

Women's Quest Camps

Empowering Women from the Inside Out



Former triathlete Colleen Cannon founded Women's Quest to empower participants through athletic activities, meditation, yoga and other techniques.

By Kelli Rosen

Finding time for yourself can be a challenge, especially if you're a modern-day woman. So when your kids go to camp this summer, why not send yourself, too? Women's Quest camps empower women through athletic endeavors, journaling, meditation, yoga and other activities. You won't have to put name tags on your belongings, but you will have fun, laugh till it hurts and bond with women who have similar interests.

After retiring from the pro triathlon circuit in 1992, Colleen Cannon—the 1984 world champion and two-time national champion—founded Women's Quest camps to help women connect with themselves and others through friendly, noncompetitive activities. Each summer, camp participants travel to Winter Park to enjoy the outdoors and learn a few life lessons along the way. "There's something magical about running among wildflowers under a canopy of aspens and being face-to-face with the 14,000-foot peaks of the Continental Divide," Cannon says. "It's the perfect playground. We toss personal labels out the window and show women there's an athlete in each of us."

Cannon couples her impressive credentials with those of some of the world's top female athletes, who also teach at the camps. The staff boasts such notables as Diane Israel, the 1984 Colorado mountain running champion;

Jacqueline Stanford, a former professional triathlete;

All Abilities Welcome

Whether you're a veteran or rookie, you'll benefit from Women's Quest camps. Upon arrival at Winter Park's Woodspur Lodge—a rustic A-frame where televisions are nonexistent and cell phone signals are few and far between—you'll find a group that matches your ability. For example, if you've never been on a mountain bike, hang with women who are just learning. If technical single-track is your thing, tag along with the group pedaling expert trails.

"Women's Quest welcomes women of all backgrounds and athletic abilities, from walkers to seasoned athletes," Cannon says. "The activities are supportive, friendly and absolutely noncompetitive."

What type of woman attends Women's Quest? "Mostly professionals who have their acts together, but want the tools to make their lives better," says Dona Anderson, a Boulder resident who has attended Cannon's camps three times since 1998. The tools each woman gains are highly individual. For Anderson, the camp taught her how to not compete.

At one camp prior to the Denver Danskin Marathon, women gain the tools and support to enter the race if they

choose to. For many women, it's their first race; for Anderson, it was a chance to let go. "All the women cheered me on, and I even wore a pink tutu!" she says. "For once in my life I didn't want to run a dog-eat-dog race. I wanted it to be about having fun."

Camps offer more than athletic accomplishment, say Boulder's Robyn Lawrence, a "Quester" who attended her first camp last summer. "Women's Quest was so much more than I thought it would be. I was really looking forward to the physical part—trail running, mountain biking and daily yoga—but I didn't realize how powerful the mind and spirit parts would be for me," she says. "It really affirmed how important it is to spend time with other women, and Colleen's fun spirit and openness made all the difference."

Indeed, Women's Quest may be the perfect vacation for active career women who seek a balance in their lives. Women's Quest is definitely designed with activity in mind, but taking the time to refresh the spirit is important too, Cannon says. Questers are encouraged to think about the lives they want to lead rather than those they currently live. "The first camps I attended were so great it was hard to go home," says Debbie Juretus of Lafayette, who has attended camp four of the last five summers. "I was so afraid of losing that incredible feeling inside that I'd go home and literally cry for two

days. When I returned from camp last year, it was the first time I didn't cry. I think it's because I finally found balance in my life, and I have Colleen and the rest of the Women's Quest staff to thank."

Through journaling and meditation in the mountain woods and meadows, many women discover the courage to explore a different path. Some consider an occupational change; others resolve to be better parents; still others look for ways to incorporate spirituality into their lives. "I didn't have much, if any, religion or spirituality in my life," Juretus says. "As a result of camp, I went home and explored Judaism. I took a class at a local synagogue and began studying Hebrew a year later."

Above all, Women's Quest is dedicated to helping women connect with their inner selves. "I see so many people on trails and in the gym who just don't look like they're having fun," Anderson says. "For me, it's no longer about the results, but the path."

Women's Quest also offers a winter camp and a fall retreat in Tuscany, Italy. For information, contact Colleen Cannon at 303-545-9295 or visit www.womensquest.com

