



The Mountain Institute Supports the Launch of a New Non-Profit Organization: Experience Learning

Expanding Experiential Education in West Virginia

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Washington, D.C., USA: After several years of study and planning, The Mountain Institute (TMI) is pleased to announce that its environmental education program based in the Appalachian Mountains will become a separate non-profit entity—*Experience Learning*. This new 501(c)3 organization was established by three of The Mountain Institute's original founders and will be based in West Virginia. *Experience Learning* (EL) will take on TMI's educational activities in the Appalachian Mountains and is also acquiring the Spruce Knob Mountain Center property where many of these educational programs are taught.

Since its founding in 1972, TMI has focused on experiential education in the Appalachians and on inspiring the next generation of mountain stewards. From the Spruce Knob Mountain Center, we have engaged thousands of students and teachers about the importance of their mountain ecosystems. The field experiences at Spruce Knob teach them leadership and cooperation, and show them their critical role in preserving the environment. Outdoor learning in natural environments has strengthened students' skills in STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) in West Virginia. *Experience Learning* will now continue these educational programs, enriched by their expertise, local connections and networks.

Experience Learning and The Mountain Institute plan to continue their cooperation. TMI's long-term goal is to replicate the Spruce Knob educational model in other mountain regions around the world. The two organizations are seeking opportunities for collaboration that will utilize the expertise and resources of both non profits.

Background/History

The Mountain Institute was founded on the slopes of Spruce Knob Mountain—the highest point in West Virginia—in 1972. The Mountain Institute has grown significantly since then and is known for its innovative programs in the world's highest, longest and oldest mountain chains: the Himalayas, Andes and Appalachians.

For four decades, TMI has partnered with mountain communities in on-the-ground collaborations to help them develop greater self-reliance and a broader understanding of their resource-rich, mountain environments. Over time, our commitment to protecting mountain ecosystems by improving the lives of mountain people has become the core of TMI's mission.

Over the course of several years, TMI's founders and management realized that by establishing a separate institution in West Virginia, the educational outreach in this region could be stronger and would pave the way for greater coverage and impact. To that end, *Experience Learning* was established and the organizations signed an agreement in March, 2017 that enabled *Experience Learning* to take on and expand all of TMI's Appalachian educational programs as its own entity.

“I think that both TMI and *Experience Learning* will be able to grow more effectively, each with its own distinct mission, programs and strategies to protect mountains and their communities. Each will be more effective, while keeping close ties, to learn from one another and pursue shared goals,” said Dr. Andrew Taber, Executive Director of The Mountain Institute.

“By creating two organizations, both are better able to realize their unique missions. Each non-profit can more easily communicate about its programs, goals, and success, while still cooperating and seeking joint opportunities,” said Vicki Fenwick-Judy, Executive Director of *Experience Learning*.

TMI’s International Expansion

The Mountain Institute is preparing to expand its work in the Andes, Himalayas, African Rift and in the USA. (More details to be released in June, 2017.) All TMI projects will share our signature approach—combining local knowledge and cultural traditions with new tools and modern science to develop resilient solutions to the daunting challenges that mountain people face.

The Mountain Institute (TMI) is the only international organization solely dedicated to mountain communities and their unique environments. With programs focused on sustainable livelihoods for farmers, women and communities, TMI is a trusted partner to protect bio-diversity, adapt to climate change, conserve natural resources (land, water and wildlife) and promote the well-being of mountain peoples. For more info, visit TMI’s website: www.mountain.org

Experience Learning’s mission is to develop effective community members through beyond-the-classroom, outdoor learning opportunities for children and adults. We offer a variety of programs that range from wilderness courses, citizen-science programs and summer camps to special events. For more information, visit EL’s new website at www.experience-learning.org.

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