

LIVING OFF THE LAND





(Above) Yishai and Kristin Horowitz at their climbing gym. (At left) Yishai Horowitz coordinating a recent triathlon event in Morro Bay.

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

MATT LAZIER

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 and mountain bike races in Santa Margarita. As well, there is the All Out Adventure Race Series, which has events ranging from half a day to 24 hours and courses that explore the area's backcountry beauty (including running, mountain biking, kayaking, navigation/orienteering and ropes challenges).

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"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."

His gym grew from humble beginnings in a local storage unit, and Kristin (B.A., English, 2002; M.A., English, 2006) soon became part of the business partnership.

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 Criterium, 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



Competitors in the recent Morro Bay triathlon

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 begin coordinating events on the East Coast. But San Luis Obispo County will remain the company's home base.

"We want to stay and grow the business here," Kristin said. "It's important to us to stay close to this community. It's our home." □

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-opclimbing.org/.