

Los Caminos has Two VISTA Openings for Outdoor Educators

Do you perhaps have recent graduates, or do you anticipate having graduates who would like to join us in our efforts? While we are prepared to consider anyone with a driving interest in helping us, we have two needs in particular:

1. a student with great river skills, someone whose focus would be to serve as an instructor of instructors, training not just river guiding, but swift water rescue to local fire department and Border Patrol who currently travel 700 miles r/t for training, and
2. a student with solid knowledge of the outdoor industry, good outdoor skills and a particular interest in business development, marketing and information technology (website management, social networking, video production, etc.).

I should note that we also have an ambitious program involving mountain bikes and development of a Valley-wide trails network so we are by no means only interested in recruiting paddlers.

The positions don't pay much, a \$10,000 stipend per year, plus \$3000 for educational expenditures at the conclusion of the program. Other benefits are year-round warm weather, the chance to learn Spanish, great paddling adventures on nearby rivers in Mexico and a genuine shot at glory.

I am the Executive Director of a non-profit in deep South Texas whose goals are to preserve and promote the area's cultural and environmental heritage. Wherever possible, we try to develop unique responses to local challenges using endemic, under-utilized, under-respected resources. And when it comes to unique and under-utilized resources nothing comes close to our Rio Grande.

With that in mind we have spent much of the past two years developing programs that encourage people to make greater use of the river, as an outdoor learning lab for failing students, and as a cool playground to increase physical activity in one of the fattest and most health challenged parts of the country. It's a side of the Rio Grande that few people are aware of and one with potential for enormous impact, here in the Rio Grande and wherever rivers define international borders.

Last November 1 federal officials blessed the Los Caminos "BIG River" festival, which included the first-ever binational Olympic style canoe and kayak racing on the Rio Grande. Over 40 competitors from as far as Durango and Austin participated, including two Mexican Olympians. The second Big River Festival is now being planned for 2009, with a companion festival occurring one month earlier simultaneously Laredo and Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. The goal of this effort is to demonstrate that legal activity dispels illegal activity and that river recreation is a genuine tool for increasing border security.

We genuinely believe we can influence developing U.S. Homeland Security policy.

If we can demonstrate that sustainable economic development is a genuine tool for Border security then all border regions would be eligible for DHS funding (a point

that was made to me by Peter Tyler, the Legislative Director of your own Sen. Sanders).

Get back Eric Ellman if you would like to ride out a troubled economy on the Lower Rio Grande.

Eric Ellman, Executive Director

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