

Member Spotlight: Commons Climbing Gym

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in [CWA Blog](#)



Credit: Commons Climbing Gym

When Urban Ascent, a climbing community institution in Boise, Idaho, was closing down, its members were devastated.

Instead of giving up, a few longtime employees and members came together to [re-open the Commons Climbing Gym](#). In this member spotlight, learn more about that vision and how, after opening its doors in early 2020, the Commons navigated the pandemic and found success through its commitment to the community that brought it together in the first place.

Quinn Gordon, Membership Coordinator, CWA (he/him)

Great chatting with you today, Kevin! I wanted to get started talking about the transition from Urban Ascent, the previous gym, to the Commons Climbing Gym. How did you navigate that process?

Kevin Schmelzen, General Manager, The Commons Climbing Gym (he/him)

Awesome – Urban Ascent was the first real sport climbing gym here in Boise, which had a really strong community around it.

When it was known that Urban Ascent was going out of business, a lot of the members and some employees wanted to continue that legacy.

So, they came up with this idea of the Commons Climbing Gym – the name “The Commons” really comes from Urban Ascent and that sense of community that was felt there.

Quinn

And you folks opened right at the start of the pandemic, correct?

Kevin

Yeah, the Commons opened in January of 2020, right before COVID struck.

Fortunately, because of that strong relationship and support from the community for continuing and expanding on the legacy of Urban Ascent, it was those members that allowed the Commons to survive during those tumultuous months. **They wanted to see this gym survive and thrive, and it’s really a testament to the community that we are still here.**

Quinn

That’s awesome to hear. I think one of the coolest parts of the indoor climbing industry is that we show a lot of resilience and I think a lot of those success stories were really highlighted during the pandemic. Obviously, community is quite important to your operations. Could you describe how you’ve built that intentionally?

Kevin

Absolutely – community is one of our major values. It’s how we carry ourselves as a business and as a gym. We want a strong sense of inclusion. Climbing, at least traditionally, is pretty homogenous in a lot of ways as far as race, gender, etc. We’ve tried to build inclusivity through our affinity groups that we host. Whether that’s a women’s night every Friday or our monthly pride night, we just want to make people feel welcome.

READ ALSO: [Why Your Gym Should Host Affinity Groups](#)

We are also actively working with our greater Boise community to introduce people to indoor climbing in general. We’re hosting a block party in September that will hopefully get non-climbers introduced to the space.

We’re also doing things like field trips with local schools, working with

community non-profits, and [collaborating with our local climbing organization, the Boise Climbers Alliance](#), to introduce climbing in general to a broader set of people.

Quinn

I also saw you folks have partnered with [Courageous Kids Climbing](#) to expand on your adaptive programming. How has that been going?

Kevin

Courageous Kids is a really neat organization! It started here in Boise and has expanded to the western third of the US. The organization works to expose kids with adaptive needs to adventurous experiences, whether that's climbing, or hiking, or other fun outdoor activities.

A lot of times, these kids and their families probably wouldn't think to explore these activities or be able to explore without significant help. By hosting them, we're hoping to broaden the sense of community and improve our inclusivity at the Commons.

Quinn

Anything gyms can do to expand that broader climbing community is really awesome! With so much growth in the Boise area, how are you folks looking to capitalize on that?

Kevin

Great question – we are really excited to be expanding our training and education opportunities at the Commons! Right now, we've got a few different classes, like learn to climb, learn to lead, basic crack climbing, and a gym-to-crag course, but we recently reorganized and expanded our training department to grow the number of private and small group lessons, as well as other class types, like sit-down lectures.

I definitely think it is one of our biggest growth opportunities as a business in terms of that value add for our customers.

Quinn

I'm interested in what those sit-down lectures might look like!

Kevin

I think there is a lot of opportunities there! For example, we're working with a local geology professor to give a talk on the different rock types and geologic history of the crags in our area. You might know everything about climbing, but it's interesting to take a look at what you are actually climbing on. They'll be structured in a way to get a deeper knowledge of the entirety of

climbing, not just the basics of technique.

Quinn

Do you have one specific piece of advice that you would give to folks who are either looking to start up a climbing gym now or are in that first couple years of operations?

Kevin

I would say you need to know what you're attempting to create and stay focused on that vision. That's something that the Commons and our founders did very well – they knew if nothing else, they wanted it to be about community. You have to know your value, who you are looking to attract, and then you can expand from there. But you have to start with a vision and start with values.

Quinn

How as the Commons Climbing Gym benefited from membership with the CWA?

Kevin

Great question! The knowledge and expertise are huge. [Our gym has a lot of posters from the ClimbSmart! program](#) that have been helpful, and a few of our staff have gone through the [Climbing Wall Instructor program](#). **As a resource and as a knowledge bank, the CWA has been very valuable.**

Speaking of Certifications...

The CWA recently updated our Climbing Wall Instructor Certification. Learn all the changes and how to keep your certification in good standing.

About the Author



Quinn Gordon is the membership coordinator at the CWA. Quinn is an active member of the climbing community and continues to hone his skills inside and outside the gym. When not on the clock, he can be found climbing in the Flatirons, hiking in the Rockies, or reading above the tree line.



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