



SPECIAL EDITION

WOMEN *of* INSPIRATION

16 local women with a message

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"The best part is teaching a child to read. It opens up the world to them. There's nothing better than that."

by Ronni Wilde, for *The Bulletin Special Projects*

Heather Anderson is so passionate about teaching that it's no surprise she is Oregon's 2016 Teacher of the Year. Teaching is in her blood: Her mother and grandmother were teachers.

"I have wanted to be a teacher my entire life," she said, adding that her mother has taught for Bend-La Pine Schools for 30 years.

"I attribute a lot of my passion and love of teaching to my early exposure to it," she said. This includes some of her own teachers, who she said inspired and supported her in her desire to teach.

Anderson was born in Corvallis, Oregon, but the family moved to Bend in 1978 when she was two months old, and she's called it home ever since.

She is married to Sev Anderson, and has two boys, Logan, 8, and Orion, 5. A graduate of Bend Senior High School, Anderson said that her Spanish teacher, Bonnie Elliott — who was the Oregon Teacher of the Year in 1992 and the last one from Bend-La Pine Schools before Anderson — encouraged her to teach at an elementary school during her senior year, which she did, and she's been in front of the classroom ever since.

Anderson graduated from Oregon State University in 1999, and went to Guadalajara, Mexico, to be a student teacher for a fifth grade class there.

"The regular teacher quit, so I got my own class. That was my first big impactful experience as a teacher," she said. "I had to master the language and learn how to hold a job in a foreign country at 20 years old. It was fun and scary."

That experience taught her to be strong, and Anderson said she still draws from it when she is faced with something difficult.

Following that experience, Anderson earned her Master's Degree from George Fox University in 2001, then got married and moved to Maryland with her husband while he earned his Master's. While there, she helped turn around a school in a severely

impoverished area that is still thriving today. During that time, she also became a National Board Certified teacher, something she advocates highly.

"I just want us to have highly accomplished teachers in our community so that we raise the next generation as kind, successful, thriving citizens."

