

## **Todd Nolt**

Over the last 17 years, Mountain Alliance has served the youth of Watauga County through experiential adventure and service opportunities, and Todd Nolt has been our enthusiastic director since January, 2003. Todd speaks proudly of the diverse group of students that are a part of Mountain Alliance. He actively works to create a program where everyone can feel accepted and a part of something good. It is a fact that positive school experiences keep kids in school, and through Todd's leadership, Mountain Alliance provides students many opportunities for affirmative adult relationships. The students recognize his belief in them, and on more than one occasion students and families have turned to Todd for mentorship and perspective.

Under Todd's leadership, Mountain Alliance has shown consistent growth; last fall semester, the varied program activities served over 140 WHS students, including 104 who were very active participants. Todd is a dedicated and enthusiastic director whose commitment to area youth has caused his work to extend far beyond the hours one might expect a director to serve. Besides balancing the budget and other 'director duties', he has driven the Mountain Alliance bus, filled with enthusiastic students, on many local service and adventure trips. He has also traveled three times to the Gulf Coast to work on Katrina relief projects, and has taken the bus on trips to Atlanta and Washington DC, to provide service learning opportunities to Mountain Alliance students.

Todd has been an innovative and creative leader while at the helm of Mountain Alliance. Two years ago he initiated The Rolling Academy, an expedition-style summer experience for area youth. The program goal is to grow individuals as leaders, and this advanced leadership academy uses the Mountain Alliance bus as classroom, base camp, and vehicle for service and adventure challenges.

Todd's dream with The Rolling Academy was to give students a chance to gain perspective and understanding of different people throughout the country, and he wanted the program to be open to all Watauga High students. He has been instrumental in helping raise more than \$20,000 for the Rolling Academy, so that financial constraints would not keep a student from participating. The program has had an enthusiastic response from local students - for the 2008 Rolling Academy, which traveled from Portland, Maine to North Carolina, there were almost 30 applications for the ten participant spots.

Todd believes that Mountain Alliance is about leadership development at all levels of the program. To that end, he empowers the college-age staff to envision new programs. They have responded by developing, with his support, a new bike program, a climbing team, a photography club, a girl's leadership program, and alternative spring break trips. These diverse activities have brought even more students into the program, and provided many more opportunities for students to develop positive school experiences. Todd also has reached out to ASU student groups that want to raise funds. With his guidance, ASU students have started holding an annual climb-a-thon that has raised thousands of dollars to support the work of Mountain Alliance.

Todd has worked persistently to grow Mountain Alliance into a program that nurtures young teens while challenging them to look outside of themselves for ways to make a positive difference. His message is consistent: everyone matters, everyone can contribute, and everyone can use a little help along the way.

They say it takes a village to raise a family, and that is never truer than the teen years when youth start taking that important step of separating from their parents. Many Watauga County families have benefitted from Todd being a part of their village, and they would all agree that his creative energy and positive attitude have made a remarkable difference in the lives of their children.

--Terri Reddick