APA/MA 2017, Vol. 18, No. 7

ANCHORAGE
Thank you to NSAA staff, volunteers, supporters

STATEWIDE
Nation’s finest, fastest skiers glide into Alaska

KACHEMAK
Return of winter means return of Marathon

ANCHORAGE
Eagle River
Fairbanks
Girdwood
Homer
Juneau
Kenai
Mat-Su
Seward
Soldotna
Talkeetna
Valdez

PHOTOS BY
MAX KAUFMAN

CHECK OUT TWO BONUS PAGES OF THE ALASKA NORDIC SKIER FEATURING VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHTS, SUMMER SKI CARE AND MORE AT ANCHORAGENORDICSKI.COM/NEWSLETTER/
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Anchorage Nordic Skier
Newsletter Of The Nordic Skiing Association Of Anchorage, Inc.

Thank YOU! for an unforgettable season

You make NSAA great! For 52 years, this o’ ski club has provided extraordinary opportunities, and this season was no exception. It was all fueled by supporters like you. By volunteering, donating, coaching and promoting NSAA to your friends and coworkers, you’ve kept Anchorage a skiing community through Nordic events. Break-up is the perfect way to address many of these “housekeeping” duties. Once the ground thaws and dries out, we’ll start to whittle away at the trail maintenance as listed in our long-term plan. Between maintaining the equipment and the trails over the past season, participation is up, membership has increased and connecting with local businesses and organizations has improved.

NSAA’s work doesn’t end when the snow disappears. Fundraising continues. Summer also brings critical equipment maintenance and trail work to combat erosion, rutting and brush growth. The NSAA staff is currently drilling down in each program and event to tweak and improve. Additionally, NSAA is hosting national events in 2018 and 2019 for juniors and masters. Want to be a part of it? We have volunteer opportunities big and small! You can make lifelong friends, hang outside, build your resume and increase your work experience, and have fun while doing it. Connect with our office at (907) 276-7609 to get plugged into this skiing community today and help fuel us into the next amazing season.

NSAA Operations: Happy trails to a bountiful season of snow and fun

What a great season with lots of memorable moments and some very busy NSAA grookers, which was a good thing! Snowmaking got us started early and the system worked well. About mid-January there was enough snow to transition from snow machines to snow cats. The racing season was a success with only a few cancellations due to temperatures, and there were no sustained cold snaps or warm-ups. What a welcomed change after three winters of disappointing skiing conditions!

Fortunately, the NSAA Operations team didn’t have any major equipment issues; however very soon we will be turning our efforts toward maintaining our fleet.

Pisten Bullys are not like automobiles and require lots of service. Break-up is the perfect way to address many of these “housekeeping” duties. Once the ground thaws and dries out, we’ll start to whittle away at the trail maintenance as listed in our long-term plan.

Between maintaining the equipment and the trails this really is a year-round endeavor, completely made possible by your membership which is essential for the sustainability of our association. So, if you know people who enjoy using the trails all year long, please encourage them to become an NSAA member or to donate.

NSAA’s Operations staff would like to thank the members and the several volunteers who give of their time to help with making snow, coordinating, setting up and officiating races, cutting brush, grooming and countless other tasks. We would like to thank Anchorage Parks and Recreation for their partnership and cooperation. Finally, none of these events would have happened within our fabulous NSAA office staff and Board of Directors – you people are great and we appreciate you!

We’ll see you on the trails. Have a fun and safe summer!

The Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage thanks all of the individuals and businesses whose volunteer time and financial or in-kind support makes everything we do possible. We do our best every season to thank each and every one of you, but it is not always possible to name everyone. If we have inadvertently left your name off of these lists, please accept our apology and let us know. Your contributions to NSAA are greatly appreciated!

NSAA BOARD MEMBERS — Jenny Di Grappa, Meg Stehn, Diane Labelle-Hamer.

South High, Taylor Keegan, Tom Hoosier and Tully Rozen, Chris Backstrum, Chris Backstrum, Dave Fontana, Buzz Scher, Buzz Scher, Celia Rozen, Celia Legate, Aubrey LeClair, Bob Butera, Branden Garber, Dustin Shannon, Alex Grumman and Molly Miller, Mike Miller, Elizabeth Arnold, Josh Niva, Karl NSAA are greatly appreciated! and let us know. Your contributions to these lists, please accept our apology to name every person. If we have of you, but it is not always possible
Amber Adams: Service with a smile

Who’s the name and face behind the phone at NSAA?

If you’ve heard the voice of someone on the phone at NSAA, you’ve just heard Amber Adams. Amber and Erin Riehle are the NSAA phone people, leaving the phone lines open for you to call with questions, concerns or whatever else is on your mind. If you talk to Erin, you might get a question or two back from her and the Nordic community for her work.

But if you talk to Amber, you'll get a really simple answer. “I’m the brains behind the registrations, and ski! Look for NSAA volunteer details at www.anchoragenordicski.com or call the NSAA office at 567-7200.”

Amber Adams, front, and Erin Riehle certainly understand the importance of a healthy work-life balance! Amber works her magic on the phone and leaves a big pat on the back from her team and the Nordic community for her work.

The Alaska Nordic Skier is a publication representing the alaska nordic ski clubs of Anchorage, Eagle River, Fairbanks, Homer, Juneau, Mat-Su, Seward, Soldotna, Kenai, Talkeetna and Valdez. The Alaska Nordic Skier is published October through April by the Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage, Inc.

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On the cover - Photographer Max Kaufman captured the action and fun of the U.S. Junior National and SuperFin Sprints which brought America’s and Alaska’s best skiers to Fairbanks. Read about the event on Page 8.
NSAA 2017 programs and events recap

Jumping: Soaring to new heights, firsts

The NSAA Ski Jumping/Nordic Combined program just wrapped up a winter season of firsts!

This was the first time we made snow at the jumps, thanks to a snow gun purchased by NSAA. The all-volunteer crew managed to snow all three landing hills with no winch cat to smooth it all down. It is truly an art!

The first time we jumped in the winter using our steel tracks. Not snowing the in runs meant no worries about warm weather melting ice tracks. Keeping the tracks clear for practices... we have a better plan for next winter!

The first time Alaska had a girl qualify for Junior Nationals. Rowan Folds represented Alaska at JNs at Norge Ski Club in Fox River Grove, Illinois, in February. Rowan marked another first: the first time an Alaskan girl medaled at Junior Nationals! Rowan won a bronze medal for team jumping on a mixed team of girls from three different divisions. Congratulations, Rowan!

The first time Alaskans competed in Western Regions. Five boys and three girls competed with four podium finishes! Savonna Rygh was third in the U12 girls, Dylan Amy was third in the U10 boys, and Alexandra Mendenhall was first and Brooke Congdon was second in the Open division. Congratulations!

Congdon was second in the Open division. Congratulations! Savonna Rygh was third in the U10 boys, and Alexandra Mendenhall was third in the U12 girls, Dylan Amy was third in the U10 boys, and Alexandra Mendenhall was first and Brooke Congdon was second in the Open division. Congratulations! Now we wait for the snow to melt, then get ready for summer jumping, beginning on June 5. Thanks for team jumping on a mixed track.

Skiing: Teaching the next generation.

NSAA Jr. Nordic: Beginning a lifetime of skiing, healthy fun

NSAA Jr. Nordic had a great season with consistent snowpack, enthusiastic coaches and inspired young skiers. A new team for younger skiers, ages 6-9, was tried at 4:30-5:30 p.m. (the usual Jr. Nordic practice time is 6:30-7:30 p.m.) This was met with resounding excitement for many families.

Thanks to a grant from ConocoPhillips, NSAA Jr. Nordic coaches and other volunteer coaches from the community brought skiing to three local elementary schools. Many of our schools do not have skis or are without coaches, yet Anchorage has some of the best urban ski trails in the nation.

Would you like to be a coach next year? You don’t even need to know how ski! Begin with Polar Cubs at the youngest level and learn while teaching the next generation.

If interested, visit anchoragenordicski.com/junior-nordic-coaching/.

– By Karen Compton, volunteer

Sr. Nordic: Beginning a lifetime of skiing, healthy fun

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– By Tamara Kornmesser, NSAA

Ski 4 Kids: Celebrating healthy lifestyles and motivating outdoor fun

The 2017 Ski 4 Kids, hosted by NSAA, the Municipality of Anchorage’s Parks & Recreation Department and Healthy Futures was held on March 4 at Kincaid Park. More than 350 enthusiastic kids participated in this year’s event.

This year’s event incorporated traditional skiing fun with other outdoor winter activities to expose participants to a diverse variety of winter pastimes. Over 100 kids skied in the 3K timed race while dozens of other skiers toured the Storybook Trail. Two-time Olympian and Healthy Futures ambassador Holly Brooks led the group in warm-up activities before the start of the race and cheered on dozens of kids as they raced around the course. Other stations included the Lemon Drop Biathlon course, ski kids and an extensive obstacle course.

