Alums Kristin and Yishai Horowitz’s Companies Emphasize Adventure on the Central Coast

Yishai and Kristin Horowitz weren’t locals when they arrived as students at Cal Poly. By the time they graduated, though, the Central Coast was their home.

First college friends, then business partners and now husband and wife, the pair not only grew attached to one another during their time on campus, they also fell in love with San Luis Obispo County’s spectacular environment and small-town culture.

Yishai knew from early on that he wanted to make a career helping others enjoy the environment the way he does.

“When I was a kid,” he said, “I always knew I wanted to start a rock climbing gym. And I had a more vague idea that I might want to start a business in adventure tourism.”

Yishai’s childhood dream is now reality: the SLO Op Bouldering Gym gives Central Coast climbers a place to practice their craft and has received national praise and mention in the bestselling book “The $100 Startup: Reinvent the Way You Make a Living, Do What You Love and Create a New Future.”

And the Horowitzes’ other company, All Out Events, helps Central Coast residents and competitors find adventure in races and other competitions throughout San Luis Obispo County, and beyond.

All Out Events produces about a dozen events annually. These include the Morro Bay Triathlon, obstacle course competitions, mountain bike races in Santa Margarita.

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MATT LAZIER

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FEATURE: Living Off the Land

“We want to create events that help people have life-changing memories and experiences,” said Yishai (B.S., Recreation, Parks and Tourism Administration, 2006). “And we want to do it in a way that is sustainable and respectful to this amazing environment we have.”

Yishai was inspired to launch the climbing gym as a nonprofit co-op when, the summer before he transferred to Cal Poly from Cuesta College, he visited New Zealand and saw a similar operation there. “I thought it would be a perfect fit for San Luis Obispo, which didn’t have very good facilities for climbers.”


Meanwhile, Yishai came to the field of adventure racing through his recreation classes at Cal Poly. After doing work with the Big Blue Adventure Series at Lake Tahoe and the SLO Downtown Crittner, he teamed with Kristin on the venture that would become All Out Events.

As event director, Yishai (himself an avid mountain biker, climber and runner) develops race courses that are challenging and aesthetically pleasing and that incorporate their settings. Kristin (also a multisport athlete) tackles the business and finance end of All Out Events.

She brings a varied background — work with local small businesses, experience stage managing with Cal Poly’s Theatre and Dance Department, and a short career teaching English at local colleges. While her academic track and work experience weren’t tied directly to outdoor event production, her entire Cal Poly education nevertheless prepared her well for the All Out Events and the climbing gym, she said. “My professors prepared me to think well and problem solve,” she said. “My classes have contributed to everything I’ve ever done. Cal Poly isn’t about just learning one specific expertise. Learn by Doing teaches you how to think across boundaries. It’s an education for life.”

At Cal Poly, the Horowitzes found the perfect university to prepare them for their careers. And in San Luis Obispo, they found the perfect community to make their vision reality.

San Luis Obispo’s small-town culture makes it a unique place for entrepreneurs to pursue success with their ideas, Yishai said. The area is somewhat isolated from metropolitan centers such as Los Angeles and San Francisco, which often means it is fertile ground for an idea that might already have competition in a bigger city.

With a smaller town, Kristin added, comes a tightly connected network of residents and government officials who are deeply invested in making their community a better place.

“Our jobs are interesting because we get to talk to a wide variety of people — college interns one day, lawyers the next day, government officials the next,” Kristin said. “We live in a place that's small enough that no one is ‘untouchable.’ And everyone seems to love where they live. So there's excitement about things that add to their experience here.”

And Cal Poly itself is a unique resource for local business, Yishai said. “The resources that Cal Poly provides to this area are pretty phenomenal,” he said. “The RPTA Department alone still provides us with great interns, expertise from the professors, and good leads and contacts when we're preparing an event.”

All Out Events could be on the cusp of major expansion; recently, the Horowitzes have received offers to be involved in the White House House Operations Center, also known as the “Shelter,” as well as Camp David and President George W. Bush’s ranch in Texas. “The Shelter is where the President's Cabinet and high-ranking officials meet when the U.S. is under attack,” Boone said. “We were under attack on Sept. 11.”

After the first plane hit, Boone was inundated with requests from Vice President Dick Cheney, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, and various cabinet members. “I remember thinking that I wish the Americans could see how the leadership operated that day,” he said. “The leadership was measured, methodical, impressive to watch. To be involved in that part of our history was an important part of my career.”

Boone deals with very big things: aircraft carriers, utility systems, construction equipment. “We have exciting but challenging lifestyles,” he said. “But the most important thing in my career has been mentoring and developing people. It is the most gratifying experience to have a hand in motivating people to do things they never thought possible in themselves.”

He also traces that skill to Cal Poly. “The university was an amazing place for its diversity of students — big city kids from Los Angeles and San Francisco and farm kids from the Central Valley. The mix of people created an interesting dynamic, a fun group.”

After three decades, he is ready to retire. And he is reflective on the importance of his career path. “I came to appreciate a career serving others. There is no nobler a pursuit than to serve others. A lot of what Cal Poly does is teaching students the importance of looking beyond the bridge and in small class projects," he said. “I don't think any of us thought it was that big a deal to build the bridge. It fit into the culture of the campus. The Navy has the same work ethic as Cal Poly. Get involved, get your hands dirty and get it done.”

Over the years Boone has faced unique challenges. In 2001 he was responsible for the facilities at the White House Operations Center, also known as the “Shelter,” as well as Camp David and President George W. Bush’s ranch in Texas. “The Shelter is where the President’s Cabinet and high-ranking officials meet when the U.S. is under attack,” Boone said. “We were under attack on Sept. 11.”

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For more information on All Out Events, visit the company’s website at www.all-outevents.com. For more on the SLO Co-op Bouldering Gym, log on to www.slo-omp.com.

David Boone

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