ANCHORAGE  
Solstice Tour of Trees  
a new winter tradition

STATEWIDE  
UAA coach thanks  
supportive community

GIRDWOOD  
New energy, ideas  
could lead to new trails
NSAA’s impact, and story, continues to grow

Message from the NSAA President / Joey Caterinichio

Greetings NSAA Members and Anchorage community. It is my pleasure to introduce myself as the new NSAA President. I follow in the footsteps of many amazing past presidents and board members. Our board members along with all of our volunteers make this organization what it is today. Thank you especially to Jeff Scott who led this board for the past years. Jeff’s dedication, enthusiasm, passion, ideas and thoughtfulness were innovative and brought NSAA many great opportunities and programs. I look forward to building on Jeff’s innovation.

Our community is one of the best in the nation that embodies Nordic skiing. Emphasizing this was the movement to save University of Alaska skiing. Every piece of our puzzle is important for this community. The campaign to save UA skiing was a microcosm of what this great community can do by working together.

NSAA is currently managing snowmaking at Kincaid Park and grooming the various trails around Anchorage, including Hillside, Eagle River and Russian Jack. Quality trails in all areas of our city are some of the most important parts of our mission. Trails are directly funded by the community and individual donations and could not operate without the community. Trail support trends past the past five years have been in a decline. Inclement weather yielded less participation in NSAA programs and NSAA events have generated less revenue. In order to help in this area, funds must continue to be raised through personal donations and corporate donations. To enhance this effort, NSAA began working with fundraising consultants.

Thank you to the Alaska Community Foundation's Strengthening Organization Grant, a grant that funded professional experts to work with the NSAA staff and board members. New skills and methods were learned to reach new parts of the community and clearly tell the NSAA story. Areas such as utilizing public service announcements, connecting with local businesses that want to highlight the works of local nonprofits, and learning new ways of communication were all outcomes.

NSAA has approached many businesses in Anchorage that have never supported NSAA before; some are now donors, but all now have a better idea of the impact NSAA has on this community. Direct mailers have also been sent to many Anchorage residents, including our holiday appeal letter sent in late November. If you have heard NSAA’s voice on the radio in the last few months, or your business or employer received a request for support, or you have received a letter sharing a local skier’s story, you have witnessed some of our new tools.

Please feel free to give feedback, enjoy the snow on trails and look to volunteer at many upcoming events.

SKI TRAIN — Curry with kids!

Alaska Superheroes, Ski Hoppers, Prairie Dogg Pound, Unicorns, Curry with Kids and Cheesy Puffs ... Ski Train has a unique culture each year. With these group names, all signs indicate the 2017 trip — scheduled for Saturday, March 11 — will exceed all expectations.

More than 200 remain available for this season's Ski Train, with the vacancy mostly in the family cars. Curry with kids would create a great family memory and NSAA is helping to make it easy and fun! New opportunities for our young adventurers will be provided, including door prizes, free hot dogs and goodie bags. In addition to the wondering polka band, free hot dogs and goodie bags. Opportunities for our young adventurists will make it easy and fun! New opportu

New NSAA Trails Report keeps skiers informed

In case you haven’t noticed, NSAA has a rebranded its website — www.anchoragenordicski.com. On the pages you will find information about Breaking News and Upcoming Events with opportunities to Participate, Support and Volunteer. You will also find the new Trails Report. The page is for one-stop-shopping — www.anchoragenordicski.com/trails. The site has trail maps for the Anchorage area and more points of interest beyond. You’ll find information about how NSAA grooms, in six easy steps, and you can learn everything you ever wanted to know about making snow. There’s even a quick link to make a donation, should you feel the urge to further support the sustenance of your awesome trails. If NSAA’s Operations staff has anything to say, there’s a narrative section for news and information. Learn more about the trails, their conditions and the work of NSAA’s Operations team at www.anchoragenordicski.com/trails.

Tour of Anchorage — Celebrating 100 years of Nordic skiing in Anchorage

2017 marks 100 years of cross-country ski racing in Anchorage! Celebrate the landmark by setting a mark of your own at the Tour of Anchorage on Sunday, March 5. Sign-up by Febru

See AROUND THE BOWL. Page 3
Chugach State Park Headquarters parking Lake (no skins required). Depart from the there are touring options to beautiful Summit Mountain, you’ll need skins for your skis. You should also have avalanche shovel, and probe) for the telemark/AT portion for your skis. You should also have avalanche gear (beacon, shovel and probe). The ridge is practically flat with some easy ups and downs. This is a great tour for those who want an introduction into telemark or AT skiing. Bring clothing for wind, cold and snow. Meet at 9 a.m. at the Chugach State Park Headquarters parking lot (by the train south of Potter Marsh). Tour leader — Kellen Lang, Gilgiling, jenemirkill@gmail.com.

January 28 — Nancy Lakes Parkway Trails, Mat-Su Valley
Six miles of rolling terrain through beautiful forestsed hills and open frozen swamps on the Parkway, Jena Pond and Indian Lake Loops. There are a couple of steep hills that can easily be negotiated, if needed. Meet at Carrs Muldoon bakery located at Muldoon and Northern Lights at 9 a.m. and then carpool to the winter trailhead at Mile 2.2 of the Nancy Lake Parkway. It can be very cold here, just a few miles north of Anchorage, so dress appropriately, Tour leader — Patti Phillips, 240-3742.

February 4 — Manitoba Mountain AT/Tele-ski and Touring options, Kenai Mountains
Join us for a fun day telemarking, AT skiing or touring. This terrain is for beginning to intermediate skiers. If climbing Manitoba Mountain, you’ll need skins for your skis. You should also have avalanche gear (beacon, shovel, and probe) for the telemark/AT portion of skiing. If you’d like to kick and glide instead, there are touring options to beautiful Summit Lake (no skins required). Depart from the Chugach State Park Headquarters parking lot (by the train south of Potter Marsh). Bring clothing for wind, cold and snow. Tour leader — Ken DePalma, 440-1562.

February 18-20 — Sheep Mountain Lodge
Enjoy two overnights at Sheep Mountain Lodge in group cabins. Ski on 24 kilometers of groomed non-motorized trails or beyond on miles of multi-use trails at Sheep Mountain on Saturday and Sunday. On Monday, ski out to Matanuska Glacier along Caribou Creek. A $100 deposit to hold a spot is required by January 15. Tour leaders — Patti Phillips, 240-3742, and Ken DePalma, 440-1562.

February 18-25 — Denali National Park, Savage River to Kantishna. This undefeated ski tour through Denali Park is supported by dog teams. Ski 7 to 17 miles per day and stay in historic Denali Park cabins while dog teams haul your gear. Start at Mountain Vista near the Park Headquarters and end at Kantishna, where you will fly out to Healy. Great wholesome food, warm cabins, awesome guides! Cost about $1,300 plus air charter out of Kantishna for about $150. Deposit of $500 required by January 1. Contact Bob Sutherland at fultonglendas@gmail.com or Patti Phillips at philippss@chugach.net.

February 25-March 4 — Denali National Park, McKinogall and Oster Passes. Fly into Kantishna, overnight at a park cabin above Wonder Lake, then ski over McKinley Bar and Turtle Hill to our base camp with woodstove heated Arctic Oven tents on Cache Creek. Ski north toward Denali the entire tour to base camp. From base camp, we’ll ski to McConagall Pass for grand views of Denali and the Muldrow and Traenka glaciers, following the footsteps of the historic routes of the first climbs of Denali. The following day we’ll ski up Oaster Pass for even more scenery and stunning views of Mount Brooks and surrounding mountains. Dog sleds will haul all the gear. Cost about $1,800 plus air charter in and out of Kantishna for about $500. Contact Bob Sutherland at fultonglendas@gmail.com or Patti Phillips at philippss@chugach.net.