REI provided a snowshoe station, Speedway Cycles hosted a fat bike station and Arctic Orienteering hosted an orienteering treasure hunt event. Inside the chalet, the Karl Eid Ski Jump coaches and athletes introduced skiers to ski jumping. The Nordic Ski Patrol kept a careful watch over the day’s activities and we were fortunate to have over 50 volunteers from local high school and college ski teams, NSAA Jr. Nordic and other groups to keep everything running smoothly.

The impact of Ski 4 Kids extends far beyond a fun day of activities every spring. The money raised each year through corporate sponsorships and individual donations provides ski equipment grants to schools and youth groups. The addition of ski equipment allows the schools to incorporate Nordic skiing into PE programs and afterschool activities. Many of the grants have been distributed to schools with motivated skiers but who lack the ability to obtain equipment. This year we plan to distribute nearly $10,000 in grants to area schools in order to further develop the availability of ski equipment in the community. Our major corporate donor this year was ConocoPhillips, and there was financial support from Banker Law Group, LaTouche Pediatrics, Continental Auto Group, Anchorage Pediatric Group, the Elsberg Family Foundation Fund, and the Waldrop/Kornmesser family. The goal of spreading Nordic skiing to new groups within our community would not be possible without the generous support from our sponsors!

– By Iain Miller, volunteer

Backcountry Tours: Adventuring off the trails

The return of a reliable snowpack made for a fun backcountry touring season—the bonus, spectacular weather on each tour! We added several new tours and had good attendance, hosting around 10-20 skiers per trip, with a whopping 35 participants at the season finale. Skookum Glacier tour in April! The Friday Night Fun Ski in December was a pleasant social ski on the lit trails in Kincaid Park, followed by pizza and beer at Uncle Joe’s. Look for more of the Friday Night Fun Skis on the calendar next season! Sheep Mountain Lodge and Denali View Chalet were hosts to our two overnight journeys this year. Groomed trails, impressive views, camaraderie and hearty food

See Recap, Page 5

the ALASKA nordic skier

PHOTO BY TAMMY KORNMESSER
were some of the highlights. The Matanuska and Skookum Glacier adventures offered stunning views on route to and from our breathtakingly larger-than-life glacier destinations!

Of course, all tours were accompanied by dedicated Nordic Ski Patrol volunteers who kept us safe while we were exploring Alaska’s winter backcountry. We appreciate their participation.

Tune in next fall to get a preview of next season’s slate of backcountry ski tours!

– By Mary A. Vacerek, volunteer

**Ski Train: Through kids’ eyes**

Who doesn’t like the train? After experiencing Ski Train for five years in a row and having an amazing time with our friend group, I put my “mom hat” on and took my teenage son this year. We boarded the family-friendly car and didn’t look back. The early hours fogged our vision but not for long as we made our way with the hundreds toting coolers to our designated car at the train depot. As promised, it was a day we will never forget, logging memories of quality time with friends, deep snow adventure in remote Alaska and “only on Ski Train” destinations!

Our cooler looked a bit different than previous years, including a few more kid-friendly snacks and our backpack brimmed with essentials like Uno, a deck of cards and an updated playlist. We spent the day with family friends we don’t see as regularly as we like catching up quickly, then launching into new inside jokes, listening to pop music and playing games, games and more games. Our time in Curry was a lot like being at a park. We spent hours watching them go off jumps and making attempts at different challenges. The experience included snow up the back discomfort, gut laughing and plenty of teasing. The afternoon was rounded out with a hot cup of complimentary coffee in Curry and a try with a fat bike. Who said nothing is free these days? Only in Curry.

Even before the train started heading back home, a few caught quick power naps with energy levels zapped from four hours of fresh air and sunshine. More games, more teasing, more laughter. Other kids on the family car, including a few toddlers, caught our attention with playful squawks over a balloon and an empty cup. It was at that moment that I realized the Ski Train experience is really for all ages.

Learn more at anchoragenordicski.com/events/ski-train/.

– By Erin Beam, NSAA

**Biathlon: Building community, competition**

Anchorage area biathletes took advantage of a proper winter of snow this year to train and race at Kincaid Park’s world-class biathlon range. The nine-race Biathlon Racing Series included the State Championships in early March with athletes from around the state gathered for two days of racing before many also participated in the Tour of Anchorage. Dozens of athletes of all ages participated in the racing series. This season, races included a post-race soup/potluck gathering which was especially popular after the cold races.

“With a community of community and encouragement everyone to gather after races. I definitely see it returning next year,” said NSAA biathlon co-chair Marti Pausback.

Eagle Eyes Biathlon, NSAA’s development program, had another busy and enjoyable season. Coached by Tom Grenier and Zoey Grenier, masters and youth as young as 10 trained and raced in the program. They also held a spring break training camp which was full of enthusiastic young biathletes. Anchorage Biathlon Club began training this winter, coached by Duncan Koken, a Colorado native who interned with USBA before moving to Anchorage. Former Skiku Biathlon coach Zach Hall and Sara Studebaker-Hall moved to Utah this winter and will be missed.

Three Anchorage-area youth biathletes – Alex Kilby, Grace Gilliland and Helen Wilson – earned spots on Team USA and competed at the World Youth/Junior Biathlon Championships in Osrblie, Slovakia. They then moved on to race at Junior Nationals at Lake Placid, NY, followed by U.S. Biathlon Nationals in Jericho, VT, where all three earned medals. Wilson and Kilby then went to Solleftea, Sweden, for some more biathlon training before returning home.

This season’s new Alaska Gold Rush series featured six races around Alaska, including four in Anchorage. Next season, this growing series will help decide the Arctic Winter Games biathlon teams.

From range maintenance to safety to logistics to snowmaking to rifle maintenance and more, we are so grateful for our wonderful volunteers and welcome anyone who wants to have fun with us next season.

Biathlon will host a summer full of training, roller skiing and running sessions. King of the Range, a shooting competition, has started up again already and “King Jeremy” was crowned last week. More events are being planned and ideas are always welcome.

For more information, visit anchoragenordicski.com/biathlon/.

– By Catherine Kilby, volunteer
Tour of Anchorage 2017: The return of an Alaska tradition

After two years of bad weather and short courses, the Tour of Anchorage rebounded this season with incredible energy, community spirit and nearly 950 racers, despite the below zero temperatures at the start and the grueling finish up the hill to the Kincaid Park chalet.

For organizers, it felt a little like planning a wedding without the bride and groom. Did we forget anything? Will we have enough food? How will the weather turn out? Will we successfully accommodate our guests? The Tour, like any big event, requires coordination of so many moving parts and executing them almost flawlessly. This could not be done without so many: our loyal and tireless Green Grunts, gear truck drivers, Boy Scout troops, ski teams and academic groups that staffed the feed stations, the bib pickup volunteers, three race start teams, finish line timers, caterers, sponsors and supporters.

Postrace survey results indicate thumbs up across the board - 90 percent of participants rated this year’s Tour as good or great. Still rich in tradition, this year’s Tour had subtle changes from previous years: the course, the food, apres ski atmosphere! We appreciate the specific feedback to tweak the day including better signage in the chalet for those finishers looking for ways to get hydrated and nourished. Also, a few offered feed station suggestions including different food choices, peeled bananas and locations. Most loved the finish line festivities inside and outside the chalet, which included music, announcers, and 49th State Brewing food and beverage options. “Please arrange for warmer temperatures” was a common theme.

With great input from so many, we are already thinking about next year’s Tour of Anchorage. If you loved it too and have input to make it even better, consider being part of the Tour of Anchorage team! Email Thornfield@anchorgenordicski.com for more information. Help us plan the wedding, I mean, 2018 Tour of Anchorage!

For full race results, event photos and more, visit anchoragenordicski.com/races/tour-of-anchorage/.

The racing was fast, the smiles were big and the skiers were excited to hit the full Tour of Anchorage course this season.

More snow, more events, more pictures!

Enter your season’s best in the NSAA Photo Contest!

I’t’s primetime for crust skiing photos, which is a reminder that the 2017 NSAA Photo Contest deadline is coming on May 31. The contest is open to all Alaska Nordic ski club members and entrants may submit three images per category.

The categories are: Racing; Touring/Backcountry; Jumping; Kids on Skis; Grooming/Groomed Trails; Biathlon; Fun Ski Events; and Recreational/Casual Skiing. Prizes will be awarded to first-, second- and third-place selections in each category, as well as a grand prize overall winner. Winners also will be featured in the annual NSAA calendar and in an issue of the Alaska Nordic Ski newsletter.

Send digital photo files and an entry form to aadams@anchoragenordicski.com with PHOTOS CONTEST in subject line. File format should be JPG and size should be between .05 MB and 5 MB. Please visit anchoragenordicski.com/nsaa-photo-contest/ for more information and the entry form.

Contact NSAA’s Amber Adams at aadams@anchoragenordicski.com or (907) 276-7609 with questions, comments or concerns.

