Learning the Ropes

In the latter part of the 1990s, Don Soderquist, then chief operating officer of Wal-Mart, was distressed by the lack of ethics he saw in corporate America. At the urging of those around him, including members of the John Brown University board of which he was a member at the time, he decided to start an organization for the promotion of ethical business practices. This was the beginning of the Soderquist Business Center. The main goal of the Soderquist Center is to teach ethics through experiential learning. One unique way in which the Soderquist Center accomplishes this goal is through the experience offered through its ropes course facility at BaseCamp.

BaseCamp was built in 1999 on the campus of JBU. The ropes course is divided into two parts: low ropes, 18 to 20 inches off the ground and high ropes: up to 50 feet off the ground. The courses can be completed solo or in teams. Through their time on the course, participants learn trust, problem solving and communication. Many different groups have taken advantage of the BaseCamp experience including corporations, nonprofits, at risk students, high school students, and college students from JBU and the University of Arkansas.

The Soderquist Business Center and JBU have a longstanding relationship. “They have an agreement to provide services to each other,” Gary Swyers, senior program manager for the Soderquist Center, explains. Soderquist staff frequently work with the Leadership Scholars Institute program and different departments and divisions in the school. They also offer Resident Life staff training at the beginning of every school year. JBU students who have spent time at BaseCamp speak highly of their experience. Junior Hannah Shelburne is employed at BaseCamp as a belay tech, helping participants put on their harnesses and get onto the ropes course. Shelburne says she appreciates the unique element of the facility being “aimed at adults”. Her favorite part is “seeing them get out of their comfort zone and grow through that.”

Resident Assistant Kristin Pankey recalls her time at BaseCamp during training for the Resident Life staff at the beginning of the fall semester. “The individual staff initiatives were helpful for Mayfield. We got to see how each of us functions under pressure, also how we communicate with each other as a whole team.” Pankey also says that the larger Resident Life team benefited from completing the tasks together, “It was good to see that each of us plays a role, that requires a lot of give and take, patience and understanding.” During their training, the staff participated in activities such as the trust fall, which requires a member of the team to fall backwards into their teammates’ arms from a height of six to seven feet off the ground. Adding to the challenge of the initiatives, if a member of the team made a mistake, they had to do things such speak in a Russian accent or shout out facts about their home state every thirty seconds for the remainder of the activity.

Since its beginnings, BaseCamp has provided a unique atmosphere for the Soderquist’s clients and University students and staff. Through the hands-on experience participants gain valuable knowledge about themselves and others and grow in character traits that help them succeed in life.

Milestones

March 29, 1976
JBU installed a chapter of Alpha Chi National Honor Society. Twenty-three charter members were inducted. Dr. Gil Weaver was official sponsor.

April 19, 1952
Alumni Lt. Dene Godwin visits JBU after completing his 100th combat mission against Communist forces in North Korea.
If John Brown University Students wander down by the soccer field at dusk, they might meet a bespectacled figure peering through a telescope.

This figure will more than likely be associate psychology professor Dr. david Cater, an amateur astronomer and astrophotographer.

“Often on cold dark nights when I’m out in the field looking at a comet or starfield, I think of my wife asleep in a warm bed and wonder what a madman like me is doing out here,” Cater said.

Cater’s office walls are covered with photographs taken with his astrocamera, from Comet Hale-Bopp and last year’s Comet Hyakutake to Milky Way starfields and lunar eclipses. Cater said he became interested in the hobby about 35 years ago.

“About the time Sputnik was launched in the 1950s I started getting interested in astronomy,” Cater said. “I met Robert Byer who was a genius interested in astronomy as well. With his help and a background in photo developing, my interest in astrophotography began.”

For the past month Cater has been observing the latest celestial celebrity, Comet Hale-Bopp.

Cater observes and takes pictures with a special astrographic camera that is attached to his telescope. He uses a 5-inch F4 system with a 20-inch focal length.

“Because most of my exposures take 10 to 20 minutes, I’m in danger of having streaked starfields and the like,” Cater said. “So I use a guide scope to compensate for the earth’s rotation.”

Excerpt from “Upon This Rock”