March 3-5 — Denali View Chalet
Enjoy the weekend at a rustic Alaskan lodge on Kantishna Lake south of Mt. McKinley. Ski eight miles into the lodge with just a daypack. Your food and gear will be brought in by the chalet owner on snow machine. Enjoy some of Denali, fantastic company, wonderful group cuisine, sauna and more skiing on various trails in the area. Because the weather is often variable, bring clothing for wind, cold and snow. Space is limited. A $100 deposit to hold a spot is required by February 15. Tour leader — Karine Leeper, 440-0049.

NSAA calendar of events

January
TBA — First ASD Middle School Practice Starts
Saturday, January 7 — Last day Junior Nordic Session #1
Sunday, January 8 — AMI Anchorage Cup — Hickok Drumheller
Sunday, January 8 — Biathlon Race #4
Monday-Tuesday, January 9-10 — Junior Nordic equipment pickup
Saturday, January 14 — Junior Nordic Tour — Center Ridge AT/Teleski, Turnagain Pass
Saturday, January 14 — ASD High School West Relay, Chugach
Saturday-Sunday, January 14-15 — ABA Race
January 21 — Besh Cup #3 — Homer
Sunday, January 22 — Besh Cup #4 — Homer
Sunday, January 22 — Biathlon Race #5
Thursday, January 26 — ASD Middle School Race, Kincaid Park
Saturday, January 28 — ASD High School Skiathlon, Kincaid Park
Saturday, January 28 — NSAA Backcountry Tour — Nancy Lakes Parkway Trails, Mat-Su Valley
Sunday, January 29 — AMI Anchorage Cup – Part’s Classic
Tuesday, January 31 — ASD Middle School Race, Kincaid Park

February
Thursday, February 2 — ASD Middle School Race, Kincaid Park
Saturday, February 4 — NSAA Backcountry Tour — Manitoba Mountain AT/Teleski, Kenai Mountains
Saturday, February 4 — Besh Cup #5, Fairbanks
Sunday, February 5 — Besh Cup #6, Fairbanks
Sunday, February 5 — Alaska Ski For Women, Kincaid Park
Wednesday, February 8 — ASD Middle School Race, Kincaid Park
Saturday, February 11 — ASD High School Classic Relay
Sunday, February 12 — Biathlon Race #6
Wednesday, February 15 — ASD Middle School Race, Kincaid Park
Friday-Saturday, February 17-18 — ASD High School, Region IV Championships, Kincaid Park

Tour of Anchorage
March 5, 2017

www.tourofanchorage.com
Alaska Ski for Women continues its mission, with or without snow

The 21st annual event puts the fun in powerful fundraising

BY JENNY DI GRAPPA
ALASKA SKI FOR WOMEN DIRECTOR

Over the past several years, the weather on Super Bowl Sunday has not been ideal for the Alaska Ski for Women event. Attendee numbers have dropped, and along with it less grant funds have been dispersed to organizations whose focus is on ending the cycle of violence against women and their families, and who help women in crisis find positive solutions to a healthier life. While we are hoping for better weather and lots more snow in 2017, we are fortunate to have a snowmaking system at Kincaid Park that was designed and manufactured by TechnoAlpin in Bolzano, Italy. Conditions permitting, there will be snow for the event on Sunday, February 5, even if you might not see your favorite white stuff outside your front door that morning.

There are four options to register for the 2017 Alaska Ski for Women event —

1) Sign up online now through February 1 at www.anchoragenordicski.com/events/alaska-ski-for-women/

2) Print and mail in your paper registration. Form can be found on the online registration page.

3) Late registration takes place at nib-pack up on February 3 at REI from noon—7 — 30 p.m.

4) Race day late registration from 9-11 a.m.

Racers who sign up on race day can only participate in the untimed party wave event.

There is a minimum suggested donation of $35 to participate, however we encourage participants to give generously, as 100 percent of the proceeds from the event are granted to nonprofit organizations that are working to help stop domestic violence. Special this year, the first 115 registrants who donate $50 or more will receive a race entry plus an awesome Ski patch in Alaska’s Triple Patch program. The program provides a classy, distinctive patch awarded to women and girls who complete three of the four designated sporting events in one calendar year — Ski for Women, Bike for Women, Run for Women and the Gold Nugget Triathlon. Ski for Women is the only event in the series where you can participate in an untimed event (the party wave) and still count towards your triple patch.

For those that do not own kick wax or would prefer some help, bring your skis to the wax tent from 9-11 — 30 a.m. on race day where high school ski team members will apply it for you to give you the extra kick you need to win your race.

The Ski for Women event is the first of a series of four events for women to earn their patch in Alaska’s Triple Patch program. The program provides a classy, distinctive patch awarded to women and girls who complete three of the four designated sporting events in one calendar year — Ski for Women, Bike for Women, Run for Women and the Gold Nugget Triathlon. Ski for Women is the only event in the series where you can participate in an untimed event (the party wave) and still count towards your triple patch.

Parking — We always suggest that participants carpool when possible. There is limited parking at the chalet and the outer lots and they fill up early. It is best to park at Kincaid Elementary. Premier Tours will provide coach buses that will whisk you and your skis from the school to the chalet. Buses start running at 9 a.m. and continue until 1 — 30 p.m.

Finally, we could not put on such a fabulous event without the help of our sponsors. We would like to thank our current 2017 sponsors — Anchorage Women’s Clinic, Great Harvest Bread Company and Premier Alaska Tours, who are our $2,500 Silver Sponsors. We would also like to thank our $1,000 Bronze Sponsors, Moose’s Tooth and Bear Tooth.

Learn more or sign up today at www.anchoragenordicski.com/events/alaska-ski-for-women/
NSAA Jumping program begins season with (snow) guns blazing

BY KAREN COMPTON

Just when they thought it couldn’t get any worse, it did. The 2016 Alaska Ski Jumping/Nordic Combined Junior Nationals team hadn’t jumped their K40 or K65 at all last winter. There just wasn’t enough snow to open the hills. So they showed up in Salisbury, Connecticut, in February hoping to get a few days of training in before the national championships. Suddenly it was 60 degrees and raining. That hill melted and training was cancelled. In the end, the Alaska team took three jumps — one practice and two competition — all season.

What a difference a year makes! The ability to jump all summer means these kids have already made hundreds of jumps by the end of September. And this winter, despite meager snowfall, the Karl Eid jumps are open thanks entirely to a new snow gun and the help and generosity of many individuals. It really does take a village.

First, the Flying Eagles Jumping Club in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, agreed to sell us their old snow gun for a great price. Then Hilltop Ski Area agreed to let us tap into their water system if we paid for upgrades. Then we raised money to upgrade our electric to power the snow gun. The final problem — how do we get this 1,000-pound snow gun 3,000 miles to Alaska? TOTE agreed to donate maritime shipping from Tacoma to Anchorage but it would cost $3,000 to truck it on a flatbed to Tacoma.

In the end, a jumping dad from Eau Claire pulled the snow gun to Grand Rapids, Minnesota, on his way to Coleraine for ski jumping. There it waited two months for an empty spot on a Minn-Alaska Transport truck headed over the Alcan to Palmer. By the time it arrived, the trucking company lost our contact information! As it happens, the snow cat operator for Hilltop was driving by the trucking yard and saw the snow gun sitting there. He texted me a photo — “Is this your gun?” Then he pulled it the final 30 miles to the ski jumps.

