

Caring for the Earth

Douglas Wagoner has turned his love for outdoors, environmentalism into a new eco-business

BY AMANDA ARNOLD | BUSINESS FIRST CORRESPONDENT
Send comments to bngriffiths@bizjournals.com

Last year, Harrison County resident Darin Blank took his 9-year-old triplets David, Kaleb and Sophia on an overnight adventure in Hoosier National Forest led by Douglas Wagoner, owner and operator of Green Earth Outdoors.

Each day, the Blank family started early on the trail and hiked about six miles.

While enjoying their hike, Wagoner taught the family the importance of preserving the outdoors.

"He is very thorough about not leaving trash behind and cleaning up after yourself and things you really don't even think about — like a little piece of paper — but he pointed out that it was very important to clean up after yourself," Blank said.

Blank said he chose Wagoner to lead the family on their first camping adventure because of Wagoner's outdoors knowledge.

Turning a passion into a business

Wagoner started leading such adventures — including hikes, mountaineering expeditions and canoe trips — in 1991 under his independent business, Above and Beyond Adventures, before he officially opened Green Earth Outdoors in July 2007.

Now, he has ample opportunity to share a passion for the outdoors that started in his childhood when his parents took the family camping every month.

"Many times, I would go off exploring on my own and my mother would say I got lost. But I knew where I was," Wagoner mused.

Putting his knowledge to work

While some independent travelers go on solo adventures, many hire a guide as a facilitator.

According to Wagoner, outdoor guides typically are well-trained and have years of experience to ensure safety. Wagoner has trod more than 5,000 miles through the back country, 1,000 miles canoeing and is a certified Wilderness First Responder, a designation from a nationally recognized program that trains participants to respond to emergencies in remote settings.

His clients also have the luxury of relaxing with little worry on their adventures because he plans the entire trips.



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"It allows them to enjoy the experience more because they don't have to worry about the details, and they can spend more time with the people they are (traveling) with," he said.

Wagoner's clients determine the dates of travel, the trails, daily mileage and difficulty. He posts trips' difficulty levels on his Web site, but he said he is equally happy leading people up the gnarly Gannett Peak in Wyoming or the front country in Hoosier National Forest.

Clients can either pitch in with camp chores such as cooking, or Wagoner will gladly do it all.



TOP PHOTO BY RON BATH | BUSINESS FIRST
PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY | DOUGLAS WAGONER

Above: Douglas Wagoner and a trekking group on Mt. Elbert in Colorado.

Green Earth Outdoors

Phone: 502-475-7445

Web site: www.greenearthoutdoors.com

Employees: Douglas Wagoner, 40, is the only full-time employee, but he occasionally subcontracts other guides to help with logistics.

Douglas Wagoner: Resides in Lanesville, Ind., but he spends each week in the Louisville condominium in which he operates Green Earth Outdoors.

Certifications: Scout leader and trainer for the Boy Scouts of America for 21 years; Wilderness first responder; Leave No Trace master educator

Before Green Earth Outdoors: Wagoner was involved with the outdoors, including managing the REI Store in Dallas, and he was promoted to buyer at the REI headquarters in Seattle. Wagoner also taught several outdoor recreation courses at Indiana University.

Leave No Trace: The Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics is an international nonprofit organization founded in 1994 as a way to promote environmental awareness and enjoy the outdoors in a responsible way. To reach millions of people, the organization partners with federal land management agencies including National Park Service and Scouting groups.

Master Educator: Master educators teach others about Leave No Trace, but Wagoner recommends the trainer course for anyone who spends time outdoors.

Leave No Trace state advocate for Indiana: By volunteering his time as a state advocate for Indiana, Wagoner is a resource for those taking Leave No Trace courses. He

also works with educators, park managers, outdoor groups, Scouts and the public.

Wagoner sees the benefit: "I do see it (Leave No Trace) making an impact both locally and on a national level. When I get out and revisit a place I visited maybe 10 years ago, I see a difference," Wagoner stated, but he says that he feels disappointed when he spots trash (which he picks up) on the trail. |

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TRAIL GUIDE BUILDS BUSINESS BASED ON ENVIRONMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Explore/Discover/
Share Weekends

This weekend of camping introduces young people and their parents to the basic skills needed for safely enjoying the outdoors.

Green Earth Outdoors trains participants in safe hiking, campsite selection, outdoor cooking, useful knots, map and compass use, plant and tree identification, simple first aid, viewing the nighttime sky and Leave No Trace principles.

All food and group equipment such as tents, stoves and cookware is included.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN REGISTERING

Date and time: Oct. 3 to 5; begins at 7 p.m. Friday and concludes at 11 a.m. Sunday.

Location: Clermont, Ky. (30 minutes south of Louisville)

Minimum age: 6; class size is limited.

Fee per person: \$150; includes food, group equipment, camp fees, instruction, program materials and a T-shirt. |

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Green Earth Outdoors also provides rental backpacks, trekking poles, sleeping bags, tents and other outdoor gear for those unsure of making an investment.

"We provide pretty much everything but their clothing. ... We want them to be comfortable when they are out there," he said.

Wagoner said he tracks gear carefully to keep it up to date and in good repair, rotating it out of use after no more than three years. He also logs a safety history on all life-saving equipment.

The cost of an outing with Green Earth Outdoors varies depending on the trip and the needs and wants of individual clients. Wagoner said that because Green Earth Outdoors offers an inclusive personalized experience to suit every comfort and experience level, he charges a range of prices in every tier level.

Caring for the planet

For every trip, Wagoner shares the seven principles of Leave No Trace with his clients. (See box at right.)

Wagoner does not just follow the principles of Leave No Trace, he takes it a step further by

volunteering his time as a Leave No Trace state advocate for Indiana and a Leave No Trace master educator.

In 2003, he trained for the master educator designation by spending five days on a canoe trip in the Upper Missouri River Banks in Montana through the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS). He now teaches others the weekend Leave No Trace Trainer Course and the abbreviated Awareness Training.

Wagoner often teaches children the importance of Leave No Trace. "Kids today are the answer to the environment and doing things responsibly because, unfortunately, a lot of adults are set in their ways or don't realize the true impact of what the human race has done to the planet," Wagoner said.

He does not discount the importance of educating adults, however. One event that Wagoner said he especially enjoys leading is the Explore/Discover/Share Weekend, which is an outdoor introductory outing for both children and their parents. (See box at left.)

Changing others' habits

Parthenon Capital Management LLC chairman J. McFerran Barr II is a longtime

PRINCIPLES OF LEAVE NO TRACE
CENTER FOR OUTDOOR ETHICS

1. Plan ahead and prepare.
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces.
3. Dispose of waste properly.
4. Leave what you find.
5. Minimize campfire impacts.
6. Respect wildlife.
7. Be considerate of other visitors. |

hiking partner of Wagoner's and has learned a lot about Leave No Trace from him.

Barr, 62, who also is active in the Lincoln Heritage Council of the Boy Scouts of America, admits that during his younger days environmental awareness was quite different.

"We (Boy Scouts) would dig around the tent and disturb the soil and grass, and we burned our trash," Barr recalled. "Now we do things in such a way that if someone came along they would never know anyone camped there."

Wagoner's ultimate goal with Green Earth Outdoors is to establish more of a local presence and get "as many people to appreciate the outdoors as possible." |

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