

Agency for Change Podcast: Dr. Jeanette Patterson, CEO, Lincoln Hills Cares

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Jeanette Patterson:

People see you when you see you.

Announcer:

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of changemakers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

Lyn Wineman:

We often hear terms like climate change, carbon emissions, green energy, and reducing your impact. They're used in the news, in movies and television and on the internet to discuss the growing concern over environmental issues. And largely, we have one group of people to thank for our knowledge about effects of climate change, environmental scientists. These are scientists who protect the environment from risks, develop restoration plans, protect people from the environmental hazards, and sometimes even advise policymakers on how to deal with these issues. But here's something shocking about this field. There are very few people of color working in environmental science.

Among the organizations working to correct this disparity is a nonprofit in Denver, Colorado, which provides young people of color with opportunities to connect with nature, learn about conservation practices, and explore careers in the environmental sciences. We'll learn about the history of this impressive organization, the programs we offer, and how they're helping young folks in the Denver community.

Hey, everyone. This is Lyn Wineman, president and chief strategist at KidGlov, and welcome to another episode of the Agency for Change podcast, where I'm speaking with Dr. Jeanette Patterson. Dr. Patterson is the CEO of Lincoln Hills Cares, which is developing the next generation of young leaders through outdoor education and recreation, cultural history, exploration and workforce advancement. Jeanette, I am eager to talk with you today and learn more about the great impact you are making on the world.

Jeanette Patterson:

Thank you, Lyn, for giving me this opportunity to talk about the historic Lincoln Hills and Lincoln Hills Cares, the important work that we're doing here in the Denver metro area and in the front range. We're just giving kids opportunity and access to get up to the mountains and to explore and to be a part of our outdoor education program. And so, we want to say thank you.

Lyn Wineman:

Jeanette, thank you. I know that you are really busy with this endeavor, but I'd love to just start by talking a little bit about Lincoln Hills Cares. What do you do and who do you help?

Jeanette Patterson:

Lincoln Hills Cares develops the next generation of young leaders through outdoor education, recreation, cultural history, exploration, and workforce advancement. Our programs empower youth who may not otherwise have the opportunity to have these experiences, and it's due to their economic, social, or family circumstances. We promote outdoor equity for students who come from marginalized and underserved communities, students who come from impoverished communities and have no opportunities to have outdoor experiences. We are staff who come from the field of education, from the field of outdoor education, from the field of business. We are in the business of people because we love kids, and that's why we are working at Lincoln Hills, and that's who we're here to serve. We want to make sure that we have a promising future.

Lyn Wineman:

I love it, Jeanette. You mentioned you have a lot of educators on staff, and I know you transitioned from a 29-year career as a K through 12 public school teacher, a principal. What lessons were you able to take with you in your current role as the CEO of Lincoln Hills Cares?

Jeanette Patterson:

Well, I worked in middle school. And so-

Lyn Wineman:

Oh, okay. Wow! Bless you for working in middle school.

Jeanette Patterson:

Most of my career, I worked in middle school, but also, I had a strong education administrative background. I was a principal, as you mentioned, as well as a central office administrator. And I was able to navigate the education system by utilizing my connections for schools and to district leaders. And here's the thing, I know and understand programs, especially school programs and how our program can support schools, especially during this time of coming back from the pandemic. We hear of educators saying that kids are out of control, and we can't really get them back focused. And so, our activities are there to provide support for teachers and for students with engagement and keeping kids interested in the subject matter. Our programs bring substance to the curriculum. It's just not so dry. We add the extra so that kids can love the work that we do, and teachers love the work that we are providing.

We provide professional learning for teachers. Our teachers are able to go up to the mountains and experience what their kids are going to experience. And that's what I think I brought to Lincoln Hills. We are a teaching and learning agency. I think a lot of organizations out there are teaching and learning agencies because they support teaching and learning because it's very important that we have a promising future, like I've said before. And so just bringing that fun, engaging activities to the classroom so that kids can connect and get back focused on learning. So that's what I think I've brought

Lyn Wineman:

Jeanette, I've got to imagine that that knowledge and experience that you have really helps you make this meaningful. I love that you're focused on the teachers and the kids, because you're right, coming out of the pandemic, there just has been so much disruption and change that both of those groups just really need a little something extra that you're doing. I'm curious, can you give me a little history lesson on the Lincoln Hills area? I know it has a really interesting past and history.

