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the ALASKA nordic skier

MARCH 2017, VOL.18, NO.6

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ANCHORAGE 2
Time to Tour.
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STATEWIDE 7
Spring brings America's
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FAIRBANKS 14
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Anchorage Nordic Skier
Newsletter Of The Nordic Skiing Association Of Anchorage, Inc.

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NSAA Operations report: Winter! Snow! Grooming! Skiing!

BY NSAA OPERATIONS TEAM

It feels like we've reunited with an old friend – it's great to have winter back in Alaska! Everyone seems giddy with the skiing this season and the trails are in excellent condition. The NSAA groomers are busier than ever with a healthy race schedule full of citizen, high school, middle school and biathlon events and regular maintenance grooming. Not to mention the old faithful Tour of Anchorage that didn't quite die over the last few years, but was forced to kick back and relax a little on the Snowmaking Loop at Kincaid Park, sporting a Hawaiian shirt while soaking in the hot tub, no less. But not this season! We are expecting the full Tour and the groomers have gathered, are ironing out the logistics and will make every effort to put down the best course possible. Good luck to all participating and enjoy the trails!

Learn more about the NSAA Operations team's work and Anchorage-area trails and grooming at **www.anchoragenordicski.com;** visit the new Trails Report.

AROUND THE BOWL

Ready for the Tour? Still time to sign up!

It's not too late to register for the 2017 Tour of Anchorage, which hits the trails on Sunday, March 5! There are four race events this year: 25K, 40K and 50K freestyle races and a 25K classic race. This year we are celebrating 100 years of racing in Anchorage – our town's first recorded race was March 3, 1917.

Sign-up options include:

• Online at **tourofanchorage.com** by Wednesday, March 1, to be seeded in the race.

• In person at bib pick-ups: noon-7 p.m. Friday, March 3, at APU Moseley Center; and 10 a.m.-noon Saturday, March 4, at APU Moseley Center

Come for the cheer and beer at the finish! Food and craft beverages provided for racers of all ages by 49th State Brewing Co. of Anchorage. There will also be games and terrain for spectators and food available for purchase.

Pull an all-nighter of fun at SKAN 24

SKAN (Ski Kincaid All Night) 24 is on! The race is schedule for March 25-26; register online and learn more

PHOTO BY **ADDY WRIGHT**

A young skier shows off old school classic skills at the recent Sven

now at www.anchoragenordicski.com/races/skan-24/.

Tip your cups to AMH Anchorage Cup's top skiers

The 2016-2017 AMH Anchorage Cup race series was outstanding! With this winter's extraordinary snowfall, we had some phenomenal race conditions and real courses. It has been a privilege watching the enthusiasm at this season's races. Thank you to all of the volunteers, competitors and sponsors for such a successful season.

Races aren't over with yet: the Fat and Freestyle event is March 12! Grab a partner with a fat tire bike or race solo. Either way, see you there!

Huge congratulations to all of the racers and the top skiers in the overall race series:

Women's overall winners — 1st place, Sarah Freistone; 2nd place, Rachelle Kanady; 3rd place, Julia Ditto.

Men's overall winners — 1st place, Seth Downs; 2nd place, Cody Priest; 3rd place, Peter Brewer.

Learn more about the AMH Anchorage Cup and see the season's results at **www.anchoragenordicski.com/races/amh-anchorage-cup-series/.**

Get off the beaten trail with NSAA Backcountry Tours

Below is a partial schedule of upcoming NSAA Backcountry Tours. Stay up to date by visiting **www.anchoragenordicski.com/programs/backcountry-tours/** or calling the Tours Hotline at (907) 248-6667, ext. 4.

March 18 — Mystery AT/Tele-ski

Location and details TBD.

March 25 — Skookum Glacier

This will be a kick-and-glide tour to Skookum Glacier. On a sunny day, you'll enjoy incredible views of the glacier and because it's spring, we have to worry about the warmth instead of the cold. Depending on how far out we go, the ski is flat, but we will need to negotiate some snow bridge crossings. Meet at 9 a.m. at the Chugach State Park Headquarters parking lot (the train south of Potter Marsh). Tour leader: Patti Phillips, 240-3742.

See **AROUND THE BOWL**, Page 4

NSAA scholarships support outstanding Alaska skiers, ski community members

Deadline for 2016-2017 academic year scholarships is March 31

The benefits to being a member of the Anchorage Nordic ski community never end. And now it's time for high school and college skiers to take advantage of one more opportunity – the Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage College Scholarship program. To recognize college-bound high school seniors or college students for their scholastic performance, participation in cross-country skiing, and contributions to their community, NSAA annually awards multiple scholarships of up to $1,500.

