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AgCountry Board “Holds the Edge” on Sea Kayaking Adventure



Team bonds are built and strengthened by shared experiences, whether it’s overcoming a significant business challenge or tackling a new outdoor experience head on. AgCountry Farm Credit Services recognizes this, and for years its board has engaged in experiential development programs – most recently paddling out onto Lake Superior during an FCCS “Holding the Edge” sea kayaking program.

“We understand the value of developing a common language and learning through a shared experience,” says Marc Knisely, AgCountry’s CEO who has joined his board and leadership team at the Lewis & Clark Experience, also through FCCS. “Experiences like Holding the Edge, tied to our annual strategic planning session, provide another level of reinforcement of the themes and objectives we’re exploring, much more so than participating in a meeting.”

Sea kayaking offers a strong metaphor for business strategy, Marc says: having a float plan, being agile enough to make course corrections, and “holding the edge” around what’s important in the face of challenge and alternate options.

“Strategic planning is looking to the future as best you can, just like a kayak trip requires planning, assessing what could go right and wrong, and aligning your efforts with your strategic plan,” he says.

Holding the Edge begins with participants learning kayaking basics on land the night before the excursion from FCCS’ John Regentin, director of the Gettysburg Leadership Experience and leader of Holding the Edge, and Jay Lux, Vice President of Organizational Development, working with a local outfitter. John is also an experienced expedition leader, having planned and led nearly 20 multi-week sea kayaking journeys.

“We could tell some people were apprehensive because they’d never kayaked before, but that uncertainty and willingness to move forward into the unfamiliar is an impactful strategic learning in and of itself,” says Jay. “It’s also key to understanding the apprehension employees may feel in an uncertain or changing environment.”

Excursion Day started in the morning with a reminder instruction and safety session, after which those who opted not to paddle solo selected teams for the two-person boats and a larger 10-person canoe, which accommodated some who couldn’t paddle but wanted to participate on the water. In the end, the majority of the directors undertook the excursion.

The kayak trip itself began in Duluth Harbor, Minnesota, but after demonstrating their capability the group crossed the shipping channel onto Lake Superior itself. The journey was nearly three hours of hard physical labor, striving to maintain the right

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CEO, AGCOUNTRY

direction despite different abilities and strength and the vagaries of weather and water. John provided instruction and guidance throughout.

"We had the perfect weather, and the team seemed excited to try something new," says John. "They had a blast on the water, and it was clear they felt accomplished afterwards, albeit exhausted."

In the afternoon, the group debriefed about their experiences and learnings, and discussed how these relate to their strategy and planning objectives.

"The benefits of sharing an experience like Holding the Edge or the other FCCS experiential programs we've completed are valuable to any team, but they especially accelerate the bonding between two teams that have come together through a merger," says Marc, who has gone through several mergers. "You build relationships and teamwork and improve communication, all while reinforcing your strategic direction."

FCCS stands ready to create a custom Holding the Edge program for your organization, at a destination you select. For more information about Holding the Edge, contact John Regentin at 717.752.0495 or via [email](#). To discuss strategic planning support, contact Jay Lux at 651.982.4568 or via [email](#).

The [Accelerate Center](#), powered by FCCS, connects organizations and individuals to exceptional learning and leadership experiences, including the [Gettysburg Leadership Experience](#), [The Lewis & Clark Experience](#) and [Holding the Edge](#).