Jeanette Patterson:

Yeah. Lincoln Hills was founded in 1922 by two gentlemen who want it to serve a resort for Black Americans because it was during that time, and even in the '20s, '30s, '40s, it was during that time that the Ku Klux Klan was at its highest point in Denver metro area in Colorado. There was a fight against segregation. And so, it is a place where Black people could go and vacation and have time off and just be at a place where they could be free. And Lincoln Hills provided that in the 1920s, it was the only Black resort in the west of the mountains. And so, there were other people that visited Lincoln Hills at that time, people from Kansas, Illinois, Wyoming, all of those African American people would come here to Colorado, Coal Creek Canyon to just rejuvenate.

It was a place where... There were some families who wanted to send their kids off to the YMCA camps where they could ride horses. They weren't allowed to do that. And so, we created Lincoln Hills in 1927, the Nizhoni Camp, Nizhoni meaning beautiful, a Native American word, and it gave kids an opportunity to ride horses and to be on trails. And so, Nizhoni was rejuvenated in 2013, where it really is now a camp where we still have horses, but it provides supports for young ladies who need to just be out in the air, learn about horses and trails, and to explore out on the properties at Lincoln Hills. Lincoln Hills, there's a lodge up at Lincoln Hills, which was founded in 1922 called Winks Lodge, and Winks Lodge-

Lyn Wineman:

Jeanette, what was that again? Winks Lodge?

Jeanette Patterson:

Winks Lodge.

Lyn Wineman:

Winks Lodge. Okay.

Jeanette Patterson:

It was recognized for a symbol of hope for people and determination for people. And what happened at Winks Lodge is that there were some prominent folks that would come up to Winks. It would be like your Count Basies, and Duke Ellingtons and Lena Horne and Billy Eckstine, they would visit Winks after spending some time down in the Five Points area performing. And so, they were there to just rest and relax.

And Winks, they would also have readings at Winks, and it would be similar to the Renaissance, the Harlem Renaissance. So, you would have your national treasures as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, those folks would be there as well to just make people feel like they were somebody, to feel like they had some pride and hope for who they were.

Lincoln Hills was acquired in 2000s by Robert F. Smith and Matthew Burkett because they wanted to revitalize Lincoln Hills. Lincoln Hills, during that time, is equivalent to the Idlewild in Michigan, where African Americans could go and Americans Beach in Florida, Martha's Vineyard, Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts. That's what Lincoln Hills meant to African Americans, and that's what Lincoln Hills is equivalent to. So that's some of the history of Lincoln Hills. It was just a place for African Americans to go and thrive and to be themselves.

Lyn Wineman:

Jeanette, I bet if walls could talk, I'd love to hear that conversation from Winks Lodge, but it seems to me like the founders of Lincoln Hills and the current owners of Lincoln Hills have really been very future thinking, obviously very focused on access and equity. Could you talk to me a bit more about increasing equity in accessing those outdoor resources and opportunities, and explain for our listeners what that means?

Jeanette Patterson:

Increasing access in equity and increasing access and opportunity is about access for all. Giving kids opportunities to experience the outdoors through our nonprofit organization and through schools and districts that allow for interactive lessons to be implemented in classroom instruction, making sure that everyone gets everything. What I mean by that is sometimes with a program like ours, you may have advanced students or GT students get this opportunity and everybody else is left to the side.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah.

Jeanette Patterson:

With what we are doing is that we're giving opportunity for all kids to experience. So, in our environmental science program that we offer at a local high school in the Denver metro area, all freshmen are getting this program because it is a 9-12 program. All freshmen are getting this program at another high school that we serve. It is just not only those few, and that's offering access and opportunity, allowing kids to have field trips, all kids to experience outdoors, all kids to making a program for all, all kids exposed to outdoor recreation, all kids get the guest speakers. That's what equity and access looks like for Lincoln Hills and what we do. And then training all teachers to have the experiences that they need so that they can direct the classroom.

Lyn Wineman:

Jeanette, hearing about your program just makes me smile. There are so many good things that you're doing, and when I think about nature and being out in nature, there's just something about it that just clears your head and changes the way you think, puts a smile on your face, unless of course it's snowing or an ice storm, which can happen. But I'm sure you don't bring the kids up in the deep of winter. So can you talk to me-

Jeanette Patterson:

No, we don't.

Lyn Wineman:

Good plan. Good plan. Can you talk to me about some of the programs that Lincoln Hills Cares offers and how were these different programs chosen and what do you want people to take away from them?

Jeanette Patterson:

Here's what we do offer, and I can share this with you. We have an outdoor education program that provides an abundant, diversified opportunities for our youth and families to engage in outdoor education and environmental education programming. We partner with youth serving organizations to teach and encourage discussions about their cultural history and their natural sciences and about the

environment as well. And outdoor recreation through dynamic and culturally responsive curriculum with elements that meet the state standards. That's our outdoor program. It's a K-12 program. You can go in kindergarten to the age of 18, five to 18 and do some learning how to fly fish and doing some hiking and archery and some of those activities that we provide. We also provide the Nizhoni Equestrian Program. It's the horse program that we talked about.

