

PARAGLIDING

FROM PAGE 1

US World Team. The next world competition will be held July 13-26, 2013, in Sopot, Bulgaria. There were four men and one woman on the previous US world team. At the upcoming Rat Race, cumulative points from last year and this year's competitions will determine the new US team. In 2007, Seattle resident Tom McCune, whose first competition was the Rat Race, earned a bronze medal at the Paragliding World Championships in Australia, becoming the first American to medal since the competition began in 1989.

Giving back. Mike and Gail are proud of what they and their pilots give back to the local community—in a multitude of ways. Here are some examples:

- Fundraising dinner. Here is your chance to meet the world's top paragliding pilots. This year's fundraising dinner will be held at Fiasco Winery on Sunday, June 17, from 6 – 9 pm. For the first time, RVHPA is hosting the dinner and it is open to the public. Local club members will be cooking and donating food, and there is *no charge to the public*. Mike and Gail expect upwards of 300 attendees. Donations are appreciated.

- A scholarship in the name of the Hunter Family Charitable Fund has been awarded to a deserving student in past years. Andy Pallotta was chosen by the Hunter family last year. (See Andy's article in the Winter 2012 *Applegater* or online at www.applegater.org.)

- This year's donation by the Hunter Family Charitable Fund will be directed to the Magdalene Home for homeless pregnant and parenting teen girls in Medford, and also will be used to purchase premie car seats for parents in need through the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Rogue Valley Medical Center.

- Charitable contributions by paraglider pilots are used to make significant improvements in the Ruch area. For example: a new roof for the Applegate/Ruch RAT (Rural Action Team) Sheriff's office, and computer equipment, band equipment and playground equipment for Ruch School. The club also has held aviation assemblies at Ruch School.

Boon to the local economy. Not only do pilots stay in the area throughout the competition, but some of their families come, too. "Pilots love that there's so much to do in the valley for their families," said Gail. Some pilots rent homes, some stay in local hotels. Other pilots and their families camp out at Cantrall-Buckley Park (usually 75-plus pilots and families totaling around 125 people) and frequent local establishments. And because it's

"Nationals" this year, even more pilots are expected at the event.

In addition to the pilots, there are also 35 volunteers from all over the country during the week who help make the Rat Race what it is and contribute to the local economy, too.

Race Day. With one race each day, here is what goes on during a typical day of competition:

- 9 am—Pilots meet in the Haley's 2,100-square-foot classroom where, among other things, Mike goes over weather conditions. Last year Mike canceled one day of the competition because the lift was too big (strong) even though conditions were good (not windy). (For those who know the lingo, this means that the turbulated area between up and down was too strong.)

- 10:30 – 11 am—All gather at the top of Woodrat Mountain. It takes two 57-passenger school buses, a 20-passenger bus, and volunteers' vans to shuttle all the pilots to the top. A truck follows with all the gear.

- Noon—Start of the race. Pilots are required to sign in at launch and sign out when they land.

- Pilots hover in the air up to over an hour as high as they can get in one spot.