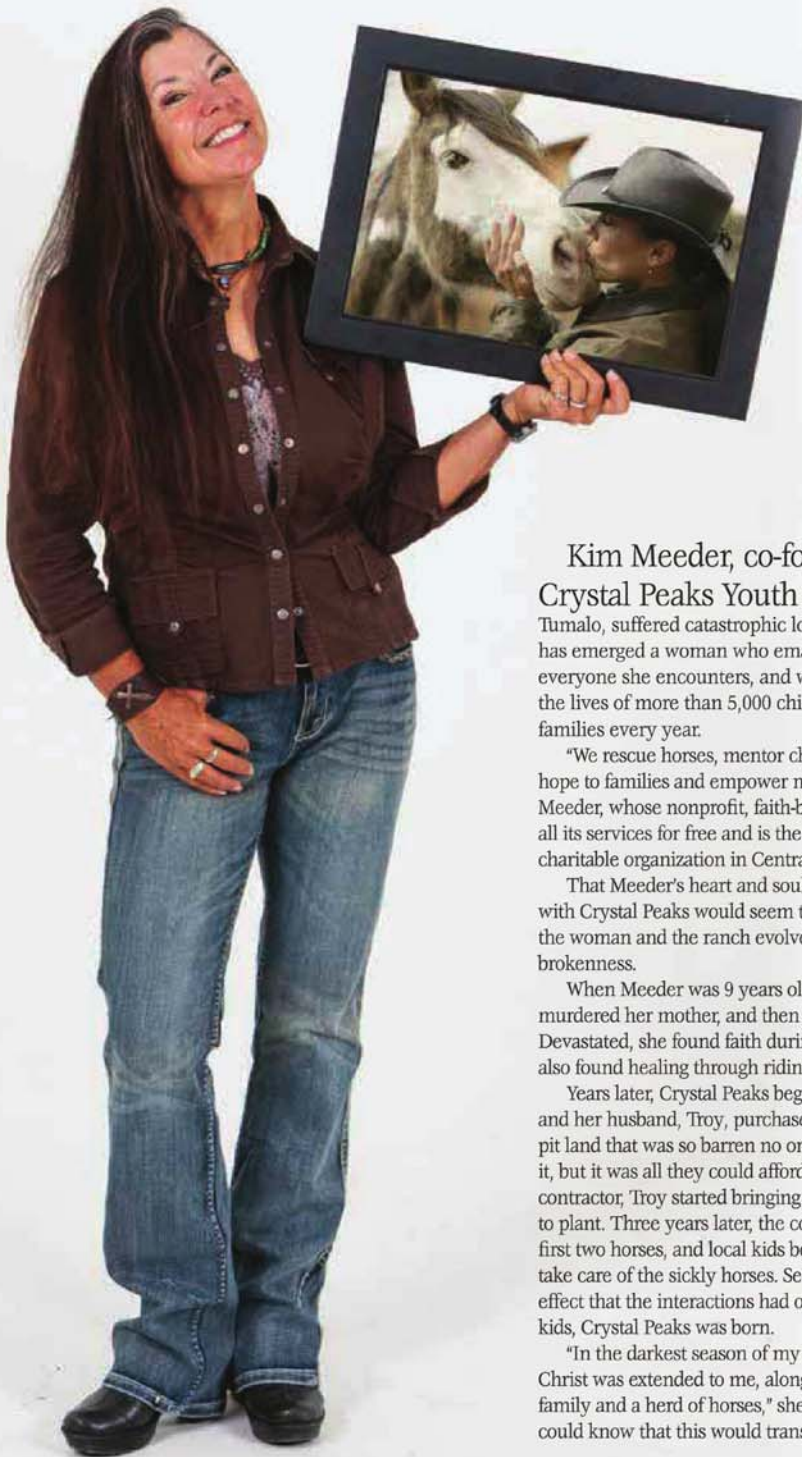
Anderson has been a fourth-grade teacher at Juniper Elementary School in Bend for four years, and was nominated for Teacher of the Year by the school's principal, Dan Wolnick.

"I am fortunate to have a lot of supportive people around," she said. "It's an honor to represent teachers around the state. There is a lot of travel and speaking; things I never thought I'd do."

Anderson said that anyone who knows her would describe her as hardworking, determined and tenacious, but also caring and nurturing. These attributes have not gone unnoticed: Anderson was just bestowed with the 2017 National Education Association's "Teaching in Excellence" award for Oregon, which will enable her to continue as a teacher leader for another year, she said.

"There is no job more rewarding than teaching. It's hard work, but you get to impact students for a lifetime," she said. "My greatest accomplishment is teaching kids to read, it's not the awards. I'm just a representative for all the teachers who work so tirelessly."





"Hope is like light in darkness. What might seem insignificant to some is, for those in a very dark place, enough to light the way to freedom."

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Kim Meeder, co-founder of Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch in Tumalo, suffered catastrophic loss as a child, but has emerged a woman who emanates hope to everyone she encounters, and whose work touches the lives of more than 5,000 children and their families every year.

"We rescue horses, mentor children, bring hope to families and empower new ranches," said Meeder, whose nonprofit, faith-based ranch offers all its services for free and is the largest private charitable organization in Central Oregon.

That Meeder's heart and soul go into her work with Crystal Peaks would seem to be destiny — both the woman and the ranch evolved from a place of brokenness.

When Meeder was 9 years old, her father murdered her mother, and then killed himself. Devastated, she found faith during that time, and also found healing through riding horses.

Years later, Crystal Peaks began when Meeder and her husband, Troy, purchased 9 acres of cinder-pit land that was so barren no one else wanted it, but it was all they could afford. As a landscape contractor, Troy started bringing home rejected trees to plant. Three years later, the couple rescued their first two horses, and local kids began coming to help take care of the sickly horses. Seeing the therapeutic effect that the interactions had on both horses and kids, Crystal Peaks was born.