Lyn Wineman:

Oh yeah.

Jeanette Patterson:

It exists because it started in 1927 with families not being able to participate in an activity like that. So, it's still there. We have the Pathways Program. It prepares youth for higher education and career opportunities through an employment-based youth development model, which we call Teamworks. And so, we give young people an opportunity to be out and to service, to engage in diverse groups of kids, to go out and to work in the community and work in water conservation management, environmental science, types of activities, camping, forestry work, science soil. Some of those things are happening within our program because we want to make sure that we keep kids in STEM related or in environmental science programming to move into those careers. And so, we give them an opportunity through employing them, internships, mentorships, those types.

Our last program is a new program, and it's called the Environmental, Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics Program, which is called E-STEM. It's a pathway where we captivate enrichment opportunities that maximize student learning. And the instructional framework for the E-STEM program is trout in the classroom. We partner with Denver Trout Unlimited. We have the curriculum that's aligned with the Colorado Academic Standards. We use the ninth-grade curriculum. So, you talk about the life cycle of the trout. Students are able to raise the trout from eggs to fry. The eggs are retrieved from Carbondale River in Carbondale, Colorado. The tanks that we provide are treated as independent hatcheries from August until May. And so, kids are able to see the lifecycle of a fish throughout the year and take care of these fish. And then the culminating event is that the students released the fish into Lake Platte up at Lincoln Hills in May.

They're able to name the fish, they're able to learn the scientific pieces of the process of the fish. They're able to do a history hike. They're able to hug trees and learn about-

Lyn Wineman:

Nothing like a good tree hugging, Jeanette.

Jeanette Patterson:

I know. That's right. They're able to do a lot of activities with our programs, field trips, guest speakers, all of that. So that's our programming at Lincoln Hills.

Lyn Wineman:

That's a lot. That's a wide list and I'm impressed also. I mean, I would expect nothing less of you as I've gotten to know you, but it's a very well thought out list of programs too. It's not just a field trip. It is really taking everything and moving it forward. And that kind of leads me to my next question because I want to make sure to address something you and I have talked about before today. You have mentioned

that sometimes people think Lincoln Hills Cares is just an outdoor education program. How would you address that misconception?

Jeanette Patterson:

Well, I believe the misconception is that we hear a lot of times even in a Black community or Hispanic community, and also in a white community, is that people of color don't go in the mountains, and they don't camp. And the skiing industry and the camping industry really is geared towards, or caters to, white people more than people of color. And people of color do camp and go to the mountains.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah.

Jeanette Patterson:

That's not true. There are so many explorers out there who we failed to mention, the Matthew Hensons, which is a descendant of mine, belonging to the Henson descendants, James Beckwourth, who had a hiking club, Juan Garrido and Pedro Niño. These are all people that were explorers and that were outside, doing this outside work. And people of color do love the mountains, and there are lots of outside mountain clubs like the Afro Hiking Club. It's nationwide, the Colorado Backpackers.

Lyn Wineman:

I love that name.

Jeanette Patterson:

You have your Slippers-N-Sliders, African American ski groups. And so, our organization thrives on giving kids an opportunity to venture outside of the city and expose kids to new experiences and new adventures. We are allowing kids an opportunity to dream of something they have never dreamt of before because they've never experienced it. And so, we want to make sure that we give kids those opportunities to be outside. So that misconception is wrong. Kids of all colors love to be outside and to experience the outdoor nature. It is not just an outdoor education program that we provide. It is exposing kids to different careers and how to be stewards in the environment and how to conserve water and having an understanding of the importance of water. That's what we do. Environmental sustainability and stewardship. So that's what's important. That's what drives what we are and what we do.

Lyn Wineman:

That's fantastic, Jeanette. Actually, that leads right into my next question too, because your website talks about environmental stewardship, and it discusses a survey of environmental employers who stated they were unable to find quality minority workers to fill the roles at their companies. So, I'm curious, what does access to environmental careers look like for people of color, and how does Lincoln Hills Cares help to address that?