Next, of course, we had to learn how to use it. Hilltop’s Operations Department trained us and has spent many, many hours troubleshooting our system and getting us out of jams. Our all-volunteer snowmaking crew has been undaunted by the challenges of working on steep slopes with high pressure water, 480v 3-phase electricity, propane weed burners, negative temperatures and all-night shifts.

None of this would have been possible without the generous support from Hilltop Ski Area, GCI, Alaska Ski Educational Foundation, the Landes Foundation and the Anchorage Downtown Rotary. Kids are jumping this winter because of your help, and for that we are deeply grateful — especially this year’s Junior Nationals team!

Learn more about NSAA’s Ski Jumping program at www.anchoragenordicski.com/ski-jumping/.

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PHOTO BY VIVIENNE MURRAY

NSAA Jumping Program’s Karen Compton and jumping coach Natasha Mattoon celebrate as volunteer Tom Smith fires up the snow gun for the first time.
New club president thankful for volunteers, opportunities

Fritz Creek Skier / KNSC

A few of you may know me as Fritz Creek Skier, and now Fritz has a new role to fill, president of KNSC. He cannot express enough appreciation and admiration for the outgoing president, Jan Sparkland, for his outstanding abilities and contributions. Fritz is really glad that Jan will remain on the board of directors to help ease the transition. Which hopefully should be so smooth that no one will notice.

I also want to thank Jasmine Maurer, Jason Neely and Christine Andersen, our new secretary, for stepping up to fill vacancies on the board, and to express gratitude to Bob Glen, who has agreed to become our new equipment committee chairman. I look forward to working with this fine team to help keep the club running smoothly.

I also really appreciate the hard work that many volunteers over many years have given to create the really great skiing opportunities that we now enjoy around Homer.

Chili Cook-Off, January 14 at Grace Ridge Brewery

Go skiing and then come and enjoy a warm bowl of chili and sample door. Beer tasting is included for folks $10 each and can be purchased at the crockpot amount.

To sign up to enter your prize chili, contact Sheri at 399-5200 or Jasmine at 299-6975. Chili should be about a January evening than eating chili and

Frank Friday Nights – 6-8 p.m. January 20, location TBA

Bring out your skis or snowshoes and come enjoy this unique ski experience for all ages and abilities. Torches will be lit from 6-8 p.m on Friday. Headlamps, glowsticks and other light-up devices are encouraged. There will be a warming fire and hot chocolate.

Please leave your dogs at home! Dogs and nighttime skiing/snowshoeing on narrow trails is not a good combination! Do your dogs and everyone else a favor and leave them at home.

The “Night Lights” is a season highlight for many families. The cost is only $10/member or $25/non-members (if you haven’t yet renewed your membership, this would be a good time). With the full moon on January 23 and the trail lit by 100 torches, this event is not to be missed!

Welcome Holly Brooks back to Homer!

KNSC is enthusiastic about welcoming two-time Olympic cross-country skier Holly Brooks back to Homer in February for a ski coaching and race development clinic. Holly last joined KNSC, Homer Women’s Nordic, Kachemak Nordic Race Development and ski enthusiasts from other Kenai Peninsula areas for dryland training in fall 2013. This season, the snow is back and Holly will be, too! Get your skis ready and stay tuned to the next issue of the Alaska Nordic Skier newsletter and the KNSC Facebook page for details.

Upcoming ski events and clinics!

January 7 — Junior Nordic Coaching Clinic, Noon-2 p.m. Lookout Mountain Ski Area. This clinic provides youth and junior coaching skills and drills, and basic age-appropriate techniques to develop young skiers and ensure they have fun! This clinic is free and open to any individuals interested in helping with the KNSC Junior Nordic Program. No experience required! For questions — nscjuniornordic@gmail.com.

January 8 — Season 2 for KNSC women’s ski group (Homer Women’s Nordic) begins. Visit homernomensnordic.com or the Home Women’s Nordic Facebook page for details.

January 22 — Beginner Skate Ski Clinic, 10 a.m.-noon, Lookout Mountain Ski Area. Led by KNSC coaches, this clinic is for individuals who have no ski or limited ski experience or are looking for more instruction on the basics. $25 clinic fee. Online registration or visit the link through the KNSC website or KNSC Facebook page — goo.gl/forms/RWqGy8G6K8aW8t4E

January 22 — Intermediate Skate Ski Clinic, 1-3 p.m., Lookout Mountain Ski Area. Led by KNSC coaches, this clinic is for individuals who have mastered the beginner skate ski movement and are looking to refine their technique and increase efficiency on varied terrain. $25 clinic fee. Online registration or visit the link through the KNSC website or KNSC Facebook page — goo.gl/forms/6m76GOdKU6F0t2

Find the Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage on Facebook at — facebook.com/anchorageindieskiing
Ken Jones – The ski trails are lonely without him

**BY GLENN SEAMAN**

KNSC and the entire Homer community are mourning the loss of Ken Jones, who died last month in a kayaking accident. I met Ken for the first time on Homer’s ski trails, maybe 12 years ago. I was relatively new to town, and was skiing with my dogs up the “Far Side” heading to the Sunset Loop. Ken gave me a good “talk” on why dogs should not be on this trail and the likely dangers to other skiers. Like many newcomers might, I objected and stood up for my “rights,” exclaiming that the club did not have a policy or rules that prohibited this. Through all this, Ken remained calm and diplomatic and after time I began to appreciate the logic in words . . . his cause.

I continued to ski with my dog on the lower Baycrest and decided to make another quick jaunt up to Sun-set, one of my favorite trails. I ran into Ken again, and in a calm, friendly and persuasive way he made his argument again. I began to think more rationally and soon gave in, never to take my dogs on the upper trails again.

We became friends, and both being avid skiers we often saw each other on the trails. After much debate, the club later approved a policy designating select trails for skiers with dogs, while keeping other trails like upper Baycrest dog-free. Ken and I would later become better friends as we learned we had many friends in common.

Like myself, Ken often skied alone, presumably enjoying the benefits of a good workout, lost in thought solving personal and worldly problems, or just enjoying the beauty and serenity of nature. Ken was an excellent yet modest skier. About 10 years my senior, he might be described as an animal on the ski trails. It was not uncommon to see a tall, slender skier plowing seemingly effortlessly up the hill on the upper Baycrest or Lookout trails. I might nudge him a little bit early in the season due to a good base from active fall biking, but by mid-

season his 70-year-old legs would be kicking butt on my 60-year-old legs. He was in excellent shape, as I hope I will be at 70.

Ken was always friendly and welcoming. Homer is a definite ski community – we know most people on the trails and everyone you see will return a smile and say “Hi!” as you ski by. If not, they are usually from out of town or new to the area. Ken was very much a part of this ski community and it is going to be really tough not seeing that unassuming, modest and genuinely friendly guy on the trails.

The skiing on the Lookout Trails these last few weeks has been excel-

lent – the best we’ve had this early in the season for years. There’s only been one thing missing and that’s Ken.

KNSC extends its condolences to his wife Sara, their children and their extended family. We miss him, too.

**Trail cams and real-time grooming**

**BY FRITZ CREEK SKIER**

The first trail cam picture from the McNeil Trail System was taken at 2 – 53 p.m. November 17 as snow was falling. The second camera was installed two days later at the Lookout Mountain trail system, a week after skiing had begun there. These cameras use the cell network to email pictures to our website – kachemaknordicskiclub.org/category/lookout/ or http://mcneill – every hour, 9-5.