2017 NSAA Photo Contest Application

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Official Rules:
Deadline May 31, 2017
Send to: aadams@anchoragenordicski.com with PHOTO CONTEST in subject line.
File format should be JPG and size should be between .05 MB and 5 MB.
Contest open to all Alaska Nordic ski club members. Entrants may submit 3 images per category.
All photos submitted may be showcased on NSAA website, in the NSAA newsletter, on the NSAA Facebook page, in the NSAA calendar, and for any other NSAA promotional materials.
Prizes will be awarded to first-, second- and third-place selections in each category, as well as a Grand Prize overall winner.
Basic enhancement of photos is allowed including cropping, minor color enhancement, contrast or brightness. Obvious photo manipulation is not allowed including morphing, polarization, composite or multiple images.
You will retain all rights to any photograph you submit, including ownership if applicable, other than those rights licensed in the next sentence. We will make every effort to credit your photo any time it is used. By submitting your photo to our NSAA Photo Contest, you hereby grant to NSAA (i) a nonexclusive, worldwide, irrevocable, royalty-free license to reproduce, distribute, publicly display and publicly perform the photographs you submit to NSAA, and (ii) the right to use your name, city, state, and country of residence in promotions and other publications.
Contact Amber Adams aadams@anchoragenordicski.com (907-276-7609) for questions, concerns or comments.
BY CHELSEA HOLMES

When six APU skiers arrived in Lahti, Finland, for the 2017 World Championships they were welcomed by a city steeped in ski tradition and history. The atmosphere of the city, which held the event for a record seventh time, was illustrated by the boisterous opening ceremonies, heartfelt speech by the Finnish president and masses of fans.

Standing in the ski depot in the Lahti Sport Stadium on opening day was a rather awe-inspiring experience on its own, to know that I was one of a small field of the world’s best skiers. That feeling was fleeting for me, overwhelmed by the nervous energy and anticipation of my own goals.

When Kikkan Randall raced to a bronze medal in the sprint in the first championship event, I felt immense excitement and pride. As Lahti 2017 continued I watched as my teammates raced heart and soul, Jess and Rosie throwing down, Sadie earning bronze in the team sprint and Erik 18th in a classic race in which the country pulsed with excitement and pride as a hometown hero won by a landslide. By the end of the week when I was anxiously and impatiently hoping for a start spot, I found that I wanted nothing more for myself than to put my own iron to the fire: To simply have the opportunity to contribute to my team’s successes.

There is truth in the euphemism, success breeds success. It is also true that the success of APU on the world stage is truly a representation of our programming as a whole: from devos to masters.

We believe in our ability to constantly reach new heights and we couldn’t be more proud of how our members performed and embodied our mission at home and abroad. Thank you to our members and staff, supporters, family, friends and sponsors: you are our community and our foundation!

Alaska Guardsmen bring home gold from National Guard biathlon championships


BY LAURI BASSETT

Skiers in both Team Alaska groups had successful showings at their national competitions; the Junior Nationals Championships held in Lake Placid and the U14 skiers at the Western Regional Championships held in Sun Valley, Idaho.

This was the first year Alaska skiers attended the Sun Valley event; which was a long weekend of sun, ski racing and barbecue. Hopefully the taste of spring traveling gave these skiers an experience on its own, to know that I was one of a small field of the world’s best skiers. That feeling was fleeting for me, overwhelmed by the nervous energy and anticipation of my own goals.

When she first joined our club, there was a bit of astonishment, as was the suggestion ‘pulled fishing nets all day, then ran down the beach.’ But she made the training happen over the tundra. The wheels went flat after an outing or two, and she was left to run and bound on that one road, to run on the beach, ski, bike and do strength at the local school gym, and hike over the hills.

Aly for being selected to receive the 2017 Dave Quinn Award and congratulations to all skiers who competed in the ConocoPhillips Besh Cup races – as well as the post-season events!

Young Alaskans – and one in particular – shine bright at national competitions

A special award at Junior Nationals includes the Dave Quinn Award which is presented to the outstanding cross country skier at the Junior Olympics by the USSA Cross Country Sport Committee based on results and sportsmanship. Fairbanks skier Alyeska (Aly) Daniels joins Jim Oksoktaruk, D’Anna Dorris, Gretchen Pfisterer, Todd Grover, Christian Hinderman, Kikkan Randall, Cole Talbot and Lydia Blanchet on the list of Alaskans to receive this award. Fairbanks coach Pete Leonard introduced Daniels at the awards ceremony with the following story (slightly edited), shared with her permission.

Aly joined our club a year ago in the fall, after starting at the University of Alaska Fairbanks as a 17 year-old. She had competed in high school in the Western Interior Ski Association. She is primarily a middle-distance skier, second only to the distance. She has a big heart – her training log notes a hike – with a shotgun – to the Tundra, the wheels went flat after an outing or two, and she was left to run and bound on that one road, to run on the beach, ski, bike and do strength at the local school gym, and hike over the hills.

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The U.S. World Championships relay team: Jessie Diggins, Sadie Bjornsen, Liz Stephen and Kikkan Randall. Bjornsen and Randall were two of the six athletes representing APU as well as the U.S. at the 2017 World Championships in Lahti, Finland.
Super racing for America’s finest in Fairbanks

BY LEX TREINEN

Soft snow, spring sunshine and stomach bugs characterized the U.S. Spring Nationals and Supertour Finals held in Fairbanks from March 27-April 2 at the Birch Hill Recreation Center on the Jim Whisenhunt Trails.

“People are surprised to see the sun,” said Fairbanks native Becca Rorabaugh, a former National Champion who skis for APU Nordic Ski Center.

Everyone enjoyed the warm temperatures and reception. Patrick O’Brien is the head coach of Stratton Mountain School’s team, which includes Jessie Diggins, the world champion who swept all four races on the women’s side.

“Last time I was here was for JOs (JNs) in 2003, I knew what wind-briefs were but had no idea what lobster gloves were,” he said. “It’s nice to know that it can be warm here.”

Alaskans turned in top notch performances, with Logan Hanneman of APUNSC thrilling his hometown crowd to take his first ever national title, while his teammate Scott Patterson bagged his second national title in the 50km Skate, annihilating the field by 3 minutes and 20 seconds.

The APUNSC team also took second in an exciting battle with the SMS team in the mixed relay. It was APU’s first defeat in the event since it was created in the current format, but Alaskan competitors were complimentary of their rivals.

“It’s really good for the title to move around,” said Sadie Bjornsen, World Championship bronze medalist. Sadie and her brother Erik (as well as top contenders David Norris, Rosie Brennan, Simi Hamilton, Andrew Newell, Cole Morgan, Erika Flowers and more) missed out on at least one race due to nagging colds and stomach bugs.

Temperatures shot above freezing for the first time of the season in Fairbanks around mid-week, reaching nearly 50 degrees as racers experienced everything from slow, hard mid-winter conditions to sporadic rain during the 30/50K competition.

Throughout the competition there was effusive praise from the athletes for the volunteer commitment and race organization, led by Chief of Competition Jon Estle.

“It’s great skiing,” said two-time winner Scott Patterson. “I wish we came up here every spring.”

David Norris, another Fairbanks native complimented the summer trail work. “They’ll be some of the nicest trails we’ve skied on all year,” he said before the races. “Birch Hill has been really committed to development. I hope I can represent well.”

Estle turned attention back on the Fairbanks Nordic Ski Club volunteers and racers. “We don’t do this to make money,” he said before the races. “A lot of these volunteers have been watching these guys race since they were little. It is really important for them to be able to see these guys racing. It would be really great to see them get up on the podium this week.”

Learn more about the races and find results at supertourfinals.com and supertourfinals2017fairbanks.us.

What a wonderful winter we have had!

All of us at AMH would like to thank:

The Office Staff at the NSAA office for their efforts

The NSAA Groomers for all their efforts with snow-making, track setting, and summer maintenance

All the volunteers who without their help the races and events would not take place

The skiers who donated by buying Trail Pins which enable all us to have our wonderful trails

The various training groups, coaches and booster clubs

The MOA for their efforts in grooming trails

Our Customers.

Without your patronage AMH would not be successful
Skiers go the distance as the Marathon returns

BY DELAND ANDERSON

The Kachemak Nordic Ski Marathon, held on Saturday, March 11, was a great success. This annual event, hosted by Kachemak Nordic Ski Club, celebrates the backcountry beauty of Homer and its community spirit. Fifty volunteers were involved in recreating the traditional race, following a course that stretches 42 kilometers, from Lookout Mountain to Baycrest; 99 skiers tested themselves on this challenging route, the fastest of which skied the distance in just over 2 hours! Many participants came from out of town, including Anchor Point, Ninilchik, Kenai, Soldotna, Nikiski, Seward, Girdwood and Anchorage.

Everyone who started the race finished it, with a couple of exceptions.

