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**The Adaptive Sports Center opens a new chapter of expanded therapeutic recreation opportunities for people with disabilities**

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DISCOVERING NEW WAYS TO

# Thrive

*The Adaptive Sports Center opens the new Kelsey Wright Building and the next chapter of expanded therapeutic recreation opportunities for those with disabilities*

By **Kevin Gould**, AIA, Principal, RTA Architects



*Photo: RTA Architects and James Ray Spahn, Photographer*  
The Adaptive Sports Center's new Kelsey Wright Building in Crested Butte, Colorado, provides year-round therapeutic recreation activities for those with disabilities. Replacing the former Outpost Building, it is also a prominent feature of the Town Center.

**FOUNDED IN 1987**, the Adaptive Sports Center (ASC) was originally known as the Physically Challenged Ski Program of Crested Butte, Colorado. During its first winter, its all-volunteer staff gave 33 lessons out of its cramped headquarters in the basement of Crested Butte's Treasury Building. Today, the ASC is a nonprofit world-class provider of therapeutic recreation opportunities for those with disabilities.

Clients of the ASC's programs come from across the U.S. and include individuals with disabilities stemming from spinal cord injuries, cognitive impairment, severe burns, autism, traumatic brain injuries, cerebral palsy and visual impairment, among many others. Activities and programs promoting physical and social well-being are provided year-round, and range from mountain biking and kayaking to skiing and ice climbing, just to name a few. Over 6,000 lessons are provided each year to more than 700 individuals by a team that includes 15 board members, 14 full-time staff members, more than 25 professional instructors, and hundreds of volunteers.

Having celebrated its 30th anniversary two years ago, the ASC embarked on its first-ever building campaign to construct a new permanent home that would support the increasing demand for its programs. In August 2016, the ASC purchased the Outpost Building at the ski resort's base area with the intention of replacing the existing structure. The new four-story,

27,000-square-foot Kelsey Wright Building opened in July 2019. Located at the base of Mount Crested Butte Resort, it doubles the capacity for guests and provides space for additional staff.

### **Honoring 'perseverance and courage'**

The new facility is named in memory of Kelsey Wright, who had mitochondrial disease. Kelsey had a passion for skiing and was one of the Adaptive Sports Center's first and longest-attending participants. Kelsey's parents, Dan and Pat Wright, felt that Kelsey's experiences at ASC were life-changing for her. Kelsey's father commented, "We hope that our contribution to the Adaptive Sports Center helps many more people like Kelsey discover new ways to thrive." Adaptive Sports Center Executive Director Christopher Hensley says that the facility's name embodies Kelsey's spirit of perseverance and courage. "Kelsey inspired all of us to do our best and help others live their lives to the fullest."

The architects for the Kelsey Wright Building worked closely with ASC staff, program participants, and members of the Wright family to design a facility centered upon movement. The ASC encourages physical movement of its clients to keep them active, not only during their time in Crested Butte, but long after they return home. The Adaptive Sports Center also supports a larger social movement re-



The two-story indoor rock climbing wall is a dramatic feature of the ASC's new Kelsey Wright Building.  
*Photo: RTA Architects and James Ray Spahn, Photographer*

After a long day in the mountains, clients and instructors can come together in one of the many common areas to share their experiences. Photos of the building's namesake, Kelsey Wright, are featured in the dining room to memorialize her spirit of perseverance and courage.  
*Photo: RTA Architects and James Ray Spahn, Photographer*



garding how people's differences are perceived, impacting not only the community of Crested Butte, but the sporting community as a whole.

"Kelsey broke a lot of stereotypes about people with disabilities. She surprised some people she met when she told them that she could ski," Dan Wright said. "She loved to go fast, ski powder, and connect with nature. She also loved to show the world that her disability didn't define her."

### Therapeutic design

Through the design process, specific goals for the project were identified, including: increased program space; more opportunities for peer interaction by providing several common areas on the housing level; ski-in/out access from the main level; a fun, respectful client reception experience; access to outdoor space at each level through multiple roof decks; visual connection between administrative staff and clients; a covered/protected entry; and building orientation that takes full advantage of sunlight and the incredible views of the base area.

Universal design principles were used throughout the facility, including a quiet room to accommodate clients with PTSD and autism, flooring transitions with color contrast for visually impaired users, and two elevators. An accessible kitchen for cooking classes was also part of the design. One of the regular program participants, who is in a wheelchair, even invited the design team into his own home to show them first-hand the accommodations that need to be made to a typical kitchen.

Outside, an overhead canopy at the entrance of the new building provides protection from the weather for those entering the facility. A set of stairs and a ramp provide easy access for all users of the building. An expanse of windows along the entry and along the public circulation path provides visibility from the reception area from the interior, and allows the public to see the various recreation activities going on inside, particularly of the dramatic two-story indoor rock climbing wall. The lower level is used year-round by the general public for 250 ski and snowboard locker rentals, a unique source of revenue



Clients of the Adaptive Sports Center receive personal assessment and specialized equipment modifications in the spacious fit-up area. Photo: Ray Spahn, Photographer

that helps offset some of the Adaptive Sports Center's operating costs.

### A look inside

The main level of the new Kelsey Wright Building contains the program level. Clients are greeted in the comfortable reception area and meet their instructors. They then head to the program fit-up area to receive specialized assessment and equipment fitting services to ensure their enjoyment of—and their safety in—their chosen activity. This service can last up to an hour, so expanded fit-up areas were included in the design on this level so that participants and staff could have increased space to store, maneuver, and modify the necessary equipment. The equipment is rotated according to season. Once fitted, clients then have ski-in/ski-out access to the base of Mount Crested Butte. The second level of the new building features the quiet room, a multipurpose program area, a commercial kitchen for preparing meals for participant groups, multiple dining areas, and administrative space for ASC staff.

The third level of the Kelsey Wright Building is an onsite accommodation level that features guest rooms with 14 beds so clients and their families can stay onsite, laundry facilities for clients and staff, and a multipurpose room for group debriefs, video analysis, continuing education for instructors, and events. After a long day in the mountains or on the climbing wall, commu-

nity common areas on this level—including a living room, lounge, a kitchen and dining area, and an outdoor patio—allow program participants to experience meaningful interactions with peers in similar situations and to recount the day's adventures. The common areas also provide increased opportunities for interaction among clients and staff, building a sense of team.

The rooftop level of the new building features an outdoor deck, accessible restrooms, and a warming kitchen for ASC fundraising events. The rooftop level also provides clients and staff a chance to take in the breathtaking views of alpenglow at the base area.

### The 'best piece of equipment'

The Adaptive Sports Center expects to eventually surpass 10,000 therapeutic recreation activities annually in the Kelsey Wright Building. Chris Read, the Adaptive Sports Center's program director, summed up its impact: "Our state-of-the-art equipment and our ability to customize experiences for participants has always been leading edge. This new building brings our accommodations to the same level of excellence, and will make each experience even more beneficial to the participant. This facility will be the best piece of equipment we have ever had." ◊

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