I thank our heroic volunteer webmaster, Richard Burton, for his efforts in making this possible. The cameras are exactly like a good friend with a cell phone who texts you a picture of the trail every hour during daylight. These rugged cameras are relatively inexpensive to purchase and the data plans are cheap. The cameras are plugged into AC power at our maintenance buildings, but could be installed anywhere, because they also can run on batteries with or without solar power. The specifications say that they will take pictures down to 4 below but they were put to the test in December and quit at around minus 2. However, when it warms back up they are back on the job. You couldn’t expect much more from your good friend at the trailhead unless you live in the Interior, but hey, we’re in Homer for a reason, right?!

By the time you read this, our new real-time trackers should be installed on our primary trail-grooming machines and be tracking grooming progress at the website — skitrails.info. The service plans for three trackers are pretty expensive for a small club, so we will definitely be looking for your feedback on their usefulness. The trackers turn on automatically when the groomer starts the machine. They are like cell phones; they use GPS satellites and the cell network to transmit their location. As long as the machine is running near the mapped trail system, the trackers will transmit location information to skitrails.info over the cell network. That means that you can comfortably browse the web while sipping hot coffee at the breakfast table to see that a hardworking volunteer is out there making beautiful skiing possible, right now! Just like the trail cams, they are like having good friends who live on each trail system reliably reporting to you exactly when the trails are being groomed.

What are you waiting for? Get out there and go skiing, the trails are ready! Thank your groomers!

**NSAA Sponsor Spotlight – Hartman Orthodontics**

Another season of Anchorage School District (ASD) Nordic racing has started. There’s nothing cooler than seeing middle and high school skiers infiltrate our community trails! The adult size 7th grader dressed in Carhartts and a hoody barrels down the trail with a smile from ear to ear. Studies show introducing competitive sports to kids at this age increases self-esteem and often times creates a lifelong passion for healthy living and the desire to achieve more in life. Hartman Orthodontics has played a huge part in reaching this goal by supporting our local schools’ Nordic teams.

Support from local businesses is essential to keeping Anchorage skiing. Recently, Dr. Brian Hartman generously contributed towards new ASD racing bibs along with several other funds, which has already significantly enhanced school competition. In addition to the Hartman Orthodontics donation, Alaska Ski Education Foundation as well as Alaska Arts and Health PTSA contributed to the project. Thank you to our Nordic supporters!

School sports have very limited budgets which extend to Nordic skiing. Timing officials identified a need for a complete set of race bibs for all schools. Schools had bib shortages, some bibs were illegible, and many teams did not have funds to purchase new ones. Without a complete set, race day becomes challenging for coaches, parents and the timing staff. With new bibs for school ski teams, our races are now better organized and officiated.

We appreciate Hartman Orthodontics’ commitment to helping us promote healthy living and outdoor enthusiasts. NSAA strives for continuous improvement including finding opportunities to partner with those as passionate about our schools, sports and community. We are grateful to work with Dr. Hartman and his staff to support our school racers as a long-term investment in our youth, which creates lifelong passion for healthy living and activity.
A special Solstice celebration

Bright trees, happy people at NSAA’s inaugural Solstice Tour of Trees

An estimated 2,000 attendees skied, walked in boots or snowshoes, and rode in sleds around the short Mine Loop at Kincaid Park to celebrate winter, Solstice, community and holiday trees at the NSAA’s first Solstice Tour of Trees. This was a unique opportunity for skiers and non-skiers of all ages to share a trail that is typically ski-only in the winter.

Sixteen trees were decorated by Anchorage-area businesses and organizations, lighting up the trail with bright, colorful lights and creative designs. Alchemy Orthotics & Prosthetics was voted the best tree, followed by the tree decorated by Alaska Music & Sound.

The event was a true winter celebration. There were two burn barrels, s’mores fixings, hot chocolate, as well as 40 demo skis that were checked out multiple times by new skiers.

NSAA thanks all of the people who attended and volunteered for the event. This year’s unexpectedly large gathering set the bar for a bigger and better celebration next year. NSAA also thanks all tree sponsors — Alaska Internal Medicine & Pediatrics; Alaska Music & Sound, Home of the Horn Doctor; Alchemy Orthotics & Prosthetics; BP Exploration Alaska Inc.; Dillon & Findley PC; Geneva Woods Birth Center; Barber & Associates, LLC; Pacific Northern Academy; Resource Data Inc.; Skinny Raven Sports; Snow Blossom Acupuncture LLC/Arbonne; and the West High School Ski Team. NSAA also appreciates event partners CRW Engineering Group, Skiku/NANANordic, Labrador Tea, Kaladi Brothers Coffee, Dr. Veerman of 907DentSpa, South High School Ski Team, Service High School Ski Team and Anchorage Parks & Recreation.

Popularity and participation grow for NSAA Biathlon programs

By Tom Grenier

Around 20 racers competed in the first biathlon races of the season on December 11 at the Kincaid Park biathlon range. The record turnout was partially buoyed by participants in early winter Eagle Eyes Biathlon classes trying out new skills in their first biathlon race. Fall Eagle Eyes classes all filled to capacity this year, reflecting a growing interest in the ski community for biathlon.

Monthly range safety classes are scheduled throughout the winter for skiers interested in trying biathlon. Eagle Eyes clinics and classes for late winter and spring will be announced in early January. For more information, visit the NSAA Biathlon program website at www.anchoragenordicski.com/biathlon/.

Eagle Eyes alumni Alex Kilby and Eagle Eyes coach Justin Carpenter duel in a shooting stage in the first biathlon race of the season. Kilby will represent Alaska at the U.S. Team Trials for the World Youth/Junior Biathlon Championships later this month.
Valdez's Qaniq Challenge revamps for third year

BY LEX TREINING

The flagship Valdez Nordic race, the Qaniq Challenge, is back for its third annual weekend on January 14-15 with some exciting changes. The two-day race is the brainchild of Valdez director of Parks and Recreation Darryl Verfaillie, and has attracted some of the top Alaska skiers in the previous two years. They sought a payout for a podium finish from the $10,000 prize purse (the second-largest prize payout in the country behind the American Birkebeiner). This year's race will see changes to both the payout and race format.

After getting input from the racers, Verfaillie decided to retune the prize distribution and pay prize money all the way down to 10th place. With just over 30 starters last year, the odds for getting a piece of the pie seems pretty good, especially with many of the top Alaska racers committed to SuperTour races in the Lower 48 and elsewhere.

“It’s hard for some of the top skiers to commit to things like this in advance, but we realized that the most important thing is to get a core of racers excited to race every year,” said Verfaillie. “For a lot of Outsiders, it’s a one-and-done but we want to get a good group of Valdez skiers and Anchorage skiers and focus on building from the ground up.”

As part of this new approach, Qaniq organizers are testing the experience of the race over the headline-grabbing prize money. This year, the race will include a kids’ competition as well as a free ski clinic hosted by some of the previous years’ top finishers from the APU Nordic Ski Center. The race entry also includes a family-friendly after-party and awards banquet at the waterfront bar/restaurant. The Fat Mermaid. Previous year’s banquet attendees may or may not have ended with all of the racers tearing up the dance floor. Furthermore, the techniques and locations will be swapped from previous years, with a classic race Saturday at Old Trap Range and a skate pursuit race on the frozen Mineral Creek trails on Sunday.

Verfaillie said that more than trying to attract a huge quantity of racers he is trying to increase the value of the experience. “We might have only 40 racers, but if we get 500,000 views on Facebook and the internet about how fun and exciting the race is, we will hopefully keep growing this thing,” he said.

“It’s a challenge just to get down here no matter how you do it,” he added. “People came last year by car, plane and ferry, but no matter what I hope they came away with good memories. We just want you to know that it’s worth the challenge.”