Dylan Watts smiled his way through Milli’s Loop at the Kachemak Nordic Ski Marathon. Dylan won the 42K race in 2 hours 9 minutes, an amazing 13 minutes faster than the second place skier.

Deland and Christine Anderson look relaxed and ready for the 27K KNSC Marathon. You’d never guess that Deland was also the race coordinator.

(one skier broke a ski about 8K in and had to walk back to the start; another one could not resist the siren song of his sauna so he skied to it instead of to the finish) and one clarification of to the finish and one clarification (one participant got a snow machine assist up the most grueling hills by the sweeper).

By the after-party and awards ceremony, there were tales of spectacular crashes and equally spectacular saves, descriptions of flawless technique as well as portraits of flailing birds – had gone south. Maybe we should not have come.

Needless to say, an event like this would not be possible without a supportive club, dedicated and talented volunteers, the cooperation of landowners, and lots and lots of snow. As Marathon coordinator, I would like to express my gratitude to all who helped make it happen!

The KNSC decided not to groom on land that it didn’t own. The backcountry route was no longer maintained – but provided a vision.

A pril /M A y  2017

Looking at the Alaska winter and an amazing ski season! How great is that?

This was also a good season for events. The Wine & Cheese/Wooden Ski Tour included, for the first time in all its point-to-point glory (see Deland’s article), attracting almost 100 participants. The Sea to Ski was also back in all its point-to-point glory. Wine & Cheese/Wooden Ski Tour, Kevin & Jeannie Walker

Kachemak Nordic Ski Marathon

Deland Anderson

Sea to Ski Triathlon

Kevin & Jeannie Walker

Winter Backcountry Film Festival

Dan Del Misser

AROUND THE BAY

Finally … A cold and dark Alaska winter and an amazing Nordic ski season!

Last year, my husband and I – after 40 years in Alaska – talked seriously about becoming snowbirds. Not because we could no longer endure the winters, but because for three consecutive years, winter – like the birds – had gone south. Maybe we should follow.

I’m glad we didn’t. The skiing this season has been consistently pretty good since November, and the last couple of months have been exceptional. Lookout, Sunset and McNeil have been groomed to perfection, and for the first time in three years there were more skiers than walkers on Lower Baycrest.

Wolf Ridge, Milli’s Loop and the Marathon Connector enlarged our tightly looped trails, offering expanded mileage and big vistas. And pretty soon there will be miles and miles of crust skiing! How great is that?

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AROUND THE BAY, Page 12

Wolf Ridge Trail: Touring Homer’s backcountry

BY JEANNIE WOODRING

Did you ever wish for a ski trail that was easy to access yet took you far into the backcountry?

If you live in or visit Homer in the winter, you can find such a trail: the Wolf Ridge Trail that is accessed from two different trailheads (with parking lots) and winds through forests, hills and meadows in the area’s scenic backcountry.

Wolf Ridge lies in the hills behind the McNeil Canyon School and Eveline State Recreation Area (SRA) groomed trail systems. Access from the school follows a powerline path to the trail, which covers 6K. Half of the trail climbs a gentle curve to about 1,300 feet to give the awesome views that Homer skiing is known for. The other half of the trail drops down into a flat meadow trail that takes skiers through spruce forest and backcountry silence. Access to the lower half of Wolf Ridge also comes from a new connector trail that lies at the bottom of the Eveline trail system.

For years, Homer skiers have known the delights of skiing the nearby hills. Access, however, was never consistent. The Wolf Ridge Trail was started in 2013 by Nicky Szarzi, a longtime Homer resident, skier and trail groomer. She says that the roots for the trail began in the late 1990’s when some Kachemak Nordic Ski Club’s (KNSC) groomers who skied the backcountry began grooming a trail in the hills that connected to existing trails at McNeil and Eveline.

For insurance reasons, the KNSC decided not to groom on land that it didn’t own. The backcountry route was no longer maintained – but provided a vision.

See WOLF RIDGE TRAIL Page 10

Kathy Sanss-Irwin and Allison O’Hara, best friends and best dressed, are still smiling after completing 27 grueling hills at the Kachemak Nordic Ski Marathon.

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Ski Club, celebrates the backcountry event, hosted by Kachemak Nordic Ski Club, in recreating the traditional race.

Jennifer Edwards, Administrative Assistant

Caleb Rauch, Student Intern

COMMITTEES/EVENTS

Lookout Mountain Ski Trails

Mike Byrley

Lower Baycrest Ski Trails; Snowshoe Trails; Friday Night Lights; Grooming Equipment Dave Brann

Upper Baycrest Ski Trails; Marathon Trail Coordination Alan Parks

McNeil/Eveline Ski Trails Ginger Johnson (Chair) Derek Stonorov (McNeil Grooming) Dave Brann (Eveline Grooming)

Kachemak Nordic Ski Development; Ski Your Age; Bean Cup Races; Homer Epic 100

Jan Sparklund

Junior Nordic Carlin Rauch

Homer Women’s Nordic Stacey Buckelew

Webmaster Richard Burton

Alaska Nordic Skier Newsletter Marysia Burton

Snow Machine Maintenance Bill Hague

Trail Signs Jennifer Edwards

Winter Gear & Ski Swap Michelle Ripley

Kachemak Ski for Women & Haven House Kris Holdereid

Wine & Cheese/Wooden Ski Tour Kevin & Jeanne Walker

Kachemak Nordic Ski Marathon Deland Anderson

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See WOLF RIDGE TRAIL Page 10
GOOD RIDGE trail more accessible. In a day, Peter and another groomer, Konrad came from the McNeil Canyon Trails. dog mushing trails.

This winter, with a healthy snow cover, groomer Andrew Peter started moving parts of the trail away from the grooming on the Wolf Ridge Trail. This winter, with a healthy snow cover, he has new skate skis and regularly skis in Davos.

Thank you Chugiak High School ski program!

Ski the Beach: A fun-filled community race on a gorgeous Alaska day. Elite and beginner adult skiers joined with families and children of all ages for a great Ski the Beach event at Beach Lake trails. There were races from 1K to 15K for a variety of skiers. Beach music blared from a boom box. Kids and parents came dressed in beach garb adorned with leis. A great time was had by all.

Junior Nordic ends with a fantastic pizza party!

The energy was palpable as enthusiastic ER Junior Nordic kids and parents swarmed into the gym at the Chugiak Methodist Church to celebrate a great ski season and the beginning of spring. Pizzas were stacked in a long row and free swag there was as giveaways. Thanks to coaches and parents for a great season.

CERNSC plans annual meeting in the fall. The CERNSC board is planning to switch the CERNSC annual meeting to the fall. Look for emails about summer trail work opportunities and fall rental ski cleaning and waxing.

Big thanks to board members, coaches, Eagle River Parks and Rec employees and the groomers!

Eagle River skiers shine at national races. UAP skiier Sarissa Lammers earned All-America status at the recent NCAA Ski Championships in New Hampshire. The former Chugiak High skiier finished eighth in the women’s 15K freestyle race.

Eagle River’s Will Timmons, a senior at the University of Wyoming, won the men’s combined title at the U.S. Collegiate Ski Association National Championships in Bend, Oregon. Several Chugiak/Eagle River skiers were part of the Alaska Junior National Team.
Around the Valley

A special Nordic skiing season comes to a close

I usually have an association with the last issue of the Alaska Nordic Skier and Anchorage Road. That is because this time of year the valley is well into spring and the short snowpack is, well, absent. Thankfully, this season the trails at Government Peak Recreation Area are still in full swing. Just last week, we held the Race to the Outhouse at GPRA, sans outhouse (sorry race fans). GPRA has been good this year. Sure, we have actually had a winter, but a lot of credit needs to be given to our team of groomers. They’ve done an amazing job!

While this is the last issue for the season, the skiing opportunities should still exist when this lands in your inbox (or mailbox). The MSSC is planning on grooming Anchorage Road and Independence Mine area into May, as long as the snow plays along, which means you can stretch this season straight past break-up.

The end of the season is an important time for the club. It’s our chance to reflect on the season and our successes and challenges.

The biggest change that affected this season was light’s! Last fall, the planning and fundraising had been brought to fruition: 7K of lit trails. This improvement at GPRA has been a blessing for the after-work ski crowd, and also for our little skiers in Junior Nordic. Personally, I was used to skiing by myself on dark trails, usually by headlight, but this season brought out many late night skiers now that we don’t have to ski by braille. In fact, trail usage at GPRA is up substantially.

If you recall, this season did not start out great for our sport. Sustainable snow showed up late. In fact, our pinnacle race, the Iceicle Double, did not occur this season. It was a bit of a letdown, as this season the race was planned to ring in the New Year. The unfortunate (for the race, that is) cosmic twist was that the race was cancelled a couple days in advance since snow wasn’t on the ground and the forecast was grim, but the Friday before the scheduled event start found white flakes on the ground. Such is the attitude of Ullr.

