

# Family of four to compete in Master of the Mountains Adventure Race/Relay



Cullen O'Neill, right, and Cameron O'Neill provide water for their mother, Shelley O'Neill, during the first running of the Master of the Mountains Adventure Race/Relay in Raton in 2013. They are competing as a family team this year. (Courtesy of the O'Neill Family)

By [Glen Rosales / Journal Staff Writer](#)

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Shelley O'Neill has already competed in the Master of the Mountains Adventure Race/Relay twice, but life kind of got in the way of her training this year.

So she's decided on the next best thing: sharing the fun with her family, who live near Cimarron. While she concentrates on her favorite event, cycling, her husband Tim O'Neill will do the run, their 13-year-old son Cullen will kayak and 10-year-old Cameron will handle the rifle stage.

“We got such a kick out of helping her, we came up with the idea of doing this as a family,” Tim O’Neill said. “The youngest one is quite the shooter. He was sort of a fit for the shooting component. She’s the bicyclist and she likes that. And me doing the running is natural because I run. And Cameron ended up doing the kayaking. It sort of all has fallen into place. It’s a real celebration. It’s a neat competition.”

And while New Mexico is already well known for the winter Mount Taylor Quadrathlon, Raton officials are hoping its unique Master of the Mountains summer competition on Sept. 12 will soon gain similar notoriety.

The four-event competition combines a 10-kilometer run up and down Little Horse Mesa, a 19.3-mile bicycle ride through scenic Sugarite Canyon, a 3-mile kayak paddle on Lake Maloya and a dash through a tactical rifle shooting range on the National Rifle Association Whittington Center.

It’s the brainchild of Raton parks and recreation director Jared Chatterly, who seized an opportunity to create an event that would not only highlight the best of what northern New Mexico has to offer, but also would draw folks to the area as a means of economic development.

“I was looking for an event that the (Parks and Recreation) department could take on as a signature event for the department and showcase what Raton has to offer recreation-wise,” Chatterly said. “Adventure races are popular and we wanted to see if it was something that we could do in Raton, and it’s all kind of fallen together.”

In its third year, the event has grown from 49 competitors in its first year to 63 this year. But, since the Master of the Mountains is now recognized by the state’s Department of Tourism as a New Mexico True event, Chatterly said he believes it’s really going to take off in the coming years.

“We’re hoping next year will be our breakthrough year,” he said. “It has been profitable. Every year, we have managed to stay within our budget and have a surplus for the following year. A big thump in the arm was having the state tourism department recognize it as a New Mexico True event.”

As for the O’Neills, they’re just happy to have an interesting event to compete in as a family.

“The kids and my husband have been my support crew; they’ve been incredible,” Shelley O’Neill said. “It’s been a pretty intense, crazy summer. I told my husband, ‘I need help. I’m feeling so under pressure about the race and the amount of work I’ve put in.’ I knew if I didn’t sign up, on the day of the race, I’d feel so disappointed. So we thought, what if we run it as a family this year. A part of me is a little sad that I’m not doing the whole thing by myself, but I’m doing it as a family, so I’m excited.”

The youngsters are excited for the opportunity to compete alongside their parents.

“It’s really fun that we’re all going to go there,” Cullen O’Neill said. “While my dad is running, I’m going to be getting ready to kayak and, when he gets here, I’m going to be on my way and then they’ll be helping my brother. We’re all kind of doing everything together and competing.”

Cameron O’Neill, who bagged the family’s Thanksgiving turkey last fall, knows a lot of responsibility rests on his shoulders.

“I think it’s going to be a better bonding experience,” he said. “I think it’s going to be really fun to be doing it as a family. I don’t care if we win, I just want to have fun. I know my shooting is important, but I know the course. But I have a feeling it’s going to be different this year on the shooting.”

And when it’s all said and done, the results don’t really matter, Tim O’Neill said

“Coming in first would be awesome, but it’s our first time competing as a family, so finishing is the important thing,” he said. “Years from now, when we all laugh about it, we’ll look back at this day as being very special.”