"In the darkest season of my life, the hope of Christ was extended to me, along with the sense of family and a herd of horses," she said. "Only God could know that this would transform into what it is

today. Anything that my mind could dream would be a vision far too small."

Meeder, whose background and former career is in sports physiology, said Crystal Peaks continues to grow exponentially. The ranch, 21 years in, is now comprised of more than 100 acres of valuable Tumalo farmland and has 30 paid staff members. Donations have been so plentiful that the ranch has never had to have a fundraiser.

"I am so humbled and amazed and grateful every day," she said. "Much of our focus is transforming all the property into a sanctuary where people go to find rest."

Crystal Peaks sits amidst rolling green hills with sweeping views of the Cascades. While children are in riding and mentoring sessions, parents relax under peaceful shade trees.

"Families are drawn to the ranch. They are hungry and need help on a multitude of levels."

Because of the success of Crystal Peaks, the Meeders have helped launch 210 similar ranches, including 10 in foreign countries. Although she is still very hands-on in her work at Crystal Peaks, Meeder also travels the world sharing her message, particularly in poor countries.

"To go to these impoverished places and share the hope that was shared with me, changes me every day," she said. "Everyone has something to give that will make a difference in the life of another person, and that should be our daily focus. Where there's still breath, there's hope. When our hope rises above our circumstances and feelings, everything changes because we change. This life is not about what we lack, it's about what we can do."

"Being mindful and enjoying every moment is a way for me to connect with others and inspire them to not be afraid to go where no one has gone before."

by Ronni Wilde, for *The Bulletin Special Projects*

For Bend's Laurenne Ross, hurling down the side of a mountain at 50-100 mph and continent-hopping is a way of life. But despite the lifestyle that being a World Cup and Olympic skier brings, Ross keeps grounded by establishing a sense of community wherever she is, maintaining balance between skiing and other interests and by attempting to be present everywhere she goes.

Ross, 28, said she has been working on meditation and mindfulness for the past five years, making a conscious effort to submerge herself into every community in which she travels, even if she's only there for a few days. She describes herself as spiritual, but also scientific and practical.

"It's hard for professional athletes or people who travel a lot to get to know the people and the culture of a community. I'm here in Bend so rarely that I can barely call it home, which is a shame, because I love it here."

To help counter homesickness, Ross — whose gentle confidence and zest for life shine through even when jet-lagged — said she learns as much as possible about the places she travels to.

"This allows me to appreciate each individual mountain and the communities within them," said Ross, who has spent more than 20 years skiing on Mt. Bachelor.

"I love Mt. Bachelor. I know it so well," she said. The cold, stormy weather on Mt. Bachelor that was challenging for her as a young skier — including the notorious freezing fog — wound up helping her in the long run, she said. "I face challenging weather a lot at World Cup races. Mt. Bachelor prepared me for that."

Ross was born in Edmonton, Alberta and skied the Canadian Rockies until age 7, when her family moved to Klamath Falls. Growing up, she had a wide range of passions, including music, art, gymnastics and mountain sports such as backpacking, hiking

and biking. By age 14, Ross decided to commit herself wholeheartedly to skiing, and made the U.S. Ski Team her senior year in high school.

In 2006, Ross moved to Bend, and bought a house here in 2011, where she still lives when in town.

"I'm so grateful to be able to do what I do. It's incredible. But it's a lot of work, and it's very stressful at times," she said. "The competitive environment on the World Cup circuit is intense. It can be overwhelming."

To help cope with the stress, Ross — whose friends describe her as an overachiever — keeps her life well-rounded by maintaining her love of art and music (she sings and plays the piano, violin and guitar), and by taking classes each spring toward a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at the University of Oregon in Eugene.

She hopes to ski in the World Championships in St. Moritz, Switzerland, in February 2017, and then the World Cup Finals in Aspen, Colorado, in March 2017. After that, she said she looks forward to the Winter Olympics in 2018.

"My goal is to be where I am, to work hard and to ski to the best of my abilities. If I do that, I know I can win."