Jeanette Patterson:

I'm going to go back a little bit, Lyn, because I think we have to have some facts and have some understanding on why people of color are not going into these fields. There's a professor out of the University of Michigan, her name is Dr. Dorceta Taylor, and she calls it a complete farce and it's not true

on why people of color are not interested in the outdoors, and they really are. There are stereotypes that Black people aren't as interested in environmental issues as white people persist in public imagination. And that's what she talks about. It's an irony despite being perceived as least environmentally concerned, all minority groups surveyed... So, she did a survey on African Americans and white people, and it's shown in that survey is that you have more people of color interested. I'm talking Black, Latino or Latinx, Asian, and Native American people who are more concerned about environment than white people.

Lyn Wineman:

Wow.

Jeanette Patterson:

And this is what came out in this survey. The biggest barrier for why kids of color are not going into these programs is because college is expensive.

Lyn Wineman:

Yes.

Jeanette Patterson:

And graduate school is expensive.

Lyn Wineman:

Yes.

Jeanette Patterson:

And there are no environmental fellowships offered to some of these kids. I mean, even Robert Smith knows that and understands that. That's why he has some internship academies and things like that going on. Here's how we do it. The way access looks like at Lincoln Hills is exposing students interested in this work early on. We start at kindergarten. We're not starting in high school. We are starting our program at kindergarten when you're five years old. There are a lot of kids who love to go outside and love the idea of being outside and doing experiments, interacting and engaging activities, live trout in the classroom, getting in the water, getting their hands dirty. And not only taking them outside, we expose kids to professionals in the careers.

So, you're going to see an environmental scientist in our programs. We expose kids to forestry and water quality management, and so many of those fields that kids aren't able to experience just in public schools. We want to make sure that they're in those careers and internships and working with Teamworks and doing our Pathways Programs. We partner with Red Rocks Community College so that we can start implementing environmental science in public schools and the schools that we're working with so that the teachers are actually teaching about environmental science before kids are out of high school. We are partnering with Red Rocks Community College in terms of working with their outdoor education program. They have a program there. They do a water quality management certificate there. We work with Metropolitan State College in downtown Denver, and I'm sure there's others that have an environmental science program where they study science, soil and water quality management.

We partner with a number of organizations that support what we're trying to do to give kids access and opportunity. And so, I know that we've got a lot of problems in America with what we're talking about

with giving kids access and opportunity to even feel comfortable being the only African American or a Latina in an organization where you are isolated and needing to, wanting to just leave the whole business. And that's what Dr. Dorceta Taylor talks about. But really and truly, we need people like her in this business to make sure that other kids want to follow in her footsteps.

I was reading an article about a young lady who she was going up to the registration table, and she was the keynote speaker and the person that was taking her information questioned her and questioned her and wouldn't allow her in, and she's the keynote, because she was African American. And that's what people are pushing against. That's happening to our kids.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah. And at some point, you just stop pushing.

Jeanette Patterson:

Yeah, you just stop. And so, I think that's a problem. But as long as we provide access and opportunity, we're going to get some kids in there.

Lyn Wineman:

Thank you, Jeanette. Thank you for those facts. And once again, thank you for your foresight and the work that you're doing.

Jeanette Patterson:

Sure.

Lyn Wineman:

So much good coming out of that. One of my favorite things that you said is how you're starting in kindergarten, because I'm sure as a teacher, you've seen sometimes kids dream bigger when they're younger. And as they get older because they've been pushing against barriers, some of those dreams start to go away. So, creating that interest early on. Also, I love your perspective as an educator. We kind of touched on this earlier, but what are your thoughts on how the pandemic impacted learning for students and how will that trickle down to environmental science or will it?

Jeanette Patterson:

Oh my goodness. The pandemic was devastating for schools and student learning. I remember when, and I was still working, we had teachers, you had novice teachers and you had teachers that were strong in technology and there were that didn't know too much. And so, we had to do a lot of teacher training. But it was devastating when we talk about student learning, because we did see the test scores, I know that they were out there, that reading suffered some, but math suffered a lot. And there was no increase in student learning whatsoever. And by right, you weren't consistent with instruction. And kids were not as focused because they were at home and all those things were going on.

But when you have this type of devastating news, the impact is great because what happens is there are subject areas that are going to be put on the back burner because you got to get kids to read and to do math and to write, and that's going to be a problem. Because of the loss of the basics, it means that you are going to maybe have some science and social studies just get their basics, but not really understanding that science and social studies and all those subject areas can enhance reading, writing and math.

Lyn Wineman:

Absolutely. Because they increase your understanding of the world around you.

Jeanette Patterson:

Absolutely. What I think what will happen is and our hope is that we align trout in the classroom with the Colorado Academic Standards and also our outdoor education program. That just enhances learning. And it's not just another thing. And when teachers are in a bind like this, trying to catch kids up, some teachers see it as another thing. But if it's aligned with your standards, it's not another thing. It just adds and enhances what your kids are going to be learning. And it helps. And so, what I think what we'll see is we'll see academic after school clubs, like our outdoor education program become academic clubs versus fun clubs after school.

