

Member Spotlight: Macon Rocks

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in [CWA Blog](#)



[Macon Rocks](#), located in Macon, Georgia, has incorporated a community focus before they were even a gym. Whether by preserving community history in their building or working with local businesses and non-profits to benefit their members, Macon Rocks has not only expanded their business but fostered a climbing culture in a town where climbing did not use to exist.

Bryan Nichols, owner, and John Hur, general manager, discuss how they have helped bring a new climbing community to a small city in central Georgia.

The interviewees were interviewed separately and combined here for clarity and brevity.



Quinn Gordon Membership Coordinator



Quinn Gordon, Membership Coordinator:
What made you decide that Macon needed a climbing gym?

Bryan Nichols, Owner, Macon Rocks:

Well, I own a lot of different things here in Macon. I know what goes on in

our town and I hear all the different complaints about what we have and what we don't have.

We have a lot of bars, a lot of restaurants, a lot of concert venues, but there's nothing for families to come and do, you know?

Well, my wife and I climbed a little bit in Atlanta and some different places and we enjoyed it and she said, "Macon needs a rock-climbing gym..."

I thought, "Ah, I don't know anything about rock climbing gyms," but then again, I didn't know anything about [my other businesses]. We learn everything and then we do it as high quality as we can. And because we do that, people come.



You're a big supporter of historic preservation, not only in Macon but nationally. Could you describe how you incorporated that approach into Macon Rocks?

Bryan:

Being a huge historic preservationist, most of the businesses I own, I owned not because I was trying to open a business, but I was trying to save a property. You have an African American district that's very old here [in Macon], and it was only about three blocks long and a lot of those buildings had already been torn down.

We were trying to save this building because it was connected to the Capricorn Records offices. The Capricorn Records offices, of course, are where the Allman Brothers came from the Marshall Tucker band, too. They were going to knock these buildings down, and we stepped in to save them. Not only did we save them, but then we were able to turn them into a thriving area of downtown.

Bryan talked about how Macon Rocks came about in part because there weren't family-friendly activities in downtown Macon. How have you been able to capitalize on that in terms of your programming and membership?

John Hur, General Manager, Macon Rocks:

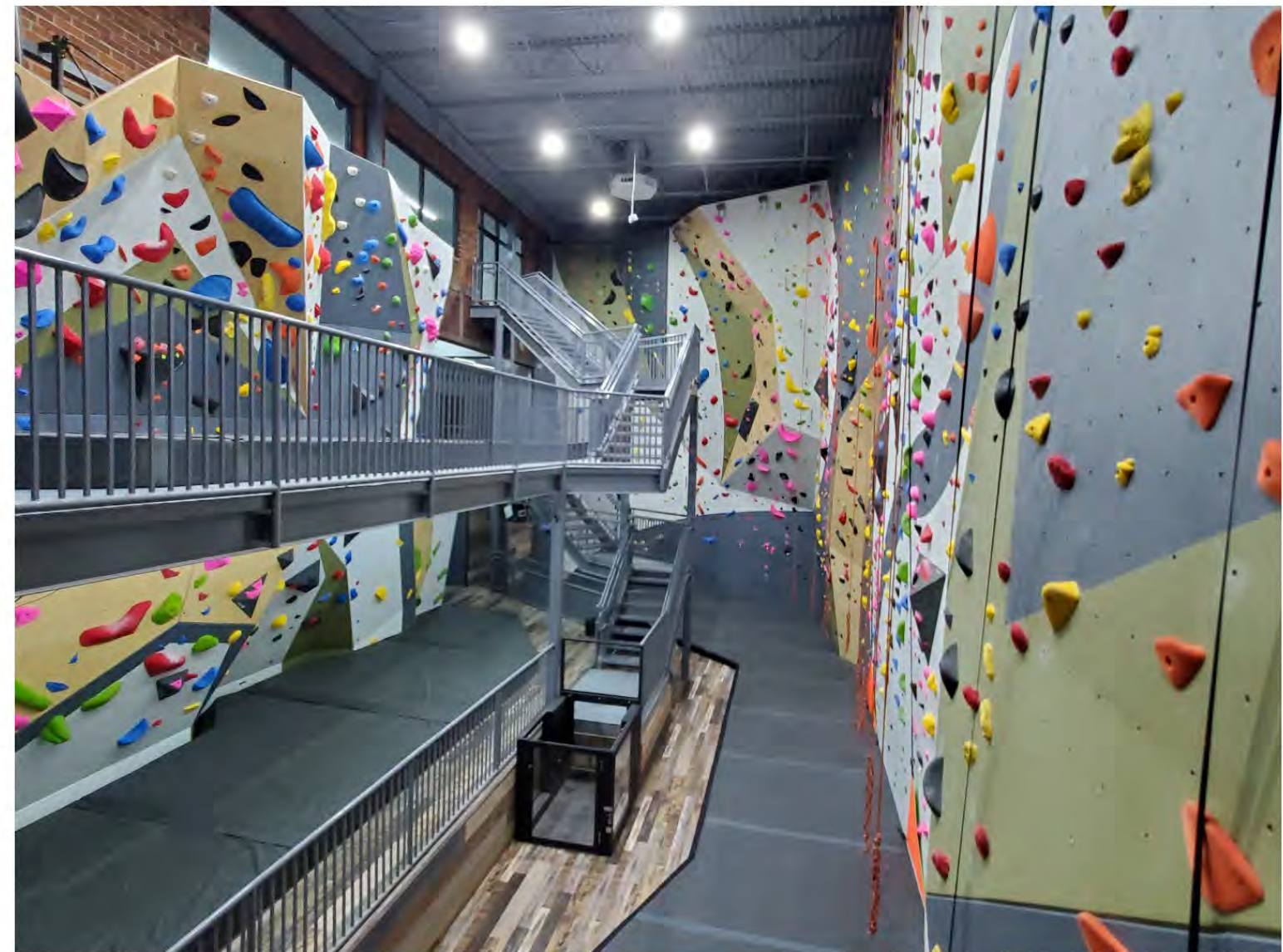
I would say, like other gyms, we have a diversity of routes for beginners, as well as intermediate and more advanced climbers. We also benefit from having a large number of auto belays. Half of our wall terrain is built with auto belays. This allows families who are brand new to the sport to climb alongside each other. So, it's not unusual to have a five- to seven-year-old climbing alongside his mother or dad one lane over. So, it just allows a really close experience with families and others to start coming in together.