Speaking of races, the club hosted a couple high school races, including the Matanuska and Susitna loops. Then, Daryl Farrens and Gene Backus went on to the Palmer High School ski team and work on maintaining. It started out with the trail’s “wind out,” and almost overnight the public to “toss branches and twigs off the trails,” we put paper signs at the trails we maintain. Following “wind events,” we put paper signs at the GPRA trail access points asking the public to “toss branches and twigs off the trails.”

As mentioned, the project is not fully funded. In the event we do not reach our funding goal, we will be forced to only construct a portion of the trails. Please help the Expand The Peak project and log on to our website to contribute. Here’s to seeing you out on the new trails next season!

Thank you to all Mat-Su trail maintainers!

This started out as a big thank you letter to all the volunteer trail groomers in the Mat-Su Ski Club until we quickly realized the web of volunteer stretches way beyond the groomers that lay down corduroy and classic tracks. It includes almost every person who recreates on the trails we maintain. Following “wind events,” we put paper signs at the GPRA trail access points asking the public to “toss branches and twigs off the trail,” and almost overnight the trails are cleaned up by individuals, families, the Colony, Palmer and Wasilla high school ski teams along with the kids in the Junior Nordic program. Great ski trails start with clean snow. Thank you one and all.

The snow fell, and fell, and fell some more. Club members had over 172 documented hours that month alone. Countless other skiers and walkers on the Pioneer Loop helped by tossing twigs and branches off the trails. Thank you!

Thank you to our grooming crew: Ashley Wise, Jeff Kase, Josh Hejl, Mark Strabel, Zack Steer, Mark Stigar, Ed Strabel, Gene Backus, Shane Barber, “Billy’s Dad” and the unnamed grooming fairies at the Moose Range. Your dedication and long hours grooming in the cold dark is appreciated by the countless skiers that enjoyed the fruits of your labor.

Finally, thank you to George Perry, the ski club “field dentist,” who restored several teeth on the Anchorage Road Ginzu Groomer with his portable welder and to the mechanics at Tool Doctor. Israel Hale and his crew kept our equipment running well and gave us a high priority on getting our machines serviced and repaired so we could keep all the trails in great shape.

The club’s team of groomers will continue to groom at GPRA, the Moose Range, Anchorage Road and Independence Mine until the summer sun rots out the snow. We hope to groom until sometime in June. Then, we will be back and grooming in October.

OK, one final “Thank You!”

Additionally, the club started its first race series, the Northern Lights Race Series, on Wednesday nights. Seven races were held this season. It was a great addition to the club’s offerings, allowing members to fit in a hard workout during the week, and/or track their improvements through the season. It’s a program that will really grow in the coming years.

Another group that continues growing is our Junior Nordic program, with over 300 kids participating this season. The steering committee and volunteers have transformed this group into a highly sought-after opportunity. A number of seasons ago, Junior Nordics started experiencing substantial growth and the steering committee has made great strides in making all aspects of the program efficient, while still keeping the component that is the most important: ensuring kids have fun.

Finally, the club put on its first end-of-season event, a fundraiser and volunteer of the year celebration. There was live music from Wandering River (which was great), happy/malty beverages from Arkose Brewery (which was also great) and a smorgasbord put together by the board’s very own Lucas Parker (which was fantastical). This season the club recognized its volunteer of the year, Ed Strabel, who we cannot say enough about in regards to his commitment to the club from its infancy to present. Music and dancing continued on into the wee hours (10 p.m. is late for some of us). The fundraiser was a success, raising over $2,000 for the Expand The Peak project. The club looks forward to holding this event again. Thanks to all the attendees and our event sponsors: Backcountry Bike and Ski, Pioneer Motel, Arkose Brewery and Sportsman’s Warehouse.

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January was a wild month in trail maintaining. It started out with the Palmer High School ski team and Daryl Farrens and Gene Backus going around the trails shoveling snow onto thin spots on the trail followed by the Hanestad family raking the Matanusa and Susitna loops. Then the snow fell, and fell, and fell some more. Club members had over 172 documented hours that month alone. Countless other skiers and walkers on the Pioneer Loop helped by tossing twigs and branches off the trails. Thank you!

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OK, one final “Thank You!”
All good in Girdwood after successful season

BY DEB ESSEX

Well, that’s a wrap! What a great winter for cross-country skiing, walking, skiing, snowshoeing, and biking in Girdwood. As we look forward to all the crust skiing, we also look back over the past six months and say, “Thanks!”

Thanks to October’s first groomer, Tim Charnon, who always packs the first snowfall for us as we train the new groomers. We have a solid group of about 12 steady groomers that rotate to groom with snow machines. Girdwood can be a tough and soggy place to groom. I am constantly impressed at the beautiful multi-use trails created by such a dedicated group. That being said, this year’s winner of the best snow machine sitzmark goes to … Peter Zug! Peter is a fantastic groomer – so if he can get stuck, anyone can. (Thank you Justin Thomas for helping dig.) Thanks also to Kyle Kelley with Girdwood Parks and Recreation for keeping our tanks full of fuel, and coordinating maintenance with Shane Bowlin.

Thanks to the community members for celebrating in December at our annual Solstice Celebration. We will continue to build this event to kick off the holidays, as we give our regards to Ullr.

Thanks to Alyeska Resort for packing down the heavy snow in January and February to help us host a day of the UAA Seawolf Invitational. About 100 skiers from 16 teams raced around the Nordic Loop bringing the first Nordic national competition to Girdwood since 1969. No way we could have pulled this off without Lin Hinderman and team of groomers Peter Zug and Jim Braham.

Thanks to Ari Stiassny and briana Sullivan for creating fun March event – Stumpy’s Annual Snowball Biathlon and Sking Jamboree. Without a doubt the most fun event to watch. Although there wasn’t an AK Skimeister event this year, stay tuned in future years for it to re-surface in some form. We will not be hosting the Alyeska Run this summer. A new spicer race has taken the place of the Alyeska Run, and we welcome the Discrete Nordic Loop.

The turnout for the Seawolf Invitational was big and festive.

Peak Series Race on August 12 to bring some excitement to Max’s and Alyeska Mountain. You can find more information on the Alyeska Resort website.

And of course, thank you to all of the members and donors helping support our mission and grooming efforts. You motivate us to keep creating outdoor spaces to ski and play, so kids can dream like our hometown-girl (U.S. National Champion, 13th at Finland’s World Cup) Chelsea Holmes.

And lastly, thanks to everyone who participated in our trail survey. Our summer plans will be to continue discussing our proposal for a new trails system in the Girdwood valley. The wetlands are a fantastic place to ski … when there is over two feet of snow and it’s dry. So we are proposing another forest loop to connect more trails in the valley. We also look forward to working with the Girdwood Mountain Bike Alliance as they build trails around the Nordic Loop. The future looks as fun as this past winter! See you on the trails.

AROUND THE BAY
Continued from Page 9

the race was canceled, and the year before that it included a run, a longer bike ride, and a run on the beach carrying a ski!

On the program side, Junior Nordics had a record year, attracting over 100 5-to-12-year-old happy, energetic, mostly fearless skiers. Looking down on the Lookout trails from the road on a sunny, Saturday afternoon when classes were in session, the kids, parents and coaches looked like ants, scurrying everywhere, from the flat Hayfields to the steepest Phelps’ Pholly and Double Cross hills. Homer Women’s Nordic also continues to be very popular, bringing more women into the program each year. This season, HWN sponsored Holly Brooks, who taught classes both to HWN members and to the general skiing community.

These two programs – Junior Nordics and HWN – are great ambassadors for Nordic skiing in general and for KNSC in particular.

None of this would have happened, though, without our heroic groomers. With the exception of some snocat grooming that we occasionally contract out at McNeil and Wolf Ridge, KNSC trails are groomed by unpaid volunteers using equipment paid for by KNSC (that would be you, dear members). They are a hardworking and eclectic group – sharing a common vision (great ski trails!), speaking a common language (snow-glish), and taking particular pride in their own territory. Fair enough. I ski and enjoy all of their trails. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Speaking of which – knowing which trails have been groomed and when gets a whole lot easier this season with the addition of trail cams and real-time tracking, both of which are linked from the KNSC website. It’s not perfect. The tracking equipment is only mounted on one machine at each area, so any grooming done by other machines doesn’t show up. But it’s a big step up, and it’s become part of my morning routine. Stumble from bed, feed the cats, get a cup of coffee, log into the computer and pull up the KNSC real-time grooming report to see where the best skiing is to be found today.

What else to wrap up this season? Oh yes – a big thank you to the program and event coordinators, coaches, registration crew, Limers, bib minders, refreshment providers, party organizers, and KNSC board. A huge army of volunteers. If you missed your chance to volunteer this season, there will more opportunities next season. And thanks to our business sponsors, big and small, whether they contribute money, event prizes, or in-kind contributions. It’s a long list, but this year’s major sponsors are: Bear Creek Winery & Lodging; Ulmer’s Drug and Hardware; Homer Saw and Cycle; Fritz Creek General Store; and The Grog Shop. Give these folks your business.