Top Alaska talents kick off Besh Cup series

BY LAURI BASSETT

Just before Christmas, the notoriously long and complicated sprint day kicked off the ConocoPhillips Besh Cup race series at Kincaid Park in Anchorage. The format featured a qualifying race in the morning that was followed by an elimination style competition in the afternoon. The U18 and older age groups started with the top 30 skiers from the qualifying race who battled their way through quarterfinals and semifinals; down to the top six for the day. The range of competitors for the men’s final ranged from a high school skier, an NCAA ski, skiers who have been on the podium at the U.S. SuperTour and Senior Nationals, as well as a World Cup skier.

In the classic technique event, APU skiers swept the top three positions in both the men’s and women’s finals. Reese Hanneman edged his brother Tyler Kornfield finished third for the APU trio. On the women’s side, Rebecca Rorbaugh led teammates Jessica Yeaton and Lauren Fritz across the line. In the U16 age division, Zander McMullen (APU) won the male race and Fairbanks XC (FPCX) skier Kaya Ratzlaff earned the victory on the female side. Ruby Schumacher earned the sprint victory for the male U14s, while Quincy Donley captured the female U14 title. Both skiers train with Alaska Winter Stars.

The distance race gave skiers opportunities to move off the heavily skied man-made snow loop. While all skiers are grateful for the man-made snow, they were happy to venture to Elliott’s Climb, Margaux’s Loop and parts of the challenging Lekish trails. In the men’s race, Scott Patterson took men’s lead with a comfortable gap between a couple of top skiers. The crowd witnessed an exciting second- and third-place finish between senior skier Reese Hanneman and 16-year-old skier Gus Schumacher. Near the end, Schumacher had a small lead, but Hanneman found enough gas in his tank for silver. APU skiers Jessica Yeaton, Becca Rorbaugh and Rosie Frankowski swept the podium arriving at the finish line within five seconds of each other.

Cross Country Alaska takes its show on the road in January (Sol-dotna) and in February (Fairbanks). January 18 is the deadline to register online for ConocoPhillips Besh Cups 3 & 4. That weekend of racing on January 21 & 22 will feature another sprint event, this time in the freestyle discipline; and it will include an interval start race. At the February race, Cross Country Alaska will announce the skiers who qualified to make Team Alaska which will compete at Junior National Championships in March in Lake Placid, New York.

For more information about upcoming races or to register, please visit the Cross Country Alaska web page at www.crosscountryalaska.org.

A thank you letter to Alaska’s Nordic ski community

BY ANDREW KASTNING

The holiday season is a wonderful time to give thanks to what you have, hold your family close and cherish the simple things in life. The UA Ski Team felt the warmth and love of the ski community early this winter when the decision to eliminate the “TEAM” rule could be granted by the NCAA. Within UAA and UAF would no longer sponsor the sport skiing in Alaska.

We want to give a special thanks to the many people and organizations that helped spread the word and support our ski programs. They include Jim Renkert, Andrea Hortot, Tobias Schwoerer, Kjersti Von Wichman, Alex Von Wichman, Charlie Renfro, Dave Knutsen, Edda Mutter, Bill Spencer, Lynn Spencer, Dylan Watts, Chris Hodel and Holly Brooks, and the Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage for pulling extra hard and organizing the fight.

It was awe-inspiring to be a part of this movement and a true testament to the quality individuals this community holds. We still have battles to win with gatekeeping, but at least we have a pathway forward, and for that, current, past and future Seawolf skiers say THANK YOU!
I must make a confession, while I love Nordic Skiing, if I were to have to choose just one winter sport to do the rest of my days, it would be backcountry skiing. Being in the mountains, choosing your path (and destiny, in some regards) and attempting to become connected to this stratum we call snow, very few things pique my enjoyment meter like backcountry. That is not so say a day skiing on Archangel Valley Road with bluebird skies, 25 degrees and fresh corduroy doesn’t scream bliss – it does.

But the division between those two sports is really only a modern day advent. Several hundred years ago, there was little difference between Nordic skiing and backcountry skiing. It wasn’t until the creation of groomed trails that a true distinction was born. And while there are a large number of differences exist between the sports now (ideal conditions, skis, number of people participating in the sport) for all the number one difference for me is this — how easily can I get out and do it. Most of you who read this section probably recall that I have a young one who is turning 2 very soon and although he has shown a great affinity for my avalanche shovels, I think it is safe to say he isn’t very backcountry compliant. So when the stars align and an opportunity exists for me to head into the mountains, I seize the day!

That opportunity found its way to me a bit ago in the form of a trip to Homer. Occasionally our friends with a cabin across Kachemak Bay invite us to their private piece of paradise near Seldovia, but this time with a elder a little caveat — “Bring your skis, we might go skiing.” At first I dismissed this portion the invite knowing that dealing with a toddler in a hazardous filled environment like someone’s remote cabin may be too overwhelming if one of said child’s parents were to head up the mountain for the day. But SWMBO (She Who Must Be Obeyed, aka gracious wife) insisted that I bring my ski gear.

This probably is a good spot to mention that I have very few backcountry days that have occurred in the last two seasons, probably because of some lame excuse … like having a child. Nevertheless, I have attempted to stay in some semblance of “in shape,” not so much beach-bod, but more like dad-bod. I had scaled a number of mountains over the last hunting season and I may have even started to consider myself worthy to ski with this group, but my ego may have gotten the best of me.

So Sunday morning-ish we started edging up the trail I use the definition loosely, beginning at sea level with a few inches of snow on the ground. The trail is a series of points marked by flagging that delineate the path of least resistance and while it was mostly devoid of brush, there were many fallen trees to climb over/dive under. The terrain, obstacles and snow cover dictated that the first part of today’s objective would be a strip back with our ski gear strapped to our backs.

Fast forward to about 1,500 feet of elevation, I am beginning to feel a bit confident about my choice. Having found my appropriate spot, in the rear of the group, and having had the overexerted metalic taste creep into my mouth a few times already, the amount of time that the front group (aka everyone else) had to wait for me to catch up was verging on the line where those persons begin to regret bringing my slow butt along. At this point we swapped out our boots for ski gear and began skinning to our final destination of a peak at about 3,200 feet.

The weather was nothing less than spectacular and the views … were nothing less than spectacular. It was one of those visits that trigger this thought, “I will remember this image til the end of my days.”

We ended up switching the gear into descent mode and picking our way to the spot where our hiking boots were left. With the fading light and gorgeous sunset, we continued the march back to the cabin, arriving in the dark via headlight, exhausted (at least I was).

Even though the downhill skiing was unremarkable, the effort, the environment, the views and the friends made it a fantastic day to remember, even more so given the fact that one of my boots fell out of my pack at about 1,000’ without my notice requiring me to return in the night to retrieve it … So I will return was verging on a week of Nordic sking hoping to be in better shape the next time the backcountry ski opportunity arises.

—By Hans Hill, MSSC President

Grooming in full swing

As of writing this, our grooming team is keeping Independence Mine and Archangel in tip-top shape. With the use of our new Centaur groomer, some of the best skiing so far this season has been occurring in Hatcher Pass. So if you are one of the many that has been enjoying these trails, consider purchasing a trail pin through our website to show your support to the MSSC and its many volunteer groomers.

If you do frequent the Archangel area, you may notice a new addition near the gate. Our very own Jeff Kase has created, tested and calibrated a very interesting device. It is designed to remove dog feces from the trail. Feel free to try the device out for yourselves. I assure you the next skier who comes behind you will appreciate it.

Adult ski lessons

There are many people in this world that have the ability to effectively teach, I however can barely teach my dog to sit. Thankfully I am not instructing the club’s adult lessons, but our very own and very talented Darryl Farrens is. These lessons are for those you are interested in improving your technique and possibly becoming a faster skier.