The amount of auto-belays is certainly higher than we hear on average. Was that intentional behind the design for the gym?

John:

At the initial build, it wasn't, but then, we started to open the doors and we started seeing who was coming to the gym and how many families were coming in.



Just within a period of a few months, I recognized that this would be a more interesting path to

just within a period of a few months, I recognized that this would be a more interesting path to take. It does foster this interesting vibe. With bouldering, it's a very social aspect of the sport. So, it's interesting to see how it kind of transitioned onto the auto belays.

Could you talk about how partnering as an indoor climbing gym operator with community businesses benefits the gym, as well?

Bryan:

Oh, I mean, it's huge. When you're trying to grow an area or a business, whether it's yours or helping somebody else grow theirs, you should always work together. When we're doing events at Macon Rocks, and people come down and go to a restaurant afterward and eat, well, we brought business to that restaurant.

Any way that we can partner with that restaurant, where while you're at that restaurant, you might see something about the gym that you didn't know was there. Well, now the restaurant has helped get somebody to the gym. We all are trying to get people to come to our establishment or to come to our downtown or come to our city.

I was wondering if you could tell me about how you have utilized community partnerships with regard to your programming.

John:

We have partnered up with Mercer University, which is the main university here in town. We host an event on Friday evenings for undergrads and graduate students at Mercer to come and experience something that they don't have at their university.

So, we've gotten together with the outdoor recreation program to expose their students to climbing in the area, which has been great. We had an event earlier this past season with the [Southeastern Climbers Coalition](#), which does a fantastic job of preserving the outdoor climbing areas.

We wanted to bring awareness to that because most of the people here in this part are new to the sport and they're just now starting to get out and experience the outdoors, outside of the gym. It was really interesting, what we did was at the time we would put up sections of the auto belays that were new routes, and then we closed them off during the fundraiser to give an example of what it's like to have a new area, to have access to it and then to be denied access to it due to certain issues that come about when you're trying to open an area for climbing.

How have you benefited from membership with the CWA?

Bryan:

The [CWA Summit](#) was a huge help early on with learning about all the different things that are

The [CWA Summit](#) was a huge help early on with learning about all the different things that are out there - coming to the Summit meeting people, and seeing what you guys had. It's where you built relationships to build your business.

And the CWA has done that for the rock-climbing community. You guys are there to keep pushing the rock-climbing industry forward and to keep advocating on our behalf.

The owners of Macon Rocks saw a need in their community, and built a business to supply for it. The CWA was there, and can help you, too.

About the Author



Quinn Gordon is the membership coordinator at the CWA. Quinn is an active member of the climbing community and continues to hone his skills inside and outside the gym. When not on the clock, he can be found climbing in the Flatirons, hiking in the Rockies, or reading above the tree line.



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