That’s it. I’m done. Really done. I am happy – thrilled! – to turn over the local Nordic Skier editor hat to Jeannie Woodring (see Jeannie’s Wolf Ridge article). Jeannie not only has enthusiasm and fresh ideas, she has actual talent and did this sort of thing for a living! Imagine that.

See you on the ski trails – or out the road chasing crust!

– By Marylou Burton

KACHEMAK

The future looks as fun as this past winter! See you on the trails.

Check out the start of Stumpy’s Biathlon Race.
Board oversees sponsorships, Distance Nationals, skier safety

BY ERIC TROYER

The business of the Board of Directors is critical to keeping NSCF programs running. Here are some of the issues that the board, with help from staff and volunteers, has currently been dealing with:

- Examining a current club technology grant and figuring out how to use it to pay for the new website.
- Working on a club injury/incident policy so that responses to incidents and injuries are handled in a uniform way. The club will coordinate with the Nordic Ski Patrol.
- Overseeing Junior Nordics Coordinator Sally Endestad, who has added a UAF spring session this season in addition to organizing coaches’ appreciate barbecue, helping organize a coaches’ training session, and ironing out online registration problems.
- Coordinating the many parts of NSCF’s online presence, including the website, Wild Apricot’s membership management service, credit card payments, and the club’s weather page.
- Investigating ways to work with the borough to improve the accuracy in the Birch Hill Cross Country Ski Center, including the website, Wild Apricot’s membership management service, credit card payments, and the club’s weather page.

A good question can trouble the dreams of skiers at this time of year: How to maintain our skills and fitness once the snow is gone?

For an answer I turned to a pair of women who teach and train skiers all year long. Kathy Bue heads up adult lessons for the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks. Maria Bray teaches some of those classes; and the pair also offers classes through Alaska Health and Fitness. Here is what they suggest:

Skiers can stay “skier fit” during the summer in a variety of ways. The single most important thing to do is to stay physically active, by regularly participating in an activity/sport you enjoy and are able to do outside. OK, outside isn’t that important but highly recommended for the skier’s mental health. Movement is the key.

There is a great variety of activities in Fairbanks for anyone who wants to stay active. Rollerski classes, strength classes, learn to run or run faster classes, soccer, cycling, swimming, you name it, we have it here in Fairbanks. Some of the best-kept secrets to stay “skier fit” in the summer are not advertised.

For more information on summer ideas or where to find programs, contact NSCFAdultLessons@gmail.com.

I also sought out the head wrangler for the SCUM training group, Susan Sugai. She swims, even during the winter when conditions make skiing challenging. For her, laps in the pool serve as a good complement to striding or skating on ski trails.

“Swimming is a great core exercise and the added resistance of the water works the entire body,” she says. In the summer she competes in triathlons, which introduce biking and running into the mix, and giving variety to the insults to which an aging body is subjected. Susan is also a strong believer in entering races as a way to say focused.

“They can be a motivator, she explains. “It gets you out the door when the birch pollen or mosquitoes are bad.”

Besides triathlons, the big event Susan aims for each summer is the Equinox Marathon. Traditionally she takes the Ester Dome leg, competing in the relay event with two other racers.

An excellent way to keep abreast of all the summer events and races is to join running or biking clubs. You can get a complete list of track and trail training runs and races at Running Club North. For bicyclists there is Fairbanks Club Cycling. In fact, many SCUM exchange ski Lynca for padded spandex shorts and aim for the Chena Hot Springs Bicycle Classic, traditionally held in late June.

So, though snow is largely absent, summer is far from the skiing season:

Parking lot expansion planned for Birch Hill this summer

BY ERIC TROYER

More dirt work is planned for Birch Hill Recreation Area this summer. Last summer, Birch Hill Recreation Area saw major changes with new trails built (Sunnyside and Cliffsidée), modifications made to existing trails, and construction of a new equipment building.

This summer the borough plans to expand the parking area. The Parks and Recreation Department of the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) received a grant to add another parking lot to the south of the existing parking lot. The existing parking spaces are being filled to capacity during high-attendance days and events, such as on nice Sundays (when many independent skiers are out and several NSCF programs are in session), and big events like the Fairbanks Besh Cup races and Junior Nationals. Birch Hill is also getting busier in summer.

The new parking lot will take over the space now used by the terrain garden. A new terrain garden is being planned to replace the old one. At last report, the new garden will be nestled between legs of the Warm Up Loop with barrier trees left standing so that the trail will still retain its woody feel.

The reality of the situation is that Birch Hill has become far more popular than anyone could have imagined when it opened in the mid-1970s. That’s good, but the growing pains are sometimes awkward, so the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks is working closely with the FNSB to make things work as smoothly as possible.

Staying skier fit during the summer season

BY ROBERT HANNON

March’s abundant daylight and relatively warm temperatures offer Fairbanks skiers the opportunity to indulge in pure Nordic skiing pleasure. It is the rich desert outside isn’t that important but highly needed to stay physically active, by regularly participating in an activity/sport you enjoy and are able to do outside.

OK, outside isn’t that important but highly recommended for the skier’s mental health. Movement is the key.

There is a great variety of activities in Fairbanks for anyone who wants to stay active. Rollerski classes, strength classes, learn to run or run faster classes, soccer, cycling, swimming, you name it, we have it here in Fairbanks. Some of the best-kept secrets to stay “skier fit” in the summer are not advertised.

For more information on summer ideas or where to find programs, contact NSCFAdultLessons@gmail.com.

I also sought out the head wrangler for the SCUM training group, Susan Sugai. She swims, even during the winter when conditions make skiing challenging. For her, laps in the pool serve as a good complement to striding or skating on ski trails.

“Swimming is a great core exercise and the added resistance of the water works the entire body,” she says. In the summer she competes in triathlons, which introduce biking and running into the mix, and giving variety to the insults to which an aging body is subjected. Susan is also a strong believer in entering races as a way to say focused.

“They can be a motivator, she explains. “It gets you out the door when the birch pollen or mosquitoes are bad.”

Besides triathlons, the big event Susan aims for each summer is the Equinox Marathon. Traditionally she takes the Ester Dome leg, competing in the relay event with two other racers.

An excellent way to keep abreast of all the summer events and races is to join running or biking clubs. You can get a complete list of track and trail training runs and races at Running Club North. For bicyclists there is Fairbanks Club Cycling. In fact, many SCUM exchange ski Lynca for padded spandex shorts and aim for the Chena Hot Springs Bicycle Classic, traditionally held in late June.

So, though snow is largely absent, summer is far from the skiing season.
Season in review: So many thanks to give, so little space

BY ERIC TROYER

Lots of snow and lots of new stuff. It's been a busy season for the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks!

Lots of “late” snow
Fairbanks seemed destined for another grim snow season through late December. We were again singing the praises of the magic our groomers can do with just a little snow. Then a storm blew in and gave us almost more while blessings than we knew what to do with. Some events even had to be rescheduled because the snow. January gave us cold temps, forcing more rescheduled events, but it also gave us a lot more snow than normal. Not to be outdone, February gave us almost twice as much snow as normal. We adjusted and started singing the praises of the magic our groomers can do with a lot of snow. We can’t say it enough. Thank you, groomers! And thank you to all who donate to the Birch Hill Trail Fund!

New trails, big event
All that snow gave us lots of opportunities to ski on the new Sunnyside and Cliffsides trails built last summer. They also allowed us to check out improvements made to the existing trails for better grooming and – drum roll – the USA Distance Nationals, which were held in late March. Thank you to all who helped with the trails and the race!

New personnel
In summer 2016, we welcomed two new NSCF-FXC assistant coaches: Hilary Saucy and Alisdair Tutt. They’ve been doing an outstanding job, continuing the impressive success that NSCF-FXC head coach Pete Leonard created. As the season began, we welcomed Fairbanksan and former Olympian Aelin Peterson as the club’s new sponsorship coordinator. She quickly got to work creating a new club-wide sponsorship plan, touching base with our existing partners and reaching out to new ones. Our popular programs rely on the continuing support of these incredible partners to help keep the wheels turning. Thank you to all the ski club staff and our community partners for helping build another successful season!

New race directors
Two NSCF race series got new directors this season. Trax Outdoor Center took over the Wednesday Night Races from Ken Leary, who decided to step back, though he is still helping out. Ross MacDougall took over the Buetoet Dental Distance Series from NSCF Race Director John Estle, who is reducing his duties as he slowly moves toward retirement. Thanks to all our race directors for the many incredible races put on each season!

