

## Climb on up, everyone

By Steven Barrie-Anthony, Times Staff Writer

Tree forts used to teach kids how to be exclusive — no girls or little brothers allowed — but a Vermont-based nonprofit is trying to change that.

"Our goal is to build treehouses for everybody regardless of whether you're black, white, gay, straight, disabled, happy or depressed — if you're a human being, you can get in our treehouses," says Bill Allen, president of Forever Young Treehouses, which builds wheelchair-accessible versions.

Allen's fixation began when the then-insurance agent noticed a Peter Nelson book about treehouses on a friend's coffee table. "It would be neat," he remembers thinking, "to hang out in one of these after a game of golf."

A surgeon acquaintance offered to let Allen build on his land in Burlington, Vt., and as Allen climbed and sawed and hammered, he says he got to thinking: "If you're a kid in a wheelchair, you've never had this experience."

So Allen quit his day job, started Forever Young Treehouses, and pledged to change the world, one treehouse at a time. Forever Young has built seven wheelchair-accessible treehouses in four states since 2001 for organizations such as Paul Newman's Connecticut Hole in the Wall Gang camp for kids with cancer, and the Crotched Mountain Rehabilitation Center, a New Hampshire residential treatment program for kids and adults with spinal and brain injuries and disabilities.

8/5/2004

Allen's goal — to build a treehouse in each state by 2008.

The building process is "half the journey," says Donald Shumway, chief executive of Crotched Mountain Foundation. Kids are heavily involved throughout. "We formed a committee, picked out a location and worked with the treehouse guys," he says. People came together during the five months of construction — the young and old, able-bodied and disabled. Kids from the children's hospital labored alongside kids from nearby middle schools, church groups and Boy Scout troops.

After cutting the ribbon in February, "the kids set up rules: No adults allowed," Shumway says.

"You mean," he responded, "as long as adults are up there, we have to remember we're kids?"

Exactly, they said.

Enter phrase:

GO

ProQuest Archiver 