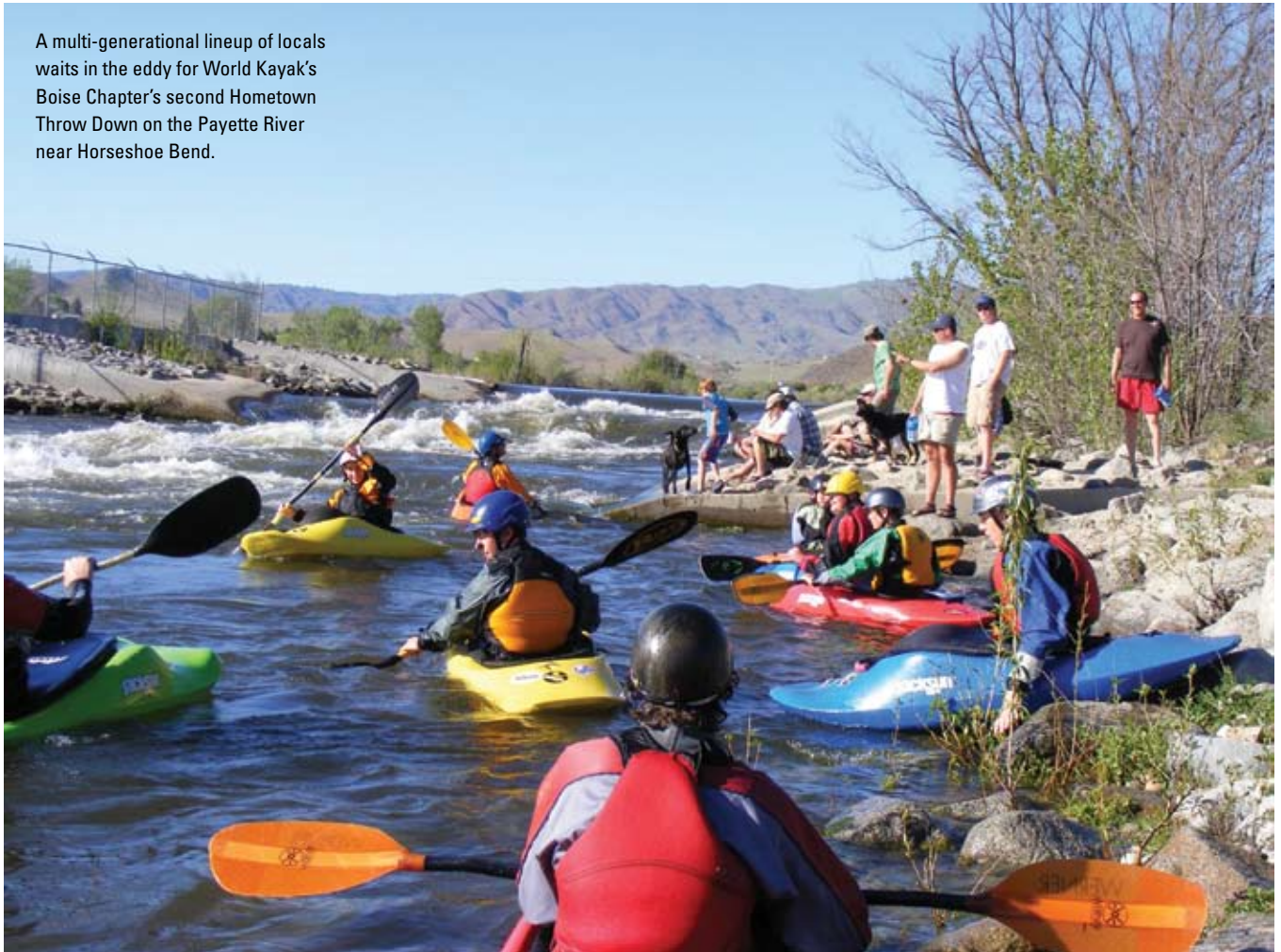


A multi-generational lineup of locals waits in the eddy for World Kayak's Boise Chapter's second Hometown Throw Down on the Payette River near Horseshoe Bend.



