

Mountain News

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Retired Film Professional Supports Local Special Athletes

by Cari Slater

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Jack Cooperman, known for his work in the film industry, moved to Lake Arrowhead in search of something different for his family and found a community of volunteerism, connection, and inclusion. Cooperman is involved in multiple Rim community service organizations and is the founder of Rim of the World Special Athletes Foundation. Cooperman has resided in Lake Arrowhead for approximately 40 years.

Cooperman and his family were attracted to the Lake Arrowhead school system, but also loved the changing of the seasons. “You have the seasons and that’s what I wanted for my children—not to grow up in a flat constant temperature,” said Cooperman.

All of his children went through the Lake Arrowhead public school system; Lake Arrowhead Elementary, Mary Putnam Henk Intermediate School, and Rim of the World High School. They all went on to college.

In Los Angeles, Cooperman worked in film and television and had an expertise for special effects, aerial, and underwater cinematography. He is credited on films such as Titanic, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, Top Gun, and many other popular films. Cooperman is now mostly retired from the entertainment industry; however, he occasionally mentors individuals working on film related projects. He continues to be a member of The Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Science, The Directors Guild of America, and other entertainment organizations. He has even used his film expertise to create videos highlighting Rim Special Athletes.

Cooperman has always valued volunteerism; “It’s always been an obvious thing to me that you have to do things in your life not just for yourself. The doorway is put in front of you and all you have to do is step into it,” said Cooperman.

Since joining the mountain community 40 years ago, Cooperman treasures the willingness of community members to help one another out. “As soon as you mention a need for something, people go out of their way to help with the situation,” said Cooperman.

“The best thing about Lake Arrowhead is the majority of people have a good sense of volunteering and community involvement,” said Cooperman.

There’s a core group of people involved in Lake Arrowhead non-profits, including the arts, the boys and girls club, Rim education, the historical society, and other volunteer organizations—a good percentage of the volunteers are in more than one organization explained Cooperman.

Cooperman is the President of the Mountain Sunrise Rotary and has been involved in the organization for approximately 5 years. He is also the President of Mountain Meals on Wheels and has been a member for more than 20 years.

Throughout his life, Cooperman has volunteered where he can. In Los Angeles with a busy filming schedule, Cooperman volunteered regularly with industry related organizations like the American Society of Cinematographers and The Directors Guild of America. In Los Angeles volunteer



organizations are much larger. “When you’re in LA, you sort of get lost in the masses,” said Cooperman.

It was later when Cooperman decided to get involved in snow sports, that he found a cause that truly inspired him to action. “I decided to learn to ski as an adult and I became aware of disabled veterans in Colorado and decided there to get involved,” said Cooperman.

As Cooperman became more involved in the San Bernardino Mountain communities and Snow Valley resort, he saw that there was a need for an adaptive program there. “People would show up with special needs and I was already providing one-on-one instruction with adaptive individuals and so I founded Rim of the World Special Athletes Foundation (Rim Special Athletes or RSA) six years ago,” said Cooperman.

According to their website; the primary objective of RSA is to provide a recreational experience that is safe and positive for adaptive individuals. It provides year-round activities for adaptive athletes, serving veterans and individuals from our mountain communities and beyond. Participants are individuals with visual and hearing impairments, amputations, spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Down Syndrome, Autism, as well as many other cognitive and physical disabilities.

During the Summer season, RSA provides adaptive activities on Lake Arrowhead, including swimming, kayaking, stand-up paddle boarding, pedal boats, aqua bikes, and other water sports. In the winter, hosted at Snow Valley Mountain Resort, RSA provides adaptive skiing and snowboard lessons, including bi-ski and mono-ski. During the Spring, Summer, and Fall there are weekly golf clinics at the Lake Arrowhead Country Club (LACC), supervised by Kim Meares and facilitated with the help of LACC volunteers. In addition, Meares creates and manages the yoga program that takes place year-round.

Beth Kelley’s son, who has a physical disability, has been a recent participant in the programs. “We’ve done yoga and they’ve modified the lessons to accommodate his needs,” said Kelley.

People like Kelley and her family members are grateful for the services RSA provides, “We think they are thoughtful, wonderful people and they really care about the kids,” said Kelley.

Debbie McAdam’s son, Jeremy, has participated with RSA for the past four years. The McAdams feel that the programs offered are life changing. “Living in the mountains is not that advantageous for people with special needs. There are a lot of programs down the hill, but here Jeremy didn’t have any opportunities—outside of family—until we met Jack,” McAdam said.

The programs offered through RSA have definitely broadened opportunities to those living in the local communities with special needs. “Until we met Jack, Jeremy was never interested in sports. Jack has such a personality and now my son skis! He used to hate the snow. I never imagined in a million years that Jeremy would ski—I stood at the bottom of the hill and balled at the sight,” said McAdam.

McAdam does not take for granted opportunities for her son to participate in his community. “It is so empowering to him to have normalcy in his life,” said McAdam.

Not only do these programs have the potential to change the lives of participants, McAdam believes that the public seeing people like her son participating in watersports and winter sports can change the stigma around “special needs.”

“We can show the public—the next generation—what a loving, kind, very capable individual he is. The best way to do it is to show photos of



him skiing, paddle boarding, and kayaking,” said McAdam.

Cooperman agrees that participating in the programs provides a sense of confidence and empowerment. “The reward afterward of a smile or feeling that you’ve helped them, you’ve empowered them, that’s a great reward—a wonderful feeling. You feel it’s the right thing,” said Cooperman.

Cooperman explains that there are adaptive programs at Bear Mountain and Mountain High Resorts and they all share information and resources with one another. The programs are not in competition; they have the same goals, but in different geographic areas. “We just want to be able to serve our friends and members from the local communities,” said Cooperman.