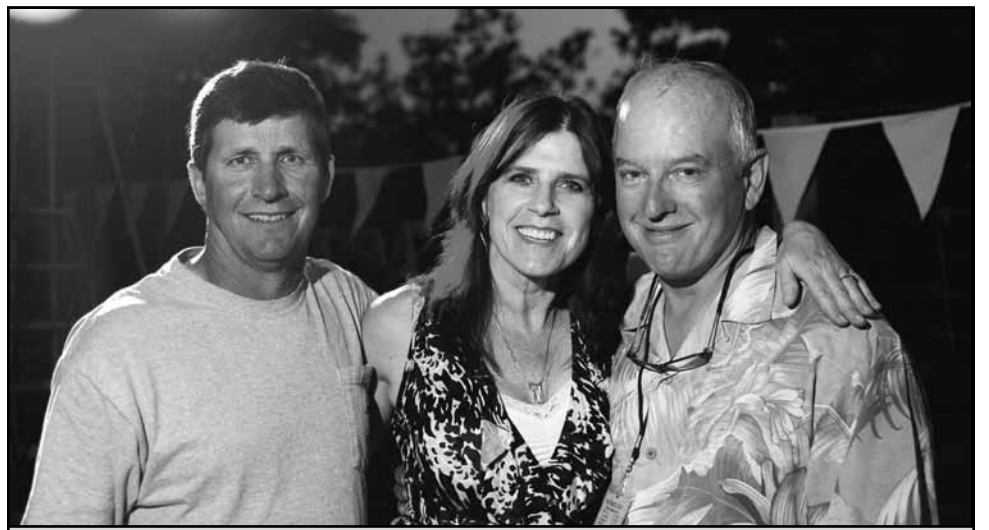
- 1:15 pm—The pilots take off to tackle an average 30- to 40-mile course. Last year there were 1,300 launches over seven days. The Task Selection Committee picks a different course every day, and pilots use GPS with "turn points" (longitude and latitude) to navigate along the racecourse. As an example, a race route might be from Woodrat to Grants Pass, Grants Pass to Gold Hill, Gold Hill to Jacksonville, and Jacksonville to the Fly High/Longsword Vineyards landing zone.

- "Retrieve and Safety Coordinators" stay at the top of the mountain until the end of the race. Pilots call them when they land.

- When a race is over for the day, free-flyers and tandem flyers go up until dark.

- One race lasts three to five hours and is mentally exhausting. As an example of how grueling the race really is, only 30% of the pilots complete it. This means that the 70% who don't complete the race are picked up along the race route each day. "We litter the countryside with pilots," Mike admits.

Join in on the adventure. In addition to the fundraising dinner and watching live feeds at Fiasco and other locations, the public can, for a fee, view the competition from atop Woodrat Mountain and reserve a tandem paragliding flight with a tandem-certified pilot before or after the race each day. Tandem flights can last from 20 to 45



From left to right, Rat Race volunteer Roger Brock with organizers Gail and Mike Haley.

Mike and Gail Haley— Rat Race organizers extraordinaire

Mike Haley is one of the pioneers of the hang-gliding sport. "I always knew I wanted to fly, but didn't have any money when I was young. I built my first two hang gliders back in the 70s," said Mike. Since taking up paragliding he has soared up to 18-19,000 feet above sea level without oxygen. The record altitude at Woodrat Mountain is 13,000 feet (accomplished by a pilot after the Rat Race was over). "I'd still like to learn to fly helicopters," Mike admits.

Gail, too, has her paragliding license, but says she's "not as passionate as Mike." She is, however, passionate about the pilots and about organizing the Rat Race to perfection.

Mike is on the Board of Directors of the national association (USHPA) and chairs the competition committee. (The Federal Aviation Administration allows USHPA to govern in the United States and be self-regulating—unlike other aviation entities—because of the stellar job that USHPA has done for over 35 years.)

minutes depending on weather conditions, and they can go as high as 4,000 to 5,000 feet above Woodrat Mountain, which is at 3,700 feet above sea level. Annually, 100 to 150 adventuresome folks fly off the mountain with an instructor in a tandem glider designed for two people. For those so inclined, you can make your reservations at Fiasco Winery, the public Rat Race headquarters this year.

The public is invited to pick up the competing pilots when they land—they're the ones with the large backpacks—and give them a ride to Fiasco Winery.

For more information on this year's Rat Race, visit the Fiasco Winery race headquarters on Highway 238 in Jacksonville or go online to www.mphsports.com.

Also, watch this excellent nine-minute video by Oregon Public Broadcasting filmed by a cameraman who flew tandem during the 2011 Rat Race (<http://www.opb.org/programs/ofg/segments/view/1789>).

Here's what a Rat Race pilot had to say about the race a few years ago: "This is the best run, best organized, best orchestrated event there is in the Northwest. Whether you finish in the top ten or dead last, you'll have a great time and you'll become a better pilot, too."

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