



360 Trails Inspires KP Pirates Biking Team

Key Pen Parks created the hugely popular biking course and now the KP has a "home team" that's made 360 Trails their own.

KRISA BRUEMMER, KP NEWS

A successful first season comes to an end in June for the new Key Peninsula Pirates mountain biking team. The group was established in January by head coach, parent and former member of the Coast Guard Coree Collins, who has been mountain biking on trails since 2006.

"I love mountain biking, so I was hopeful," Collins said. "It's super fun. It's good for mental health and stress management. And getting outdoors is so important."

Key Pen Parks has hosted Washington Student Cycling League races at 360 Trails for six years, but this was the first year the KP has had an active local team with local kids practicing and racing together.

The composite team currently has 11 riders ranging from sixth to 12th grade, girls and boys. "The kids have been very supportive of each other," Collins said. "It's pretty amazing. We're not putting pressure on the kids to race. What we're doing is building community with the kids. We're working on the fun and the skills so that if they want to race, or if they want to start getting more competitive, it's their choice. The league's mission is to empower them."

The team competed in four races this

season, with all Pirates choosing to race.

One of the team's youngest riders, Kinzie Coldicott, 11, said she likes how her teammates "all care about each other, not just winning."

"We're giving them an outlet, a sport they can enjoy for a lifetime," Collins said. "Mountain biking is a community and it's a lifestyle, so we're giving them stress reduction and an opportunity to get

outdoors and develop a passion outside of school that teaches them life lessons. We're giving them real-life experience in a team atmosphere."

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For the past six months, the Pirates have met twice weekly at their "lair," 360 Trails.

"This place is special," Collins said. "There are a lot of progressive trails and opportunities to go over tactics. It becomes sort of the veins on the back of your hand. You just know where the trails are."

"Our trail system at 360 Trails has grown from five-ish to over 15, with the mountain bike-specific trails being so incredible they bring riders from all over the state," said Key Pen Parks Commissioner Mark Michel.

"This park is great," said Chayse Ferencik, 16, who began mountain biking as a 3-year-old and is in his third competitive season. "It's a great community place. The people that work here and the volunteers put in a lot of work and effort. They laid down some really nice trails."

Ferencik hopes to earn a scholarship for mountain biking and dreams of riding professionally. He recently competed with junior experts in the Cascadia Dirt Cup, achieving 10th place. Collins describes the Cascadia Series as "a pretty hardcore endurance series, a mixture of downhill and technical climbing: torture fest."

Collins said she appreciates the team's parent volunteers and coaches, including state champion Nick Stroud. Collins hopes all the adults, as well as Ferencik, will become certified as Ride Leaders through the Bike Instructor Certification Program before next season. "Our group spreads out, so that's part of why I want everyone certified," Collins said. "Once we get them all trained, we can really split up and meet the kids' needs based on their level and skill."

"I'm hopeful more local kids will take advantage of these opportunities to participate in an individual sport they can enjoy for the rest of their lives," Michel said. "It'll be my pleasure to help remove or reduce financial roadblocks to participation. I really don't want financial need to prevent anybody from participating."

Collins echoed Michel's hope that the Pirates team will grow.

Collins's daughter Emilee, 13, who was initially reluctant, said of her experience as a novice rider this season, "I got stronger, and then my endurance came up. Now I'm really liking it."

As the KP Pirates approach the end of their inaugural season, "It's all smiles," Collins said. "The kids are really enjoying themselves. Our crew is very special."

To contact the KP Pirates, email KeyPenMTB@gmail.com. Key Pen Parks will host a Youth Mountain Biking Jamboree & Bike Rodeo June 22 at 360 Trails. For more information, go to keypenparks.com.



Top: Chayse Ferencik won a rare first place in May competition in Roslyn. "This is a big deal for our team and the league as podium placement is huge and first is very rare," said Coach Coree Collins. Bottom: KP Pirate Team at practice in May. Photos: Chris Konieczny, KP News