Dates and times are — 6-7 — 15 p.m. Mondays — December 5-Februrary 27; 6-7 — 15 p.m. Wednesdays — December 7-March 1; 10-11 — 15 a.m. Saturdays — December 10-February 25. All sessions are scheduled for the Government Peak Recreation Area, weather-dependent. Fees are — $ —

punch card, $50; 10 punch card, $90; Unlimited card, $150; Walk on price, $12 cash.

Mat-Su Ski Club members who do eight hours of volunteer time get free sessions. Session postponements and change of venue notices will be on our website and Facebook page. You can register at www.matsuski.org.

High school race volunteers

Just short of the Super Bowl, the best sports action to see in person is high school Nordic racing! Good news — the MSSC is assisting in hosting a number of high school races this season at GPR. And what better way of putting yourself right in the action than volunteering for a race. This month and next the club will need a number of volunteers to help put on these events. It truly is a great and fun experience, if you have not done it before. Please reach out to the club via info@matsuski.org if you are interested in helping.

Serenity Falls Hut trip

One thing I didn’t address earlier in my piece on backcountry skiing was the couple unique opportunities in AK to do hut trips. Being a MSSC member affords you that rare opportunity. Each season, the club reserves the Serenity Falls Hut near Eklutna Lake for a weekend and allows a select number to ski to the hut and stay the night and ski back the following day. Our super-volunteer and board member Ed Strabel will groom the trail prior to the event and then haul all of your overnight gear to the hut via snowmachine, making for a super enjoyable ski to the hut. Believe me, you want to have this experience. The trip will occur on March 11-12. Please email the club at info@matsuski.org if you are interested, as space is limited.
Eagle River Skiers — Where Are They Now?   Jackie Klecka

As with every high schooler’s goal, I was eager to begin a new adventure after graduation in spring 2012. Reluctant to leave Eagle River’s tight-knit community and beautiful hiking trails and mountains, I booked a one-way ticket to Golden, Colorado, to begin my freshman year at Colorado School of Mines (CSM).

The college transition was rough as academics were demanding, stressful and difficult. Additionally, I realized how much I took high school sports for granted, including cross-country running, skiing, track and soccer. The team camaraderie, intense workouts, incredible coaches, devoted volunteers, bus rides, and fun meets – I missed it all.

Thus, at the time I declared chemical engineering as my major at the end of my freshman year, I simultaneously realized the need to join a sports team.

Joining the CSM women’s club soccer team my sophomore year proved to be the perfect antidote. It was a necessary outlet to the enjoyable but rigorous academic load. My remaining three years at Mines followed in the same pattern as sophomore year; a balance of schoolwork, soccer, work, sleep and social life.

miscellaneous travel adventures were sprinkled in during school breaks, such as cross-country skiing.

Eagle River Jr. Nordic program is a family-oriented program with virtually every child has a parent skiing with them. Jackie Klecka

More than 100 kids giving 110 percent for skiing fun

BY ROS SINGLETON

Will Taygan. Eagle River Jr. Nordic head coach, recently said that there are just over 100 kids currently in program. But that’s just half the story because virtually every child has a parent skiing with them.

The Eagle River Jr. Nordic program is a family-oriented program with parents and kids (and even grandparents) skiing. I’m excited to see families skiing together; 25 years ago, Jr. Nordic saved me from being a hockey mom.

The Eagle River Masters meets 6 — 30-8 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday at the Beach Lake Trails chalet. For more information, e-mail Kathleen.Rehm@gmail.com or visit www.alaskanordicracing.org/masters.html.
Success, support create the possibility of even more Girdwood trails

BY DEB ESSEX
GIRDWOOD NORDIC SKI CLUB

The proposition of building Nordic ski trails in the Girdwood Valley has been tossed around since the 1960s. The Girdwood community even established a 10K cross-country ski trail in 1968-69. In 1969, Girdwood hosted Junior Nationals on the Alyeska Racing Trails built by community volunteers, the Anchorage Ski Club and the Army National Guard. These trails existed for a decade before fading back into the forest.

Fast forward 20 years — the Municipality of Anchorage Heritage Land Bank (HLB) commissioned a study to determine the feasibility of constructing Nordic ski trails in Girdwood. That study was completed in 2007 by The Boutet Company and authored by Olympian trail designer Jim Galanes. See the 2007 Final Study assessment map of possible locations for Nordic ski trails in the Girdwood Valley. HLB's goal was to develop approximately 17 kilometers of Nordic ski trails within the Glacier Creek/ Winner Creek valleys. The trail would be part of a phased development and coordinated with other development initiatives.

With positive results from this study, the Girdwood community thought the trails could be constructed in 2008. When the dust settled, neither The Alyeska Resort, Anchorage Parks and Recreation-Girdwood, nor the Girdwood Trails Committee had an interest in becoming the operator of a new trail system.

After researching successful Nordic club models in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest, the Girdwood Nordic Ski Club (GNSC) was formed in 2008 to design, construct and operate a Nordic multi-use trail system in the Girdwood Valley. The popularity of Nordic skiing, winter biking and hiking continues increasing while more U.S. alpine resorts offer four-season trail systems; Alyeska Resort has increased efforts to develop hiking and biking trails around Mt. Alyeska.

After unanimous voting outcomes from Girdwood 2020, Girdwood Land Use Committee (G-LUC), Girdwood Board of Supervisors, and Girdwood, Inc., the HLB Advisory Commission granted an ordinance authorizing a trails easement May 12, 2009. After many meetings and public forums, the other map was the design of the five-kilometer Nordic Loop completed by the Girdwood Nordic Ski Club in 2012. Since the trail’s 2012 opening, GNSC has operated and maintained the system with user-based donations. We’ve created an increasing annual membership of approximately 400 people and established a solid group of volunteer groomers.

We’ve hosted UAA and APU ski teams for informal races, local ski and snow bikes races, summer junior high cross-country running races, and Little Bears fundraising races. The trail is used year-round, including by blueberry pickers. After successfully operating the trail system for four years, the GNSC hopes to expand the trail system. We are listening to the community and want to include all user groups — even dogs. The trail would be approximately 3.5 meters wide and similar to the Tour of Anchorage trail and the Enchanted Forest in Girdwood. We are focused on rolling terrain; creating fun and less challenging outings than the current Nordic Loop; two-way traffic so trail-users can choose different routes; good line-of-sight for biking speed and wildlife avoidance; a trail width that allows for skate skiing and two-way passing, but half the width of the current Nordic Loop; and access for emergency crews towards both the Hand-Tram and the upper valley trail system. We want to improve the Girdwood trail system by creating non-wetlands trails that can be utilized year-round. We’ve learned from our first capital project and are proposing a narrower, more user-friendly trail system.

Currently, this would be a two-phase plan with 7.5 kilometers in total. Trail connectivity is our long-term goal with a river route running up the Glacier valley and connecting to the CAT track. We are in the initial stages of community surveys and working with expert trail designer Bill Spencer and HDR. Bill has surveyed the valley, analyzed wetland constraints and walked possible routes. The attached map is the proposed location of the expanded Nordic ski trails.

We have a unique perspective of how much work and capital funds it requires to build a trail of this nature. We are presenting this proposal for community feedback and want to hear from you. Please take our five-minute survey at www.surveymonkey.com/r/ XBBPFQ6.

If you are reading this in print, please go to www.skigirdwood.org and click the survey link. Also, check out our membership page and renew your membership! Girdwood Nordic Ski Club’s Facebook page (www.facebook.com/Girdwood-Nordic-Ski-Club-112569688796600/) also has the link. Questions? Please email us — info@skigirdwood.org.