Lyn Wineman:

Ah, yeah.

Jeanette Patterson:

And what we will also see is instead of seeing just a basic summer school, a summer school academic club, and instead of learning how to venture into careers. And so hopefully we can overcome that. Leaders will see that our activities provide more, that substance to curriculum will get kids reinvigorated on learning. We can reinforce reading and writing and math through interdisciplinary lessons. Trout in the classroom is interdisciplinary. You can do water rights and social studies. You can do art, and you can do some drawings in art. There's lots of things that we can do to support public education instead of losing it all to the pandemic.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah, that's good. I do believe in the ability of kids to catch up with the right efforts. Jeanette, all of these great things we're talking about, I'm curious what's next for Lincoln Hills Cares. Any big goals or initiatives that you're working towards that you'd like to share with us?

Jeanette Patterson:

Here's what we're going to do, I think we're going to continue to expand our existing program. We have lots of programs out there that we can add to. And that means that we're going to be partnering with more schools in the metro area of Denver and maybe outside of Denver, who knows? And to have our outdoor education program become more of, with schools in the metro area and outside of Denver, as afterschool programs throughout the school year, not just in the summer, and not only just at Lincoln Hills. And then we're going to be partnering with local businesses and libraries and other nonprofits for outdoor ed.

With trout in the classroom, we want to expand into more ninth-grade classes, into school districts, and into high schools, and into the feeder schools. So that means elementary and middle schools and build a program that trajectories up. The Pathways Programs, starting to partner more with high schools because we're just working really with community organizations, but to get into high schools, expand our environmental science classes with Red Rocks Community College, partnering with Denver Public Schools, and possibly doing a summer STEM camp. That's in the works, but not sure if it's going to happen. Nothing has been planned. And then just starting to focus on sustainability and environmental stewardship. With climate change, all of that happening, how can we reuse some of the things in our

households that people don't really understand because they don't know? So that's what we're going to be doing in the future with Lincoln Hills.

Lyn Wineman:

Well, Jeanette, I think there are going to be a lot of lucky kids and a lot of lucky teachers to participate in those programs. You have said so many inspiring things during this conversation that I'm really excited to ask you the next question because everyone who listens to the podcast knows this is my favorite question. Can you give us an original Jeanette Patterson quote to inspire our listeners?

Jeanette Patterson:

Absolutely. Here's one. People see you when you see you.

Lyn Wineman:

Wow.

Jeanette Patterson:

And what that means is that when you see yourself as someone who has purpose and who has passion, and you see yourself as knowing who you are, then people will see you. But as long as you don't have purpose and passion, then no one will see you.

Lyn Wineman:

Jeanette, that's beautiful. I don't know if people make bumper stickers anymore, but that should be a bumper sticker. For people who have been listening and they're really excited about the work that you're doing with Lincoln Hills Cares, maybe they want to make a donation or volunteer, or they're a school that wants to look into the program. How can they find out more about you?

Jeanette Patterson:

We have a website, www.lincolnhillscares.org. We're also on Facebook under Lincoln Hills Cares, and we also have a LinkedIn account under Lincoln Hills Cares.

Lyn Wineman:

Fantastic. You've made that easy for us by leaving it as your name. Lincoln Hills Cares on Facebook, LinkedIn, and on the internet. Jeanette, as we wrap up our time together today, what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the work that you are doing?

Jeanette Patterson:

Here's the one thing I want to remember. I found this quote by Richard Rogers, and he says, "The only way forward if we are going to improve the quality of the environment is to get everybody involved." With the work we are doing, we want everyone to have a shot at changing the world, regardless of the color of their skin or their class. All kids deserve a shot at doing this work.

Lyn Wineman:

Oh, that's beautiful, Jeanette. And by all kids, that means all kids.

Jeanette Patterson:

That means all.

Lyn Wineman:

That's fantastic. Jeanette, I fully believe the world needs more people like you, more organizations doing great work in equity and access and education like Lincoln Hills Cares. Thank you so much for taking time to talk with me today.

Jeanette Patterson:

Thank you, Lyn. It was wonderful.

Announcer:

We hope you enjoyed today's Agency for Change podcast. To hear all our interviews with those who are making a positive change in our communities, or to nominate a changemaker you'd love to hear from, visit KidGlov.com at K-I-D-G-L-O-V.com to get in touch. As always, if you like what you've heard today, be sure to rate, review, subscribe, and share. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you next time.