NSCF-FXC gets a van and trailer
FXC, the junior race-training program of NSCF, got a new van thanks to a generous grant from the Rasmussen Foundation, impressive donations from FXC parents and others, and funding from the NSCF Special Projects Fund. The board and club personnel have also worked hard to make sure continuing costs of the van and trailer, such as insurance, aren’t drawn from general ski club funds. The FXC program travels a lot locally and across the state throughout the year, so the van and trailer will help the program function more smoothly and provide opportunities to some participants who might otherwise have declined. Thank you to all who helped make this possible!

Spreading the word
Our board created a new Outreach Committee, which will help spread the word about the advantages of staying active in the winter months through the sport of cross-country skiing. Our board also joined in a chorus of protests against a proposal to cut the University of Alaska ski teams. Those protests were successful, but UA is still facing tough budget cuts, so the future of all the sports teams is still up in the air. Thanks to the board and everyone who spoke up for the UA programs!

Impressive Junior Nationals showing
Fairbanks was represented by 13 local skiers at the Junior Nationals, which were held in upstate New York. These incredible young athletes put in some outstanding performances and helped Team Alaska reach the podium several times. Thank you all for making us proud!

Website woes and wins
A hacking attack took down the NSCF website for a few days early in the season. NSCF member John Schauer helped get us back online, but the incident added impetus to something the board has known for a while: the club needs a new website. Volunteers had been slowly working on a new website, but things just weren't coming together. The board finally decided to contract with local web developer to build a new website. John also has helped keep the Birch Hill weather station up and running despite some software problems. Thanks much, John!

Volunteers are our lifeblood
Finally, thank you to all the many volunteers who help make this club so successful. We have a ton of events that help people stay active throughout the winter, including races, tours, lessons and socials. Unfortunately, we don’t have enough room here to list all even the events much less the people who helped make them happen. Please know how much we appreciate you!

around the interior
Help NSCF By Going Shopping
You can earn donations from Fred Meyer to the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks just by shopping at Fred Meyer with your Rewards Card. Fred Meyer will donate $2.5 million to nonprofits in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington annually through this program. To find out how to help see tinyurl.com/npmcles.

Podcast features Fairbanks skiing legends
Fairbanks radio journalist Robert Hannon interviews Fairbanks personalities on his regular podcast. His interviews have included Fairbanks cross-country skiing legends John Estle and “Bad” Bob Baker, as well as other locals and visitors. Learn more about the podcasts at northernsoundings.com.

Beyond Birch – Angel Creek Valley Trails
Birch Hill is an incredible trail system for cross-country skiing, but there are many other places to ski in the Fairbanks area. With a good snowpack and warm temperatures, spring skiing in the interior can be great! The Chena River State Recreation Area has many great trails species in summer and winter. The Angel Creek Valley trails offer out-and-backs or, in winter, loops. The winter trail is in the valley. It's too wet for summer, but it makes for a great ski in winter. There are areas of overflow that you need to navigate. The hillside trail is open summer and winter (but avoid it in early spring when it's muddy). Winter winds can sometimes cause drifting, so be on the lookout. The trails go to two public use cabins, so you can plan a day trip or an overnight. The two trails meet at each cabin, so in winter you can make a loop trip.

• Check out a map of the trails: dnr.alaska.gov/Assets/uploads/ DNRPublic/parks/maps/ anglecreekhilltrail.pdf
• Look into reserving the cabins: dnr.alaska.gov/parks/cabin/index

Skate skiing on snowmachine trails?
Fairbanks Daily News-Miner Outdoors Editor Sam Friedman heard about local skiers using mini skate skis on snowmachine trails, so he decided to give it a try. Sam isn’t a fan, but he talked to others who like them. Read about it at newsminer. com/features/outdoors/review-tiny- skate-ski-was-vertt-of-both-worlds/article_098af198-0544-11e7-8580-f3f31339e1e6.html.

Skiing (and other sports) keeps depression at bay
Well, we probably already knew this, but it's nice that it's now backed up by science. Check out the article “Active Kids Less Likely to Be Depressed Later” at tinyurl.com/ jnnkbnx.

Adventure on skis! Backyard playing with fatbikes and packrafts during breakup
Ok, so this article doesn’t include skis, but you could do this on skis. This is a “silly idea” that Fairbanksan Heath Sandall had about combin- ing some fatbiking and packrafting in April. So, if there's enough snow left on the ground when the creeks start flowing (and you can get your hands on a packraft), consider try- ing to recreate Heath and Audrey’s...
The Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks thanks our fantastic sponsors

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NSCF-FXC helps build strong skiers all year long:
New season starts in May

The year-round program for NSCF-FXC starts in late May, but the early registration deadline is May 1. FXC (Fairbanks Cross Country) is the junior race-training program for the Nordic Ski of Fairbanks. The goal of the NSCF-FXC is to provide a full-service training program for young cross-country skiers. The program provides a progression of developmentally appropriate training and competition opportunities where skiers are continually challenged to grow and develop as athletes and young people.

While NSCF-FXC is an outlet for a greater competitive experience, the program also uses skiing to help young people grow in a healthy social environment and learn what can be accomplished with long-term dedication and focus. NSCF-FXC aims to provide a training environment that is focused but also fun, challenging but energizing.

The program is split into three levels:

JR. DEVO TEAM
An introductory race team for skiers ages 9-14 that focuses on sharing up technical skills while introducing basic training concepts and the social aspect of being part of a team.

PREP TEAM
A team geared toward middle school students (ages 11-15) with the goal of refining technique and building fitness in preparation for a smooth transition to high school, regional and national level junior racing.

COMP TEAM
A full-service junior ski program for high school and past graduate athletes whose goals range from making their school’s varsity team to success on the world stage.

For more information, see the program’s page on the NSCF-FXC website (nscanfairbanks.org). Go to Programs > NSCF-FXC.

By Frank Soos

On doing stupid stuff

I’d done this tour a couple of times, and I thought I knew the course and its pitfalls: a long climb up to a section of the Alyeska pipeline corridor, then along the ridge for a while, then down a long descent that could be wicked fast, but on this day was easily skiable. Then along a well-used bit of trail where four-wheeler damage and low snow meant this time we were mostly skiing in a rut or with one ski in a rut and one on the high ground in the middle.

Then, as our trip leader, fellow SCUM Mike Schmoker, had warned us, we encountered a huge section of overflow cascading over the trail. It wasn’t just its length — what was it, maybe 40 or 50 feet? — but it was the length of the traverse caused by the cascade. We got through most of it by hanging onto willow scrub at the bottom of the overflow, but then came to the final section where it was pretty much overflow and our skins. Mike went first and fell pretty hard. Right behind him, I thought I’d try a different route and fell pretty hard myself. The others got through fully upright.

I landed on my funny bone, so when I finally got to my feet and scrambled off the ice, I could feel that numbing wan that comes with a good hit on the elbow. It was only after the wrench wore off that I realized my hand had taken a harder hit. I’ll call that one a yow. It really hurt, and my skin had iced up, too. With only a quarter of a mile or so back to our vehicles, though, I skied on. Of course, there was no other choice. Oh well, things like this do happen when you get out in the country on skis or snowshoes or plain old feet. Things like this happen when you’re on a bike — fat, road, or mountain — when you’re in a canoe or kayak or wading a river to fish.

I’m not advocating for an “Into the Wild” kind of foolishness here, a kind of oafish derring-do based on some notion that providence will keep an eye out for us. I’m just thinking about the things that can go wrong even when a person is reasonably fit, has some skills and is among skilled friends. Things can still go haywire from time to time.

I’m saying we all want to keep putting ourselves out there. This might be a good time for every reader to make a short catalogue of the bruises, broken bones, stitches and knocks on the head we’ve all had our share of while getting out in the world and celebrating our animal selves. Because I sometimes worry that, for myself, I might be tempted to Draw back after an injury, to take fewer risks, in other words to stop doing stupid stuff.

Some years ago, when my pal Dave Musgrave and I were grinding up the steep grade of Spinach Creek Road on our road bikes headed to the road where we once lived, I said, “What will we do when we can’t do this anymore?” “I don’t know, play checkers, I guess,” Musgrave told me. Neither of us is playing checkers yet, and I hope it will be decades before we reach that level.

When I got home from that little ski tour, I showered and held my still throbbing hand in the warm water to no avail. Then I took a nifty little ice pack from the freezer — the same ice pack I’d been given for participating in the Sportif ride of the Tour of Fairbanks bike race. I recalled that year: The weather abruptly turned, and we found ourselves riding into a head-wind driving a mix of rain and hail. By the time I got back to the start I was nearly hypothermic. I put the ice pack on my hand, while recollecting another stupid moment, and said to myself: Promise me you won’t stop doing stupid stuff. And I answered: I promise I won’t stop doing stupid stuff.

Writer Frank Soos is the 2014-16 Alaska State Writer Laureate, Professor Emeritus of English at University of Alaska Fairbanks, an NSCF member, and a SCUM
April/May 2017  STATEWIDE

Don’t ruin your skis in the off-season

BY RILEY TROYER

Do you want to ruin your skis and poles? Surely you don’t, but some people do just that by not caring for their equipment in the off-season. A set of skis and poles can easily last several decades if properly stored. But those same skis and poles, if neglected, might last just a couple seasons. Don’t shell out $1,000 on new equipment only to find it damaged beyond repair the next year.