We will present this proposal to the Girdwood Community at the Land Use Committee meeting meeting at 7 p.m. February 13 in the Girdwood Community Room. We would love to discuss this project with you from all perspectives!
New race directors lead two popular race series

BY ROBERT HANNON

This season, the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks is seeing some new directors for popular races. Trax Outdoor Center is now running the Wednesday Night Race series and University of Alaska Fairbanks Nanooks cross-country standout and coach Ross MacDougall is now helming the Buetow Distance Series.

Wednesday Night Series

Trax Outdoor Center owner Mike Hajdukovich said he wants to build the series so every skill level can participate. He sees the series like a bowling night out for skiers, only with fewer pins and no strikes.

“Race it slow, ski it with a friend or go as fast as you can. This race is designed to be just like any town running/walking race in the summer time,” he said.

All will be held at Birch Hill Recreation Area. Six were planned, but unfortunately the first two were canceled (one for lack of snow and the other for cold). Trax will create events on its Facebook page where skiers can sign up for one race or the whole series. The next race is planned for January 18 at 6 — 45 p.m. For more information skiers can sign up for the Buetow Distance Series.

Buetow Distance Series

Ross MacDougall’s first experience with ski racing in Fairbanks was with the Buetow Distance Series. He raced in the 2011-2012 series and fondly remembers the vibrant community and solid support he received at that race as a novice to the sport. As Distance Series Coordinator of the 2016-2017 season, he aims to carry the series’ tradition of welcoming skiers of all levels in the Fairbanks community.

Ross, originally hailing from Kodiak, has also lived in Sitka, Juneau, Massachusetts, Oregon, Wyoming, and Quebec. He moved to Fairbanks as a student at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in January 2011. He was introduced to the sport of Nordic skiing and joined the UAF cross-country running team as a walk-on in the fall of that year. After spending his first season of competitive eligibility injured, Ross went on to captain the running team for the next three years with teammate and co-captain Kenny Brewer and was named Most Valuable Player and Teammate of the Year for each of his three years of competing for the Nanooks. After finishing his studies at UAF in the spring 2015, Ross returned to coach the UAF cross-country running team for the fall 2016 season.

Faster, more efficient, more affordable – The Nordic Skier in your Inbox

Get your Alaska Nordic Skier online! It’s easy – the links below are just a click away. To get only a PDF version, or both a PDF and printed version, please send an email request to nordicskiereditor@gmail.com. You can also find and share PDF versions at www.anchoragenordicski.com/newsletters.htm. Getting the newsletter online only saves our club money, too!

Hannon steps down from NSCF board

Robert Hannon has stepped down from the NSCF Board of Directors, citing too many other commitments to dedicate the time needed to serve on the board. Robert served for about 18 months. The board seeks people who have a passion to support and grow the Fairbanks cross-country skiing community. If you feel you have the time and commitment, please contact Eric Troyer at fbxskierparent@gmail.com.

NSCF calendar keeps you updated

Remember to check our NSCF Calendar for upcoming club events. Things are quiet now, but they will be getting busy soon, so it’s good to check it regularly. See the calendar at — www.nscfairbanks.org > Calendar

Help NSCF by going shopping

You can earn donations from Fred Meyer to the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks just by using your Rewards Card. Fred Meyer will donate $1.5 million to nonprofits in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington annually through this program. Find out how at tinyurl.com/npmcles.

Poll shows desire for Skarland walking and skiing tracks

Stan Justice, a volunteer groomer for the Pearl Creek Park and Skarland trails, held a poll in early December on how the trails should be groomed. The poll was held on the Facebook group Skarland and Pearl Creek Park Users. Justice sent out the following email on December 14.

A long simmering issue for the Magoffin Subdivision I have been setting a separate trail for walking along with the ski tracks and it has worked well. I am pondering trying to...
Making do with snow scarcity

BY ROBERT HANNON

A recent article on Fasterskier.com said it all — "Birch Hill again held FIS races on the recent weekend of Nov. 19-20. It had snowed approximately 5 total in Fairbanks this winter by that point. Weekend racers – and there were hundreds of them, from kindergarteners without poles to the APU Elite Team – skied on trails that had been packed and draged to create a base of approximately 2. There were admittedly some leaves and dirt showing through in places – but, crucially, it was leaves, not rocks.”

Gavin Kentch’s short comment in a longer piece for Fasterskier.com identified two remarkable facts about Nordic skiing at Birch Hill this year — first, we don’t have a lot of snow and, secondly, we can still ski on what there is. In fact, Birch Hill Recreation Area has hosted several ski races and is poised for more.

Given the scant snowfall, how is it that we are enjoying a nearly normal ski season? According to Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks’ top groomer Tom Helmers, the secret lies in summer care. When spring snows have melted he and his crew ensure the trails set up before they see heavy traffic. On this point, Helmers says last summer’s soggy conditions made trail care especially challenging.

"The club spends a lot of time and money each year trying to keep the trails flat,” he said. Despite the rains, the Borough’s Parks and Recreation department did its usual great job mowing the trails. Also, Kentch observed, our trails, as a rule, are rock free, so we are skiing on top of grass. Helmer also says climate plays a role.

"Generally your ground has had a chance to freeze before it snows,” he explained, “so if we do get warmups right after the first few snows the ground is a natural refrigeration system.”

Finally, he points to experience as the club spends a lot of time and money each year trying to keep the trails flat,” he said. Despite the rains, the Borough’s Parks and Recreation department did its usual great job mowing the trails. Also, Kentch observed, our trails, as a rule, are rock free, so we are skiing on top of grass. Helmer also says climate plays a role.

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Backcountry Film Festival celebrates winter, helps the ski club

BY ERIC TROYER

The Backcountry Film Festival brings the world's winter to Fairbanks this January. The Fairbanks showing, organized by the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks (NSCF), will be held on Saturday, January 28. Watch the NSCF website (www.nscfairbanks.org) and Facebook page for more information. Besides being great fun, this event serves as a fundraiser for the NSCF and the Winter Wildlands Alliance.

This year the festival highlights experiences that fuel and surround winter activities. The lineup includes —

Reflections — The woods in winter can often seem like poetry to the senses.
Lifestyle of a Powderwhore — What is a Powderwhore?
SnowSchool — Watch the magic of the Winter Wildlands Alliance National SnowSchool program unfold with Selkirk Outdoor Leadership and Education participants.
The Secret Life of Birch — Jane Lillana and Mike Libecki on their quest to backcountry ski Antarctica.
Season on the Brink — Nature Mother is neither for you nor against you. Lessons of a near-fatal accident.
Pace — "The slow passing of time is when I feel most alive." – Brody Leven.
The Lost Sierra — A local take on the importance of protecting your home forest.
Snow Artists — Exploration is everywhere.
China, A Skier’s Journey — Skiing, both an exploding middle-class phenomenon as well as a historical means of survival for China.

Now in its 12th year the Winter Wildlands Alliance Backcountry Film Festival celebrates the human-powered winter experience through film. The films are selected from a mix of professional and amateur filmmakers from around the world who submit their best work for the festival. The BackCountry Film Festival aims to entertain while helping raise funds and awareness for Winter Wildlands and its like-minded partners. The festival, which was created in 2004, premieres in Boise, Idaho, and then travels to more than 100 locations worldwide. Funds raised by the festival showings stay in local communities to support human-powered recreation and conservation efforts and to raise awareness of winter management issues, avalanche training/safety and winter education programs.

