

CWA Member Spotlight, April 2013



Competitive tri-athletes John Wiygul and John O'Brien are bringing climbing to an urban setting in Tennessee. When they aren't working on their 22,000 square foot facility, they are active members of the Rock/Creek Outfitters racing team. We recently caught up with John Wiygul to discuss exterior climbing walls, new gym challenges, and the merits of gym ownership in the southeast.

CWA: Tell us a little about the High Point facility and what makes it unique

JW: High Point is going to be located in a renovated movie theater in the heart of downtown Chattanooga. It will be one of the nation's largest rock-climbing facilities in a downtown setting with over 3 million tourists visiting each year. This facility will have a 2,000 Sq. Ft. pit and an outdoor wall that spans the five-story parking garage above the facility. The outdoor wall will be 55 feet tall and will have approximately 5,000 Sq. Ft. of climbing. The wall will be accessed from a platform above the sidewalk. The climbing wall will be part of a giant iconic art piece covering a whole side of the building. The inside pit will have a ceiling height of 40 feet. There will be 5,100 Sq. Ft. of bouldering and 20,400 feet of indoor top rope, auto-belay, and lead climbing. Rockwerx is building our climbing walls and River City Company, our lessor, is doing the renovation. River Street Architecture is designing the space.



CWA: What services will High Point provide for climbers?

JW: Rock/Creek Outfitters will have their fourth location in Chattanooga next-door to us. They will have a full pro shop and other unique brands in their new location. Our facility will have bouldering, lead climbing, top roping, and auto-belay. We will have a yoga room and a 3,200 Sq. Ft. fitness room. High Point will feature a climbing school run by two well-known professional climbers.

CWA: What made you want to open a climbing gym?

JW: I wanted to open a premier rock climbing gym in the city I started rock climbing and grew up in. I have true passion for rock climbing and through a series of fortunate events High Point Climbing And Fitness was created.

CWA: What has been the biggest challenge of starting a gym?

JW: The biggest challenge starting this gym has been getting under construction, due to the structural engineering issues building underneath a five story parking garage. It has been a long process.

CWA: Tell us a little about the dynamic of opening a gym in the southeast

JW: The Chattanooga market is an amazing place. I grew up here in Chattanooga and have been climbing all over the Southeast. The South is a wonderful place that has some of the best climbing in the world. We have received a lot of support from the climbing community for starting a new gym. Having a premier climbing facility in Chattanooga will only increase the number of climbers, the support for climbing, and funding for organizations, such as, the Southeastern Climber's Coalition, and Access Fund. The Chattanooga area needs more crags open. High Point wants to be alongside the forefront of this progress.



CWA: What has been the biggest milestone for High Point so far?

JW: High Point's biggest milestones so far are two things that were essential to us being able to have a successful gym in downtown Chattanooga. First being able to dig an 18 foot deep 2,000 Sq. Ft. pit under a parking garage, and second being able to build a 55 foot tall outdoor climbing wall over the sidewalk on one of the main streets in downtown.

CWA: What's your favorite gym other than High Point?

JW: My favorite gym is TBA located in St. Elmo. It was the first gym in Chattanooga and I grew up climbing there. Luis Rodriguez (lurod) owns the place. It has the hometown vibe that you can't get anywhere else.

For more about High Point, visit <http://highpointclimbing.com/>

Visit the Climbing Wall Association website at www.climbingwallindustry.org