Skis and poles are highly susceptible to damage during the off-season. Skis can get shoved into the shed or stuffed into a corner of the garage and forgotten for months. During this time, dust can build up on surfaces, bases can get scratched and poles can be broken. Take these simple steps at the end of the season to eliminate problems.

Clean your bases

To prepare skis for summer, the bases should be cleaned well. First, scrape off any kick wax and apply a wax remover to the entire base, for both classic and skate skis. Wipe off the wax remover with a paper towel and brush the skis with a metal brush to remove any leftover dirt and wax remover residue.

Apply storage wax

Next, apply a liberal amount of glide wax to the entire ski base to protect the bases from dust and scratches. Wax choice is important. The amount of fluoro in the wax doesn’t matter; however, I tend to go with a fluoro-free wax. However, the hardness of the wax does make a difference. If the wax is too hard it can become brittle on the ski base and flake off. If it is too soft, sharp objects will easily scrape into it. A good midrange wax is the way to go, something like Toko NP Red, Swix CH7 or similar. After the wax is applied, run the iron down the ski a couple more times to ensure the wax is properly heated into the base.

Protect your skis and poles

Finally, strap your skis together with ski ties or tape and place them in a ski bag, if available. For storing poles I like to buy a cheap plastic tube, maybe six or so inches in diameter from the hardware or plumbing supply store. Place your poles inside to protect them from any sort of blunt force. Following these steps will allow your equipment to stay safe during the summer so that it is ready to pull out and take to the trails once the snow starts to fall again.

Riley TROYER is a student at University of Alaska Fairbanks, an employee at Goldstream Sports and a Fairbanks-area ski and bike racer.

Koyuk Invitational Ski and Biathlon Meet turns 40

BY KEITH CONGER

Nome Ski and Biathlon, Head Coach Western Interior Ski and Biathlon, President

What do cellular mobile phone systems, the Garfield comic strip and ski and biathlon racing in Koyuk, Alaska, have in common? They all debuted in 1978.

Young athletes from 10 rural Alaskan sites gathered March 2-4 for the 40th annual Koyuk Invitational Ski and Biathlon Meet. The event was attended by public school students from as far west as St. Lawrence Island, as far east as Galena, as far north as Shishmaref, and as far south as Bethel.

Koyuk is a small, picturesque village tucked deep inside Norton Sound on the Bering Sea Coast. The Koyuk Invitational has been a fixture there since Alaska Cross Country Ski Hall of Fame member John Miles introduced the sport to Western Alaska four decades ago.

Due to a double-whammy blizzard that brought unseasonably warm, 30 degree temperatures and over 10 inches of snow to the Bering Straits region, the meet had been postponed until the late 70’s.

Flight services were unable to bring some teams to Koyuk until late in the afternoon. That pushed the race start time to nearly 5:30 p.m. At one point, all the 5th-12th grade participants were on the narrow, one-mile loop at the same time. The course didn’t look much different from when Miles and fellow Ski Hall of Fame member Jim Mahaffey carved out the trail in the late 70’s.

According to Unalakleet head coach Nancy Persons, the sun had set and the shadows had lengthened considerably by the time the last skiers crossed the finish line. The darkened race conclusion caused Koyuk ski vet erans to reminisce about the lighting system the innovative and energetic Miles had once created around the Koyuk trails.

On Friday, one of the most unique biathlon races in all of Alaska was conducted. According to members of the Alaska Biathlon Association, 66 racers made the Koyuk event the largest participatory biathlon race in Alaska this year. This distinction is typically held each ski season by a rural biathlon event: either the Koyuk Invitational, the Bering Strait School District Meet or the Western Interior Ski Association Championships.

After a morning of safety clinics and rifle training, entrants braved sub-zero weather for one shooting bout of five shots sandwiched between two loops of skiing. Since the Koyuk biathlon is introductory in nature, no racers carried rifles. Each lane was manned by a trained assistant who helped competitors shoot at “open,” 4.5-inch targets from the prone position. Junior high skiers were allowed to use a rest.

“The distances aren’t overwhelming. The course is not that technical, so Koyuk is the perfect place for new skiers,” said Persons.

The Koyuk Invitational is an important cog in the development of rural competitors. It has led to Western Alaskan skiers and biathletes performing on the national stage. Former Unalakleet racer Alyeska Daniels, who competed at the 2017 XC Junior National Championships in Lake Placid in early March, started her race career at the Koyuk Invitational in 2008.
Dan Bosch remembers the early NSAA Junior Nordic days. “We met as one big group, at either Kincaid or Russian Jack,” he said. In fact, back then, Hillside wasn’t even a designated Junior Nordic site. That was over 20 years ago. Dan was the first site director for Hillside. For the Hillside Tuesday/Thursday Group, Dan is the only site director they’ve ever had and still is today.

When Dan’s parents gave him a pair of cross-country skis for Christmas, he was hooked. He started skiing back in the early 1970’s, growing up in Western New York where there was plenty of area to ski but only a few areas that were groomed. Dan came to Alaska in 1975 to attend UAF and has lived here ever since. Dan and his wife raised their son and daughter in the Junior Nordic program; both went on to ski in middle and high school.

Dan’s favorite part of Junior Nordic is “watching brand new skiers going from not being able to stand up on skis to becoming pretty competent classical skiers during their first year of skiing.” For two decades, Dan has coached because he believes teaching kids to be active is the most important outcome of Junior Nordics. Dan also believes it is important to teach that anyone can ski in most conditions. Groomed trails aren’t required; bushwhacking and backcountry skiing is fun, too.

Dan’s success is seen years later when many of his original Polar Cubs come back and coach for him, continuing the legacy of teaching and modeling active and healthy living through Nordic skiing. Dan’s advice to parents: “Always use the same technique your child is using. If your child is a beginner, always classical ski with them.” From Dan’s experience, kids want to skate ski before they master classical and this inhibits their development as a skier. Any skier can become a fairly good skate skier in the course of a year, but it takes a lifetime to master the classical technique. This is sound advice from an experienced and credible source!

John Hemmeter began coaching over 10 years ago, first working with new skiers in the Municipal- ity of Anchorage’s afterschool and “little Nordic” programs. A few years later, he initially joined NSAA’s Junior Nordic as a “fill in” coach but he stepped into a much needed role as the Polar Cub head coach a short time later. Five years ago, John became one of our site directors, a critical Junior Nordic position. He hasn’t looked back since, giving the kids credit for keeping him balanced and light-hearted.

As a teenager, John’s skiing experience started in alpine, working at a ski resort in Ohio. John was drawn to Alaska and worked in the tourism industry at Denali Park. Like many, he fell in love with Alaska and never left. With backcountry adventure guide experience and a personal interest in sea kayaking, fishing, hiking and hiking, becoming a Nordic ski coach seemed like a natural progression. John had a passion to share the love of the outdoors and teaching others, especially kids. John began teaching recreational and wilderness skills at local summer camps and outdoor programs. Teaching evolved to coaching, and the rest is history! Perspective and experience definitely influence each of us, and John is no exception. Having worked on the NSAA Operations team for close to four years grooming and doing year-round trail maintenance, John understands the bigger picture of this skiing community more than most. Because of this experience, he instills passion and appreciation for quality trails to those he coaches. John uses a unique coaching strategy that works well with his ski groups, giving them a set of challenges and letting the kids decide if they are up for it. John’s calm voice and easy going nature provides a safe and fun environment where kids ramble on about video games, connect and have fun. John says, “It’s hilarious listening to them. Those kids are learning and they don’t even realize it.”

As a busy graduate student today, John sees Junior Nordic as a reason to be outside and stay active, especially stressful days. John recently finished his anthropology degree at UAA and is currently working on his masters. On the coldest, darkest days, he many times dreams the task of coaching, but after being outside with the kids, he never has any regrets. They remind him of why he does it, why he gives so much of his time and energy to the Junior Nordic program, instilling a love for the outdoors through Nordic skiing one challenge at a time.

Alaska Guardsmen bring home gold from National Guard biathlon championships

BY STAFF SGT. BALINDA O’NEAL DRESEL

The Alaska National Guard Biathlon Team brought home several gold medals from the 2017 Chief of the National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championships at Camp Ethan Allen Training Site, Jericho, VT, held March 5-9.


The Alaska Guardsmen received a first place trophy for winning every team event and had the opportunity to meet Chief of the National Guard Bureau Gen. Joseph L. Lengyel as he presented the winning racers and teams with their medals.

Nakada received first in the men’s sprint and second in men’s pursuit races. Darrow, the newest member of the team, took first in the junior men’s sprint race and second in the junior men’s pursuit race behind Cooper who claimed first.