Community in a Box

WORLD KAYAK PLANS TO GROW THE GLOBAL PADDLING PIE USING BACK END ORGANIZATION

By Joe Jackson

SITTING HIGH ON THE ROCK WALL WEST OF WAVE NO. 3—IN

his khaki shorts, trimmed goatee, and Mion sandals—James MacBeath looks like any other spectator enjoying the Rodeo semifinals at the Reno River Festival. You'd guess he's a boater by his World Kayak T-shirt and his appropriately timed cheers when an athlete completes an obscure trick. But what his casual outward appearance hides is a business savvy that just might contain the right components for the future of whitewater kayaking.

MacBeath is the man behind World Kayak, a comprehensive business plan to grow the whitewater kayaking pie by creating what he calls a "newbie feeder system" that could funnel thousands of new boaters into local communities, kayak schools, and retailers over the upcoming years.

Seven years ago, MacBeath sold Ontario-based Nomex Inc., a 180-employee web design and development services company that he started in

1996. He proceeded to found two outfitters—Kayak Futaleufu and Kayak International. Rather than looking at these businesses as viable, sustainable models—he admits his main goal was to score trips to Chile.

"I have always crossed through life with two parts of my brain," says MacBeath. "There's the IT, business man, producer, part of my brain, and the other part has been whitewater kayaking."

After a series of meetings with Jackson Kayak owner Eric Jackson, he decided in September 2007 to go all out for a sustainable business that would fuse those two parts—World Kayak was born.

The base of World Kayak's plan is to build whitewater communities that can easily draw in non-boaters. Holding beginner-friendly events called "Hometown Throw Downs," which intend to make participating in rodeos fun for John Q. Paddler, are one of the cornerstones of this community growth. The events seek to down-play competitiveness and simply encourage participation and keep novice paddlers interested in the sport. For example, no first place prizes are awarded, and participants

receive points for the most rudimentary of tricks.

“There are scores for front surfs, you can rack up the points for paddle twirls, and we do count window shades,” says MacBeath.

MacBeath took the model from the successful Maryland Chute Outs, low-pressure, free rodeos that have been running every summer on the Potomac since 1999. He has pre-packaged the events for World Kayak ambassadors—local boaters chosen for leadership qualities—to carry out in regions all over the globe. World Kayak plans to host 63 events in 13 different regions worldwide in the next year. The organizational ease of these events as well as their effective participant draw offer a large margin for growth in upcoming years, says MacBeath.

“Communities can be hesitant to put on events because it seems difficult,” says MacBeath. “We take the organizational brunt.”

Taking this load essentially gives ambassadors events in a box—they just have to attract the participants. Ambassadors receive access to the tens of thousands of dollars of sponsor-donated gear in order to give Throw Down participants swag to be excited about.

“If 40 people show up 20 people will walk away with something,” says MacBeath.

The next step in building these communities and attracting new boaters is to make a connection online. World Kayak is encouraging

extensive blogging on its site, www.worldkayak.com, and MacBeath has put together a team for thorough event coverage. The blogging helps establish communication among local boaters and gives non-boaters a comprehensive view of what they can look forward to in their area if they decide to start kayaking. The event coverage is to help paddlers maintain

their excitement for the sport by living vicariously through the professionals.

“It’s hard to see our [whitewater] communities from outside. We want to make it visible, then we want to bring them in,” says MacBeath. “We want to keep the non-boater within the boater loop.”

Once the non—or soon-to-be—boaters are in that loop, MacBeath wants to drive them to the web.

“People can start checking the region, the obvious links to kayaking schools, and kayaking looks like it is super easy to get into.”

Jackson strongly believes in the direction of World Kayak. He is sponsoring all of the ambassadors and has put up a majority of the investment to get the program off the ground.

“It’s expensive now, but long term it’s good business,” says Jackson. “Building the base is the fastest way to grow the market.”

Even though Jackson has an absurdly strong presence on the pro circuit, he maintains that the sports destiny lies in whom they can draw into the sport. “The future is everywhere,” he says.



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