TANYA LAING GAHR PHOTO

Ryan Johannesen and Megz Reynolds are prepared for ups and downs on the Kicking Horse River.

// GOLDEN //

The waves of the future

Stepping into the role of his former employer and mentor, Ryan Johannesen is ready to ride the rapids of the next quarter century //by Tanya Laing Gahr

The Kicking Horse River is one of the foremost whitewater destinations in North America, and since 1982, the Glacier Raft Company has been negotiating tight canyon turns and churning rapids—not to mention giving tens of thousands of thrill-seekers the ride of a lifetime—on the river.

Ryan Johannesen, the new owner of Glacier Raft Company, said the river kept him coming back when he first started working as a rafting guide 10 years ago. He had moved from Vancouver to work for Jim Murphy, one of the original owners. Johannesen moved up through the ranks to become a manager of the company, and when Murphy was ready to retire, Johannesen and his partner, Megz Reynolds, took the oars.

Johannesen thinks the secret to the company's longevity has been taking time with the customers. Rather than trying to have two runs in one day with different groups, Glacier Raft Company will do one run with more interaction.

"It's always been a nicely run show," said Johannesen of the business. "We run the same river and even the same sections as other operators but our day is done way sooner . . . and it's a homey, welcoming experience."

Whatever the secret is, it seems to be working. Johannesen said they have a lot of return customers, including school groups from Saskatchewan that make the journey every year to ride the rapids.

Customers aren't the only ones who return year after year. Like Johannesen, many of the rafting guides have been with the operation for several years. He thinks it's the river that keeps calling them back. As the new owner, Johannesen expects he'll spend a lot of time with the books this season, but he's still planning to grab the paddle a few times. KB

RESOURCES:
www.glacierraft.com