

# The Times Herald

**East Falls resident Jennifer Raymond celebrated by Prince Edward for her years of service to American youth**



Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex, speaks with Gold Award Holder Victor Echaniz and mentor Jennifer Raymond.

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People worldwide have always taken interest in the British royal family. For some, this is driven by a passion for history or for politics, governance and succession. For others the interest comes from appreciation for strong female role models. For a number of people, it is the intrigue of experiencing the kings, queens, princess and princesses of their childhood tales in real-life situations, working together to lead a nation. And for one local resident, the connection started 25 years ago—not on the pages of a storybook, but at the Philadelphia Outward Bound School (POBS).

Having spent her youth in Trinidad, Jennifer Raymond of East Falls eventually made her way to the United States, confident the change and opportunities would help determine her purpose in life and chart her path to fulfilling it. At age 29 Jennifer became an instructor at POBS, a nonprofit educational organization empowering people of all ages, backgrounds and

socioeconomic status through challenging learning experiences that inspire self-discovery in and out of the classroom. Twenty-four years later, she's never looked back.

"When I first came across POBS I wondered, 'What is this thing?' but something drew me toward it," said Jennifer who is now Scholarship and Recruitment Manager for POBS. "I fell in love with POBS and Outward Bound's concept. It has done so much for me as a person. It gave me confidence to attack anything with an open mind and see that my calling was within me. I didn't really know I had the drive until I was exposed to this job and Outward Bound—until I was given a challenge and embraced it and had the choice to quit or keep going. I could see the fruits of my labor by working hard at it."

Without question, what makes Jennifer such a respected and successful Outward Bound instructor, mentor and role model for hundreds of youth is how she approached her journey with POBS. Before starting her job, Jennifer did an Outward Bound expedition and took on all the activities—making a commitment to putting herself in her students' shoes so she could fully relate to their excitement, challenges, hesitations, opportunities and interactions.

"It was awesome because it was hard. I didn't know much about camping—it was wet, cold and I was sleeping outside on the ground. I felt like quitting. But I embraced it and immersed myself in the training and gained tools. It really gave me that 'Whoa!' moment. Everyone experiences their own journey, but at the end of the day, we're here together."

"Seeing where I am today, I'm thankful for the way I approached my career. Now I can really be here to support our students and give them tools to realize they have it within themselves to achieve anything."

As she expanded her career with POBS, Jennifer established benchmarks for what she wanted to help every student realize and integrate into their lives. These include: constant learning about themselves and their abilities; the drive to set goals, seek and take on challenges; humility, compassion and sincere desire to support others; accountability; and continuously nurturing the physical and emotional self. At the heart of Jennifer's personal mission is striking the right balance of providing constructive guidance and the mentorship to "work smart as well as hard" with freedom that allows students to try, falter and learn on their own.

## **A Celebration with Prince Edward**

This fall, Jennifer was honored at a ceremony in Washington, D.C. that recognized twenty-two U.S. participants who achieved the highest levels in The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award—a global, personalized youth development program for 14- to 24-year-olds that complements formal classroom learning and focuses on setting progressive goals that build essential life skills such as resilience, confidence, creativity, leadership, civic competence, and communication. Since 1956 the Award—the world's leading youth achievement program—has been challenging young people to develop new skills, get physically active, cultivate a sense of adventure in the outdoors, volunteer and step outside their comfort zone. In other words, the

program and POBS' mission go hand in hand. Consequently, when Jennifer was asked to volunteer as a Duke of Edinburgh's International Award trainer for participants, she eagerly accepted the opportunity. At the ceremony, she was celebrated for five years of service in helping youth to, in the words of Prince Edward, not only have an enjoyable experience, "but also a worthwhile one. Most importantly, you have discovered that there is more in you than you think."

POBS is the only Outward Bound school in the country that offers training and support for participation in The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award, which gives Jennifer a chance to work with students nationwide. This role is another opportunity for personal empowerment and learning that she can bring back to her students at POBS.

"Being recognized by His Royal Highness was amazing and humbling to be honored for something I love and am passionate about. It's nice to be recognized but it's really about working with the students. That's my recognition. Seeing that they're being successful in their journey. Having that relationship. Giving students the next step up in their lives."

As for what's next, Jennifer will soon mark 25 years with POBS and has no plans of slowing down. However, every day she paves the way for the next generation to continue the mission on her behalf.

"When you are truthful to yourself and passionate about what you do, it inspires. It's not about me. It's about what we bring to the table together—that's how we spread the lessons and share the wealth of Outward Bound."