

Rock climber Libby Sauter looking for next challenge while helping others



Libby Sauter climbing Yosemite's Salathe Wall. (Courtesy Cheyne Lempe)

By STEPHANIE FORTE SPECIAL TO LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL



March 8, 2016 - 11:15 am

Don't miss the big stories. Like us on Facebook.

Like 263K

Libby Sauter of Henderson made her mark in rock climbing in 2014 by breaking the women's speed-climbing record on Yosemite's famed El Capitan route The Nose with partner Mayan Smith Gobat.

The pair climbed the 3,000-foot route in 4 hours, 43 minutes, knocking about 7½ hours off the 1999 women's record time. Their ascent was significant; it showed rapid progress that women are making in a once male-dominated sport.

Sauter, 31, talks of her ascent with pride but in the next breath points to the men's record that's still more than two hours faster. There's still work to be done, and Sauter doesn't shy away from what most deem hard or even terrifying.

In addition to her career as a pro athlete racking up speed ascents and first ascents like El Hermano, a 4,000-foot climb in Northern Patagonia, Sauter is a pediatric intensive care unit nurse educator. She works taking care of children who are cardiac patients in war-torn countries like Iraq, Libya and Ukraine and places devastated by natural disasters like Nepal.

Her contributions to climbing and her work in conflict zones have earned her recognition from the American Alpine Club. On May 7, at a reception in Denver, Sauter will receive the AAC's American Mountaineering Museum's Hall of Mountaineering Excellence Award.

In her travels around the globe for climbing and work, what's been most striking are not the differences between cultures but the similarities.

"There's a look of anguish that washes over a mother's face while she waits for her baby during surgery," she said. "Then there's the look of joy when she holds him after surgery. That's the same everywhere.

"Mothers love their babies, whether it is here, Libya, Iraq or Ukraine."

She finds common threads in climbers and others she meets on her travels around the world. She hopes that her experiences as a climber and nurse will help others to be less fearful of one another.

"When we separate ourselves from others and think of ourselves as different, then we will tolerate conditions for other that we would never accept for ourselves," Sauter said.

On March 31, Sauter is giving a talk and slideshow at Origin Climbing and Fitness in Henderson. The presentation, “Off Route,” covers her adventures speed-climbing El Cap and nursing in the Middle East, as well as exploring what it means to lead a global life. The event is at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$10.

Downhill on the rise

Mike Schuer threw some legendary parties when he was in his 20s.

“I never knew that it would turn into a job,” he said.

Schuer, 54, also known as “Downhill Mike,” is the race promoter of the DVO Winter Gravity Series at Bootleg Canyon, which has become a must-do event for mountain bikers around the U.S.

The mountain bike race series includes three events: Nevada State Gravity Championships in January, Mob N Mojave in February and Reaper Madness in March. Each one has pro and amateurs competing in downhill, super D and dual slalom events.

The races bring more than 350 riders and 500 spectators apiece to Boulder City, and the energy is very festival-like. There is a \$6,000 prize up for grabs for the overall winner, and prizes for the top three places in each age and experience category.

This year competitors from 25 states and Canada have made the trek to Bootleg Canyon for two reasons: It’s the only USA Cycling event that takes place in the winter, and the terrain.

“It all comes down to the trails that Brent built,” Schuer said of the late Brent Thomson, who pioneered the area back in the 1980s. He died in 2009. “He was like the Frank Lloyd Wright of trail building. His trails were ahead of their time, interesting and sustainable.”

Schuer met Thomson and Jeff Frampton, founder of All Mountain Cyclery, in 2000 while on a road trip from his home of Lake Placid, N.Y., where he still resides in the summer, running a mountain biking park. Frampton was running the Mob N Mojave race, and in 2008 Schuer volunteered to help out. Last year he committed to promoting that and two other events as a part of the series.

From Friday to Sunday is Reaper Madness, in which world champion Aaron Qwin is expected to compete. This year's event also includes an enduro hand cycling event with competitors from Project HERO (healing, exercise, rehab and opportunity) Las Vegas.

Schuer said the event has grown since last year, especially in the 40-plus beginner category and among kids.

"A lot of competitors are bringing their kids," he said. "We'll have about 20 kids in the 11-14 year-old range, which is a lot.

"People camp together and get to know one another. There is definitely a community."

Local kids have an advantage since Bootleg Canyon in your backyard is a lot like growing up skiing in Telluride. In fact, that's why pros and aspiring pros set up shop in Boulder City for the winter.

"Bootleg Canyon produces some of the best mountain bikers anywhere," Schuer said.

And apparently it produces the best mountain parties.

"I get emails from people telling me it was the best weekend of their winter," he said.

Stephanie Forte is a local longtime rock climber and snowboarder. She is one of the voices of Beyond Vegas, a social media community that helps to

connect people to outdoor adventures in Southern Nevada. If you are hosting an outdoor event, send information to steph@beyondvegas.com. Follow her on Twitter: [@StephNForte](https://twitter.com/StephNForte)