



An emergency room nurse, a fifth grade teacher, 15,000 screws, 5,000 t-nuts, 145 sheets of plywood, 2,100 square feet of eight inch padding, and thousands of pounds of steel is turning a 6,800 square foot warehouse on Birmingham, AL's Southside built in 1911 into modern rock climbing gym with 3,900 square feet of climbing surface.

Joe Ortega (the ER nurse) and Adam Henry (the teacher) have been creating the 16-foot-tall bouldering walls out of steel beams and plywood since January. The new rock climbing gym, called [First Avenue Rocks](#), is due to open in the second week of June at 2417 First Ave. South.

Both men have been climbing for decades - Ortega moved here from California a few years back; Henry has been heralded as developing [Horse Pens 40](#) into a world class bouldering destination. The Birmingham area has never had a facility dedicated to bouldering. The closest we came was about a decade or more ago with a co-op known as Woodville.

The Southeast has a huge bouldering community, Ortega said. "The South approaches bouldering in a different way than the rest of the country. They are more psyched about it." When he moved here he was amazed that there were no climbing or boulder gyms.

"There just should be a gym. If one can survive in Tampa", Ortega said. "Why can't one survive here?"

This past weekend the two opened up the gym for friends and members to help attach climbing holds and do a little climbing. After the floor padding is installed along with a few other items like the instillation of the eight inches of padding below the boulders, the doors will open to the public. The gym will not only have bouldering, a wall for top roping, a training area, a variety of rock climbing related instruction, yoga and pilates classes but also a gear shop, snack bar, lounge and free WiFi.

For more information about membership go to [the First Ave. Rocks website](#). You may also want to click on the image to see more photos from the facility.

Photo: Bob Farley/[f8Photo](#)