

Teacher turns annual hikes over to former student

By Tom Chambers

After 32 years of taking local students backpacking in the Sierras, Eddie Lindros is passing the torch to one of his former students.

Lindros, who just returned from his final trip leading kids through Yosemite, has taken nearly 3,500 students from the Poway Unified School District to the mountains since 1971.

The retired math teacher started Poway Backpackers while teaching at Meadowbrook Middle School with colleague Dennis Bueker — who now runs a similar biking program — at a time when funds for such programs were readily available.

“Back in the ’70s, teachers were encouraged to do creative things,” Lindros said. But with funding cuts and the passage of Prop 13 in 1978, school money to pay for the trips dried up. Lindros took the program off-campus, running it outside of school with the support of then-Superintendent Robert Reeves.

Scott Rinehart, a second- and third-grade teacher at Chaparral Elementary, will take over leading the trips next summer. He has gone on the trips every summer since 1980 except one — starting when he was a 12-year-old student in Lindros’ class.

He said the trips can be a life-changing experience.

“I’m a teacher to this day because of his dedication to kids,” Rinehart said of Lindros. “If it wasn’t for him, I wouldn’t be here.”

The 10-day trips typically begin in Mammoth, where the group camps before heading out on their trek — which takes them through Yosemite from the bottom of valleys to the top of Half Dome.

“It’s work — it’s hard,” Lindros said. “The kids will complain about the trail, then they get to the



Participants of this summer’s Sierra hike took a moment for a group photo.

top of a mountain or stop by a stream or pond and they look at it, and it takes their breath away — it just gives kids a big high.”

They hike for three to four hours a day, always setting up camp near water so they can swim and play games. The students break up into groups of five to plan and cook their meals.

Lindros said taking the kids away from cell phones, computers and televisions opens them up to appreciating one another — even if they do not usually hang out together at school.

“You strip off all the facades we put on ourselves, and it takes down all the barriers,” he said.

Rinehart agreed.

“Some of my best friends are kids that went on that first trip with me,” he said.

This summer, Lindros led 63 students ranging from fifth-graders to freshmen in college, and 11 adult volunteers.

Lindros retired last year after teaching at Meadowbrook, Midland Elementary and Bernardo Heights Middle School, and he said not being in the classroom has hurt efforts to recruit students for

the trips.

“It really needs one or two teachers to recruit more kids,” he said.

Rinehart said one of the highlights of the trips comes near the end, when the group sits around the campfire to set goals for when they return home.

“He writes them down, and in a few months he gives them a call to see how they’re doing,” Rinehart said. “He’s like my father — and I’m not just a special case, it’s like that for everyone.”

Rinehart said he wants to carry on Lindros’ traditions.

“It was strange leaving his backyard this year, knowing it was the last time,” he said. “And now, hopefully it will be my backyard that starts and ends each trip.”

Lindros said he still wants to go on the trips as a volunteer, and Rinehart said he will always have enough room for his former teacher.



Eddie Lindros, left, years ago with then-student Scott Rinehart

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