According to Cooperman, approximately 80% of winter program participants are from the local mountain communities, while 100% of the summer program participants are local.

“It’s a great community and I feel lucky that I’m able to do something within this community for people that don’t have everything they need available to them,” said Cooperman.

Like with most organizations and businesses, Covid-19 has created some challenges for the programs and its participants, but it has not halted Cooperman and his team. “We did a one-on-one watersports program without any volunteers and only one family at a time,” said Cooperman.

On some occasions two families would be scheduled for different time slots on the same day. Like many of the other activities, family members were able to join in on the fun. “It was hard for them not to see their friends, but it got them closer with their families,” said Cooperman.

Providing instruction to family units, as opposed to group lessons, allowed the important work of the programs to continue, while keeping instructors and participants safe from the dangers of Covid-19.

Kim Meares organizes the yoga program, which is a year-round program. Due to Covid-19, yoga is currently being offered through the online Zoom platform. Participants range from local communities all the way to Mammoth and the Eastern Sierras with additional out of state participants.

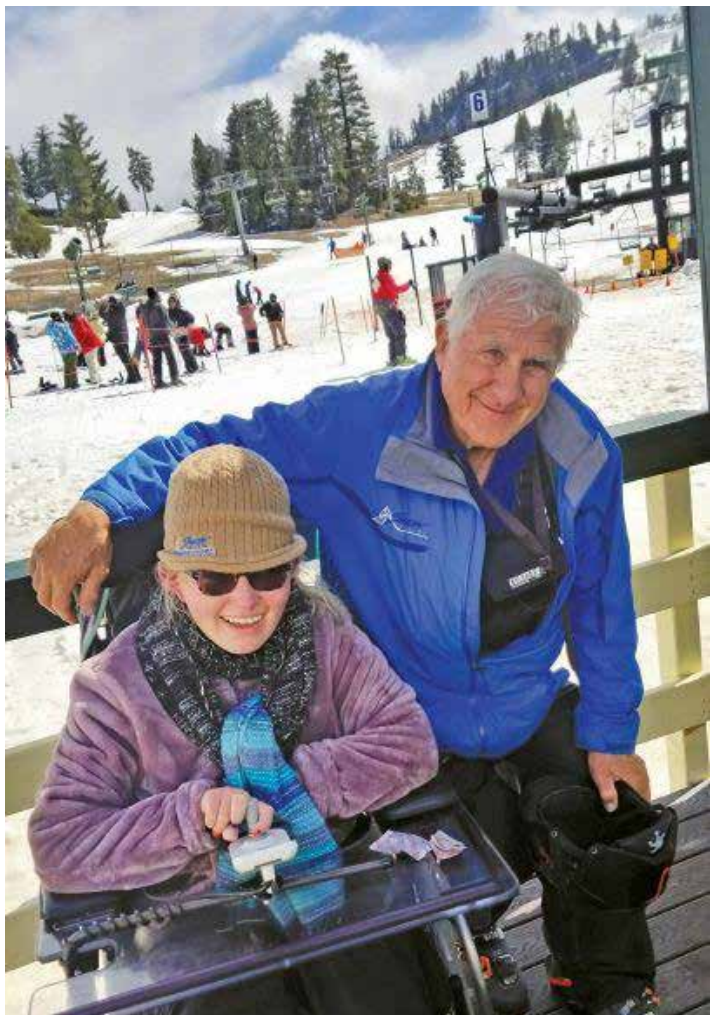
Next month the Foundation will be starting their winter program.

“We are busy preparing equipment, prepping for Covid-19 requirements, training people, and preparing for the winter season,” said Cooperman. Kim Meares and Dan Stormer are both on the Western Division adaptive educational team for the Special Ski Instructors of America and in conjunction with RSA are providing adaptive Zoom lessons open nationwide in addition to RSA adaptive lessons at Snow Valley.

Normally, Cooperman and the Foundation would hold their annual “Top of the Mountain” event together with Snow Valley Resort, where they would fundraise for the programs through event tickets, vendor donations, and silent and live auctions. It is a lively and fun event which provides funding for the programs. However, due to Covid-19 restrictions, the event had to be cancelled this year.

“This year we couldn’t do it and so we’re dependent on individual donations and sponsorships. I am confident we will continue one way or another, as the community comes together,” said Cooperman.

He explains that the costliest part of the program is the adaptive equipment needed to make it all possible. “The equipment is fairly expensive,” said Cooperman.



RSA does not charge anything to participants and the programs include adaptive and individualized instruction as well as use of the necessary equipment. Although the RSA's winter program is free to qualified participants, a Snow Valley Resort one-on-one adaptive lesson ticket is required to participate in the program.

Other participants would like to ski, but can't afford the adaptive lesson fee to participate. It's been hard for Beth Kelley's son to get to the winter program in the past but, "We're going to be able to get there this year because of Jack," said Kelley.

For veterans, the Foundation covers the cost of the adaptive lesson ticket, making the complete experience free for them. The Foundation also offers scholarship opportunities for other participants.

There is talk among RSA Board Members, parents, and participants of finding a way for all participants to join in the winter program without having to purchase an adaptive lesson ticket. "My dream is that anyone who wants to ski doesn't have to buy an adaptive lesson ticket to participate in the winter program," said McAdam.

Inclusion is key for Cooperman, the RSA Board Members, and program participants. The goal is that everyone get to participate in what our mountain communities have to offer.

To learn more about the Rim of the World Special Athletes Foundation and programming or to learn about how you can get involved, visit WWW.RimSpecialAthletes.ORG. Rim of the World Special Athletes Foundation is a 501(c)(3) and listed as a platinum level organization on Guidestar.



rimspecialathletes.org

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