

Colorado Adventure Center a model for all-in-one outdoor attraction

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John Cantamessa, the owner, Wednesday, May 23, 2012, of a new zip line near Idaho Springs will join other large tourism companies to merged this summer to create the Colorado Adventure Center, with five rafting option, three biking options and two zip line activities, including the brand new zip line towers over Clear Creek in Idaho Springs, the longest tower zip line in Colorado. (RJ Sangosti, *The Denver Post*)

DUMONT — Facing yet another challenging year for whitewater rafting, two veteran Colorado outfitters have joined forces to create a company that is moving well beyond boats.

With its five whitewater options, three biking excursions and two zipline courses between Glenwood Springs and Idaho Springs — including Colorado's longest tower zipline complex, over Clear Creek — the new Colorado Adventure Center represents the growing model for all-in-one adventure shopping.

"Hopefully we are leading the industry in what they should be doing. In today's world, you have to diversify to make it happen," John Cantamessa said last week, still strapped into a harness and helmet after initial tests on his company's 3,000 feet of zipline between four six-story towers along Interstate 70 between Dumont and Idaho Springs.

The complex, which opened this weekend, is the vision of Kevin Schneider and Cantamessa, who this year merged their four 20-year-old companies — Cantamessa's Idaho Springs-based Highside Adventure Tours and Good Times Rafting, and Schneider's Glenwood Springs-based Rock Gardens Rafting and Glenwood Canyon Zipline — into the do-it-all-with-one-call Colorado Adventure Center.



Marcus McCrea, left, and Matt Jacobs work on the finishing touches, Wednesday, May 23, 2012, on a new zip line near Idaho Springs. Four large tourism companies have merged this summer to create the Colorado Adventure Center, with five rafting option, three biking options and two zip line activities, including the brand new zipline towers over Clear Creek in Idaho Springs, the longest tower zip line in Colorado. (*RJ Sangosti, The Denver Post*)

Soon, the entrepreneurs and longtime rafting veterans envision hordes of visitors to Glenwood Springs or Idaho Springs signing up for morning floats and afternoon zips with maybe a riverside lunch or shuttled bike ride in between.

The entrepreneurial plan mirrors that seen in the ski-resort industry, which has spent the past decade developing villages, tubing parks, dining, lodging and a host of activities beyond skiing in an effort to lessen its historical live-or-die reliance on snow. Rafting companies in the Upper Arkansas River Valley and southwestern Colorado also are beginning to offer ziplining and other activities beyond boating. At least nine other zipline attractions are scattered across the state, and [recent legislation supporting broader summer recreation at ski resorts](#) will probably encourage more resort zipline systems to open.

Facing a season with paltry flows that could pinch summer-long rafting opportunities in smaller drainages such as Blue River and Clear Creek, the ever-widening adventure net aims to keep the businesses bustling. Cantamessa expects to employ as many as 75 zipline rangers, shuttle drivers, raft guides and photographers at the center's Idaho Springs office.

"Certainly it takes the peaks and valleys out of our business by having product lines that are not necessarily Mother Nature-dependent," said Schneider, who sold Good Times Rafting to Cantamessa in 2002 and whose sweeping Glenwood Canyon Resort on the banks of the Colorado River has augmented rafting with ziplining, bike rides and a bar and grill.

"It definitely hedges our bets against water years like this year and last year," Cantamessa said.

As today's slumbering economy encroaches on vacation time, more tourists are squeezing their holidays into shortened stretches. The average stay for a Colorado vacationer is about 4.8 days, down from almost a week several years ago, according to [the Colorado Tourism Office's 2010 tourism study](#).

Cantamessa and Schneider hope their new adventure center will draw those visitors who are looking to hit it all in a shorter window of time.

The new zipline complex near Dumont — with one tower-to-tower span stretching 1,200 feet over rushing Clear Creek and all within a stone's throw of Interstate 70 — is a welcome addition in Clear Creek County, which has fought for years to lure travelers off the highway. Cantamessa said the four-tower system is the first phase for the 10-acre parcel, with potentially more ziplining downstream.

The system of ziplines is inside [the Clear Creek Greenway](#), where the county has acquired parcels to link a 35-mile recreation path and parks from Clear Creek Canyon to Summit County. Just upstream from the complex, the county is developing a 2.5-acre former mining site for a wheelchair-accessible fishing area and park. Farther upstream, another rafting company is developing a riverfront headquarters, and the county's Lawson Whitewater Park continues to draw kayakers.

It's all part of a larger, multicounty effort to install the [Peaks to Plains Trail](#) from Denver International Airport to Vail and beyond.

"That day is coming," said Martha Tableman, open-space coordinator for Clear Creek County, which has all the easements and land to develop the trail across the county. "These guys doing what they are doing helps our ability to build the greenway. We want to create different opportunities for folks along the way, so this is quite complementary to our greenway vision."

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