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THE

# Kaweah Commonwealth

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WEEKLY NEWSPAPER OF THREE RIVERS AND SEQUOIA~KINGS CANYON NATIONAL PARKS

## Sequoia shares

### TELLING IT LIKE IT IS

by Sarah Elliott

The final "Sequoia Speaks" presentation for the year was held last Saturday evening. Since mid January, there have been six programs, each of them as interesting or more than the last.

This is the second year for the wintertime series, organized by Stephanie Sutton, supervisory park ranger at Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks. Maybe Three Rivers residents are under the impression that these presentations are like the summertime programs held at campground amphitheatres for big-city tourists on their first park visit, a beginning course on bears, trees, seasons, or stars.

But that is like elementary school while the Sequoia Speaks series is like college. Just by residing in Three Rivers, we're qualified to skip a few grades.

When the Sequoia Speaks events are planned for this community, it is those on the frontlines of the research, the top experts in their fields, who are the presenters.

The programs were held to one hour with lively question-and-answer sessions following. Mountain adventures, decades of experiences, current projects, cutting-edge research, and the parks' intriguing history were all discussed and highlighted by PowerPoint images.

Several of these programs would have been engaging for children and teens, yet there were none in the audience. This was definitely a missed opportunity for families to connect kids with nature, and any of these multimedia presentations could have been motivation toward a Park Service career.

If you don't orient your plans and activities toward Sequoia,

—see SEQUOIA, page 6

## Academy ranks 3R as 'World Class'



WORLD CLASS KAYAK ACADEMY high school students were in Three Rivers this week exploring the Kaweah River and checking out Kaweah Country culture and what they referred to as a pristine, soothing, and serene lifestyle.

### Students' classroom is the world; their playground is its waterways

By JOHN ELLIOTT

Sometimes, those of us who live, work, and play here lose sight of the fact that Three Rivers is truly one of the great places on the planet. This week, there are 13 exceptional high school students here to remind us all that we are indeed fortunate to be here... and for several days they will be here too — living, learning, kayaking, and sharing the Kaweah Country experience.

The students in grades 10 through 12 hail from all over the U.S. (five from Montana, two from New York, two from Wyoming, and one each from Florida, Oregon, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts) and are currently camped at the Three Rivers Hideaway with their teachers and coaches for an academic and athletic odyssey like no other.

Part independent study, part outdoor classroom, and part ex-

treme kayak team training, these 13 are the vanguard of a bold, new alternative education program called World Class Kayak Academy (WCKA). The school was founded in 2002 and is based in Missoula, Mont.

"We're headquartered in Montana," said one instructor, "but we're hardly ever there except for graduation and taking care of business between semesters prior to each new school year."

The curriculum at WCKA incorporates international travel into a traditional liberal arts education. Students take all the college entrance exams.

To date, more than a dozen graduates have gone on to success at major universities and there will be many more. Currently, the school is committed to 13 students per year and there are many more waitlisted

that cannot currently be accommodated.

Successful candidates must complete a rigorous application process and have a mandatory athletic recommendation from a coach or paddling instructor. If not an experienced kayaker when entering WCKA, the student must be willing to learn.

The high school curriculum is supervised through Alberton High School in Alberton, Mont. The focus is on academics, but kayaking is the means for each student to find their own passion.

Fueled by its paddling passion, the World Class team travels the globe in search of the best rivers, play spots, and competitions. The travel, study, and the athletics are proven character builders and foster life skills to succeed in whatever endeavor students may

—see WCKA, page 11

## River Rovers seek volunteers

Drowning is the leading cause of death in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. But a new visitor education program is seeking to curb this statistic.

As the rivers rise, volunteers are again being recruited for the River Rovers. This corps of dedicated people will roam the riverbanks to educate visitors about river hazards and encourage responsible use of park resources.

River Rovers will be provided with training, uniforms, first-aid kits, two-way radios, and other necessary equipment. However, they are not trained rescue personnel and will not be involved in swift-water rescue or placed in situations that would compromise their personal safety.

River Rovers candidates should have outdoor experience, good people skills, and be able to walk several miles on uneven terrain in high temperatures. Multilingual skills are especially helpful but not mandatory.

For more information or to request an application, contact Tim Barrett, interpretive ranger, at [Tim\\_Barrett@nps.gov](mailto:Tim_Barrett@nps.gov) or by calling 565-4212 or 565-4211.

## Increase looming for state sales tax

Effective April 1, 2009, the state sales and use tax rate will increase one percent. The one-percent tax rate increase will expire on either July 1, 2011, or July 1, 2012, depending upon whether voters approve the proposed Budget Stabilization constitutional amendment (Proposition 1A) in a statewide election to be held May 19, 2009.

On April 1, Tulare County's sales and use tax rate will increase to 8.75%. In Visalia, the sales tax will be 9% due to a previous voter-approved local district tax increase.

To view county sales tax rates and other state laws and regulations, go to:

[www.kaweahcommonwealth.com/tips-for-travel.html](http://www.kaweahcommonwealth.com/tips-for-travel.html)

### • KAWEAH COUNTRY OUTLOOK: three rivers • lemon cove • woodlake •

Saturday, March 28	Sunday, March 29	Monday, March 30	Tuesday, March 31	Wednesday, April 1	Thursday, April 2	Friday, April 3
Mostly sunny	Sunny	Sunny	Sunny	Mostly sunny	Mostly sunny	Sunny
Hi 82 • Lo 49	Hi 76 • Lo 45	Hi 80 • Lo 46	Hi 84 • Lo 48	Hi 79 • Lo 47	Hi 74 • Lo 45	Hi 73 • Lo 47

### WEATHER WATCH

No rain is in the seven-day forecast, just jaw-dropping gorgeous, sunny, spring days. It's a great time to visit Giant Forest because the roads are dry and clear; no chain-up required. Last Sunday's (March 22) storm dumped .76 inches of rainfall for a season total of 13.83 inches. In contrast, there was nary a drop of rain from Feb. 25, 2008, until March 29 when it rained .40 inches and then not again until May 25. **WARNING:** Be extremely careful around all waterways because they are so cold from melting snow it will immobilize a victim within seconds.