount has made a lasting impact on their lives. And, they share that impact with their families, friends and beyond. Our founder, Greta Mathis, describes it as a "pebble thrown into a pond, where the ripples spread out to places you can't imagine."

In my personal journey with Eagle Mount, I have had many "Golden Eagle" moments ... paradigm shifts in the way I perceive life when viewed through the eyes of someone who has just accomplished something they were told they could never do ... or when a child facing the end of his or

her life speaks words of infinite wisdom. I am humbled to be a part of something so profoundly human and, at the same time, so profoundly spiritual. It is the Creator's hand I see at Eagle Mount, bringing about quiet miracles through the generous actions of all those who choose to be involved

Eagle Mount stands at a point in its existence where we are facing new opportunities and challenges. This has been a year of many changes and renewal of our spirit and commitment. In order to facilitate growth and development, we have created two new positions, the Chief of Operations, Vicki Luquette and a full-time assistant in Aquatics and Horseback Riding, Edie Bishop. We are conducting an "organizational audit" to clarify our vision and make sure our mission is in alignment. And most importantly, we are taking time to listen to, and celebrate, the stories of transformation we are so very privileged to witness. We share some of those stories with you in this newsletter, along with some of the more basic facts and statistics.

In this traditional season of giving, we reflect on the abundance of joy that has enhanced the lives of thousands of people who are members of our Eagle Mount family. For me, it has been a privilege to be a part of something so truly inspirational. We hope you will join us in empowering our fellow human beings to find the courage, strength and freedom to forever transform their lives. And, in the process, forever transform our own.

Volunteer & Participant Numers Involved in Programs Last Year

Program	Vol Hours	Volunteers	Participants
Adaptive Ski - Downhill	6,391	196	160
Adaptive Ski - Cross Country and Snowshoeing	545	27	29
Ski Physical Education Days	61	14	10
Big Sky Ski Race	40	8	8
Aquatic Therapy	2,797	219	179
Therapeutic Horseback Riding	2,579	228	115
Big Sky Kids			
Camp Braveheart (June)	1,540	133	18
Adventure Camp (July)	5,304	333	36
Young Adult Retreat (Aug)	850	74	9
Spring Fling Ski Weekend	601	89	96
Horticulture	340	1	1
Adaptive Golf	80	14	18
Ice Skating	496	81	51
Kayak	285	11	11
Fishing	39	13	9
Total Program Statistics	21,948	1,441	750
Board, Office & Fundraising Volunteers	4,692	289	
Total Volunteer Hours	26,640	1,730	

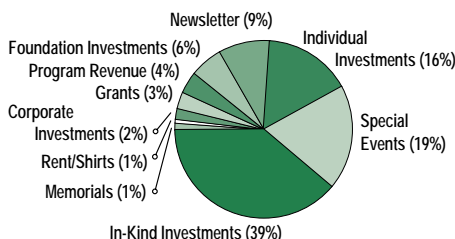
Wish List

Needs:

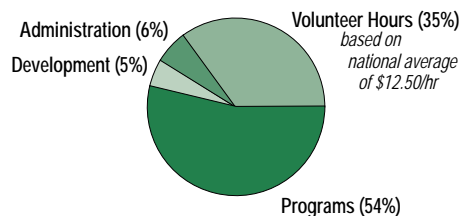
- Salt Blocks
- Tea and hot chocolate for ski hut
- Duct Tape
- Small Ski & Snowboard Boots
- Hoof Creme
- Vet Supplies
- Tissue
- Snowboard Bindings
- Heavy Duty Flatbed Truck
- Hand & Toe Warmers

Wants:

- Swimming tubes and noodles
- 30 SPF sunscreen
- Boat trailer to haul kayaks
- Swim goggles
- Wilderness first aid kit
- Kick boards
- Portable shower
- Miniature horse/pony cart and harness
- Wrench set
- Drill set with bits



Eagle Mount Bozeman Revenue Fiscal Year 2003 - 2004



Eagle Mount Bozeman Expenses Fiscal Year 2003 - 2004



Eagle Mount Bozeman
 6901 Goldenstein Lane
 Bozeman, MT 59715
 406-586-1781
 Fax 406-586-5794

Founders Greta and Robert C. Mathis, General USAF
 I Am Third Foundation (Retired)

Chief Executive Officer, Bozeman Linda Griffith
Newsletter Editor Kate Evans (Volunteer)