

Community Building In Indoor Climbing Gyms: Part 5 - Non-Climbing

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in [CWA Blog](#)



Rock climbing is what brings our indoor climbing gym communities together, and for good reason.

Climbing is fun, challenging, fosters social interactions, trust building, healthy competition, and fitness. The sport's popularity is snowballing in large part because of the inherently positive benefits it has for the general population.

When we think about planning and creating community building events for our members and potential members, climbing is often the activity at the center of these events.

Despite what most climbers, me included, want to believe, climbing isn't everything. (It was a bit painful to write those three words, but don't worry, I got through it.)

Article At A Glance

- **Writer:** The Headwall Group, renowned programming experts within the indoor climbing industry. They presented a highly successful CWA Summit session and have written for the CWA for many years.
- **Who Should Read:** This article is primarily for program staff but also senior management and even owners.
- **What Will You Learn:** How non-climbing-programming can change your community for the better.
- **Tie-Ins, Resources, or Further Reading:** This is the fifth article in a series on

Non-climbing programming is a crucial way to reach all corners of your climbing gym's unique community. We've seen incredible ways gyms use their facilities to mobilize their members, engage their community, and invite new customers, using non-climbing-specific programs.

One of the most unique examples comes to us from Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

[Adventure Rock in Milwaukee, Wisc.](#), uses its location in the city and the staff's creativity to engage in successful and fun community building and use non-climbing specific events to support the existing community. **This generates both appeal, and interest in their gym becoming that coveted 'third place'.**

When we heard about the interesting events that Adventure Rock plans and provides for its community, we wanted to get an idea of the how, what, and why of their approach to non-climbing events.

Adventure Rock creates intentional, mission-aligned, and outcome-focused events that provide value to their members and local community while driving interest in their facilities.

We interviewed Melissa Markes, Adventure Rock's Youth and Adult Program Manager, and got some great ideas for how non-climbing specific events can be done well and produce great results.

How do you define community building at Adventure Rock?

Adventure Rock is committed to building a strong and caring community. Our core values of integrity, kindness, passion, and growth guide everything we do.

We believe in offering a range of activities and programs that cater to the diverse interests of our community members. From thrilling competitions and expert instruction to supportive coaching and fun community events, there's something for everyone at Adventure Rock. Since 1998, Adventure Rock has been a trusted name in outdoor adventures, starting with our original location in Brookfield. In the past decade, we have expanded to include two locations in Milwaukee.

As we grow, **we understand the importance of bridging the gap between new and experienced members**, creating a welcoming environment for everyone.

We know that member engagement is crucial for long-term satisfaction and loyalty.

Our goal is to not just be a gym, but a place where relationships flourish, and a sense of

belonging is fostered between our members, the climbing community, and Adventure Rock.

What non-climbing specific Community Building events have you hosted at Adventure Rock?

Adventure Rock offers member night programs that provide opportunities for climbers to connect and socialize during typically closed hours. We strive to keep things interesting by rotating themes for each event, ensuring that members have a reason to return.

One memorable member night was the Adventure Rock prom, where we transformed the front entryway into a dazzling prom setting with decorations and even a disco ball. Members were encouraged to submit their favorite songs from school dances, and a photo booth captured all the fun moments. It was truly inspiring to see the dedication and excitement of our members, many of whom dressed up for the occasion.

Another highly attended event was our Northwoods Night, where everyone embraced the cozy atmosphere by wearing flannels. We organized a chili cook-off, and the response from attendees was overwhelmingly positive. This event created an opportunity for members to sit and truly get to know one another. We even awarded trophies for the best chilis in different categories, adding some friendly competition to the mix.



Melissa Markes, Adventure Rock's Youth and Adult Program Manager.

At Adventure Rock, we believe in engaging our members beyond the climbing gym. Both of our Milwaukee locations are conveniently close to the Oak Leaf Trail bike and walking path. This proximity allows us to organize community bike rides from our gyms to local beer gardens and breweries, fostering a sense of camaraderie and fun.

Our Walker's Point Facility [a bouldering gym on Milwaukee's south side] also hosts a gear-age sale that has evolved into a vibrant block party. Members bring in their gently used gear to sell,

and we handle the leg work of selling it on their behalf. The event features vendors, one of our portable walls, a tie-dye station, and art installation boulders. We also run a photo contest where members can submit their outdoor adventure photos, adding to the excitement. It's always a fantastic time filled with carefree enjoyment.

Why is it worth investing in non-climbing specific community-building events?

Community building events are fundamental to all organizations for a few reasons:

1. **Fostering Connection:** These events provide an opportunity for members to connect with each other, fostering a sense of belonging and camaraderie. This connection can increase member satisfaction and loyalty, leading to a strong, vibrant community.
2. **Promoting Engagement:** Such events keep members engaged with the organization, especially during slower times like summer. By offering exciting activities, we ensure our members remain active and connected, which is crucial for their long-term engagement.
3. **Encouraging Growth:** Community events are also a great way to encourage personal growth. They often involve challenges or learning opportunities that can help members develop new skills and abilities.
4. **Reinforcing Core Values:** Adventure Rock's core values of integrity, kindness, passion, and growth are not just words on a page. By incorporating these values into our community events, we bring them to life and show our members what we stand for.
5. **Building Trust:** Lastly, regular community events give us a chance to build trust with our members. By consistently delivering enjoyable, high-quality experiences, we show our members that we are reliable and committed to their well-being.

We want to thank Melissa Markes and Adventure Rock for taking the time to share this insight and for being a great example of how a gym can provide value to its members and to itself through non-climbing specific community-building events.

What Did You Think?

The CWA is committed to providing content that is valuable, actionable, and fun to read. This is not the place for clickbait and incorrect information. Tell us what you thought of this series, and other articles in our one minute anonymous survey.

About the Headwall Group



The [Headwall Group](#) was founded by Bix Firer and Pat Brehm. Bix Firer (MA, University of Chicago) is an Associate Professor of Outdoor Studies at Alaska Pacific University and has worked as a wilderness educator, trainer, facilitator, and experiential educator for over a decade.



Pat Brehm works as a professional organizational trainer and has spent his career as a climbing coach, facilitator, and outdoor educator.



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