See the festival films at — winterwildlands.org/backcountry-film-festival./
do this on other sections of the 12 mile trail thus this poll.
Groom a walking lane and classic ski tracks — 46 votes (88.5%)
Stop all machine grooming — 5 votes (9.6%)
Just groom classic tracks as in past years — 1 vote (2%)

The Facebook group has 208 members.

The trail has been set with a separate walking lane from the powerline above Pearl Creek School to the Musk Ox Farm. It worked better in some places than others. I put the tracks on the high side which results in them being on the steeper sidehill. Having skied the trail, there were no places where the ski tracks were too close to trees. Having the tracks on the low side would put it up against the trees since the trail has migrated downslope up against the trees.) And even in the narrow spots there was room for careful walkers to use the trail.

Beyond Birch

Birch Hill is an incredible trail system for cross-country skiing, but there are many other places to ski in the Fairbanks area. As of mid-December, snow cover was thin on the Alaska Dog Mushers Association (ADMA) trails, but when the snow comes this is a great place to ski. The trails can be accessed from the Mushers Hall parking lot off Farmer’s Loop Road or the Creamer’s Field trails off College Road. Find maps at — www.sleddog.org/maps/.

Please know that the Mushers Hall parking lot is the private property of the ADMA, a nonprofit organization, and that the trails are groomed solely by the ADMA. The group relies heavily on donations, so please give if you use the trails. The trail fee is $5 per day to be deposited in the lock box at the hall. You can also purchase a yearly membership online for only $50. And please feel free to donate more if you use the trails a lot. To purchase a membership — sleddog.org/membership-trail-pass. To donate — sleddog.org/donate.

Keep your expensive skis safer

Suggestions from an NSCF member — A friend of mine showed me his trick for leaving expensive skis in a rack and discouraging theft/accidental swapping. He would put one ski and one pole in one place and the other around a corner in another place. No one will steal/swap a single ski and few will go to the trouble of searching for the matching items.
NSCF Biathlon Program gaining popularity

BY ERIC TROYER

The NSCF Biathlon Program has been gaining momentum over the past few years due to the efforts of a few dedicated volunteers and help from the greater Fairbanks community. In 2013, the program had only three active members. By 2015 it had 10 active members. In 2016, two biathletes (Hanna Wuttig and Eloise Darrow) and one coach (Margaret Darrow) were selected to participate for Team Alaska in the Arctic Winter Games in Nuuk, Greenland. The program has also hosted summer clinics and had members participate in the World Junior Trials.

The number of volunteers has also grown greatly and now includes 12 dedicated volunteers. And while the program couldn’t function without these volunteers, others are also stepping forward to help. The program received a generous grant from the Arctic Winter Games. The University of Alaska Fairbanks Rifle Team has offered to teach rifle clinics. And NSCF trail groomers have made an effort to be available for biathlon events.

The program holds its practices at the rifle range at Birch Hill Recreation Area just off the White Bear Trail. Actually, the range is on U.S. Army Fort Wainwright land, which is adjacent to the recreation area. (Nearly all the White Bear Trail is on Fort Wainwright.) Practices are currently held from 3-5 p.m. Sunday.

The program got a big boost when it received a $25,000 grant from the Arctic Winter Games 2014 Legacy Fund. These funds, left over from the games, have been distributed to a variety of programs across Fairbanks to encourage youth sports. The largest portion of the biathlon grant money went to a shed at the Birch Hill range. This allows the program to securely store needed equipment at the range, such as masts, metal targets, wooden practice frames, fencing and lane markers. Also stored there are rifles racks, which were built by Eagle Scout Norman Rockwell for the 2014 Arctic Winter Games. The grant also paid for start/finish area fencing, a timer and a clock.

Another $5,000 of the grant money is being donated to the Birch Hill Trails Program. The donation is “in acknowledgement of past and future efforts by Tom Helmers and the other groomers to support the biathlon program, especially in the form of late-night and early-morning grooming of the range stadium and courses prior to events,” according to Helena Reuter, secretary of the program.

One indication of the growing strength of the Biathlon Program is its involvement in statewide events. This season the program will host one of the three weekend races of the new statewide Cold Cup Series. This will be a Besh Cup-style biathlon race series. The Fairbanks races are April 8-9. The other two races are in Anchorage on January 14-15 and March 3-4.

A statewide clinic was held this past May in Anchorage and eight Fairbanks biathletes participated, along with four Fairbanks adults, who helped at the clinic. Two adults were certified as Level 1 biathlon officials at the clinic, adding to the two existing Level 1 officials in Fairbanks.

While the biathlon program is having great success it still has several needs, including a beam or platform at the target line that can be leveled, a port-a-potty or desiccating outhouse adjacent to the range building (the nearest bathrooms are more than a kilometer away), and a rifle safe so that rifles can be stored at the range.

Program organizers are also pursuing grants to purchase new biathlon rifles that can be used by club biathletes. The club currently has 10 rifles, but they are obsolete and not reliably accurate in cold weather. Having program rifles available will decrease upfront costs for new participants.

The Biathlon Program is also working with NSCF Sponsorship Coordinator Aelin Allegood to find sponsors. Anyone interested in being a biathlon sponsor should contact her at sponsorship@nscfairbanks.org.

People interested in joining the Biathlon Program, either as a biathlete or as a volunteer, should contact Jim Pasek (Blizzardski@gmail.com) or check out the program’s Facebook page — NSCF-Fairbanks Biathlon.

Olympian Holly Brooks and the balance of physical and mental training

BY HOLLY BROOKS

THE ALASKA NORDIC SKIER SPONSORED CONTENT

During my tenure on the U.S. Ski Team, we all had counselors. Or if you want to sound fancy, a “Sports Psychologist.” Mine was a woman named Pam Lemons and she was spunky! She drove a red Mini Cooper, always had eccentric nails and shared the aura and energy of a mom, an aunt, a coach and a confidant. Pam helped me set goals, manage my emotions and learn from challenging situations. Because I knew everything we discussed was 100 percent confidential, I never feared retribution or judgement. She was never consulted to pick Olympic rosters or World Cup relays. During our sessions she was there for me only and I always left with a plan and/or a sense of peace.

I sincerely believe that the mental side of sport is under-utilized and under-trained. How much time do you spend lifting weights or bounding only have your mind or negative self-talk unravel your performance? I don’t think it’s always the strongest athlete that wins the race but the athlete who uses a combination of mind and body.

That said, there are a few things to think about this race season —

1) Create specific, measurable goals and write them down! Putting a pen to paper makes them real and sharing them with people you trust keeps you accountable. Goals should be outcome and process based.

2) Find methods to control your anxiety if you experience pre-race nerves. Try diaphragmatic breathing or “grounding techniques” to calm yourself. One of my favorite tactics has always been to apply glitter … even at the Olympics!

3) Create a “purpose map” and know why you are doing what you do. Your goals should align with what motivates you — not your teammates, coaches or parents. Daily actions, dedication and sacrifices should match your purpose map.

Pam’s unconditional support and the integration of mental training was key to my career. I’m convinced it allowed me to do things I would have previously thought athletically impossible for my abilities. Beyond that, her role in my life provided a model for what I wanted to become; someone’s Pam!”

This past August I launched Holly Brooks LLC Counseling, Consulting and Coaching which focuses on the mental side of sports. I am excited to combine a decade of coaching, time as a professional Olympic skier and academic credentials to provide support to athletes and individuals in Alaska and beyond. Potential topics include — getting to the next step, performance anxiety, team dynamics, the mental side of injury, disordered eating, transition, and more. If you are curious about my services, please check out my website (http://hollybrooks.com), email me (holly@hollybrooks.com) or give me a call at (907) 359-8249.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE NSCF BIATHLON PROGRAM