Applying for a scholarship is a fitting way to finish your ski season. To be eligible, students must be Alaska residents and NSAA members who are also members of their high school or college ski team.

The application process is now open for scholarships for the 2016-2017 academic year. Applications are due by 5 p.m. Thursday, March 31. Applications are accepted online only through the Alaska Community Foundation website (http://alaskacf.org/blog/scholarships/nordic-ski-association-of-anchorage-scholarship/). Qualifications, selection criteria and additional details are posted on this page. A link to the application page is also available on the NSAA website (www.anchoragenordicski.com/races/asd-high-school-racing/nsaa-scholarships/).

We encourage skiers to apply and be recognized for their academic achievements, dedication to cross-country skiing, and contributions to their schools, ski teams and communities.

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Paul Stone

NSAA OFFICE HOURS
10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday

BOARD MEETINGS
Fourth Thursday of the month, 6 — 15 P.M. at BP Energy Center or NSAA office. Open to all.

All aboard Ski Train 2017!

Here's what you need to know to have the best time ever!

2017 Ski Train boarding starts at 6 a.m. sharp on Saturday, March 11, at the Alaska Railroad depot. This day will be 100 percent quality time for you, your friends and family. Here's the itinerary:

SATURDAY, MARCH 11

6-7 a.m. — Boarding in Anchorage
7 a.m. — Doors close
7:30 a.m. — Train leaves station
11 a.m. — Arrival in Curry
11 a.m.-4 p.m. — Fun in the snow in Curry (train stays on site if you need to warm up or rest)
4 p.m. — Train departs Curry – let the polka music and dancing begin
8 p.m. — Arrival in Anchorage

Kaladi Brothers Coffee is back on 2017 Ski Train with the Polka Mocha and other new drinks, as well as free hot chocolate for the kids! The Kaladi team is excited about making this year's event the best including hot beverages available outside in Curry!

Why don't you leave the crockpot at home! Our 2017 Ski Train foodies are excited about a great menu available for purchase thanks to local partners Alaska Sprouts, Middle Way Cafe, Charlie's Produce, Glacier BrewHouse, TACO LOCO and Food Services of America. Ski Train volunteers and sponsors are making your ride to Curry easy and yummy!

PHOTO BY **JUSTIN MATLEY**

Ski Train riders looking for the most fun and comfort should add these items to their must-bring list: chapstick, ID, sunglasses, costume, money for a cool Ski Train T-shirt and the fun food and refreshments mentioned above, camera, snacks, favorite games and snow gear.

When loading in Anchorage, plan to drop off your skis/poles or snowshoes at the gear car, and take the rest of your personal items with you to your seat.

Don't have your ticket? Great seats are still available for Ski Train participants of all ages and outdoor skill levels.

See you on Saturday, March 11, for the best winter day of the year on the 2017 Ski Train!

Learn more and buy your tickets today at **www.anchoragenordicski.com/events/ski-train/.**

NSAA Volunteer Spotlight – Art Harmon

A proud product of our ski community

Catching up with stay-at-home-dad Art Harmon was a bit of a challenge. A typical ski with his son, Andrew, and a friend, was extended slightly, and Art was quick to blame it on the great trail conditions.

"We couldn't stop skiing," Art said. It as one of those "magical skis," he added, with the snow falling, a perfect classic day with hardly any other skiers. A certified teacher by trade, Art takes a pause on his career in education to focus on being a parent and, thankfully for many, an NSAA Junior Nordic coach.

Art's parents, seeking Alaska adventure, moved from Idaho to Nome, then to Eagle River. He skied as a kid a few times, but it was time on the Gruening Middle School track with the ski team that really got him started. He continued skiing at Chugiak High School, crediting the school ski program as well as the greater ski community in Anchorage and statewide for making skiing a lifelong passion.

"I had many wonderful coaches growing up here," he said, "and I can only hope I do as well of a job sharing my love for the sport with my skiers as those coaches did with me. We have a great ski community and I am very much a product of it."

Leading Otters, Wolverines, Hawks and eventually the entire Russian Jack location as site director, Coach Art loves knowing most of the Junior Nordic skiers by name. Orienteering is a close favorite to skiing, and with recent low snow years, Junior Nordic kids at Russian Jack got to be part of his orienteering adventures.

"Orienteering stimulates the brain while having fun and getting the benefits of endurance sports, too," he said. Art added that it's a great combination because most skiers are smart and orienteering keeps them thinking.

PHOTO COURTESY OF **ART HARMON**

NSAA volunteer Art Harmon takes a break from his ski with his son Andrew and family friend Owen Lovejoy.

Art is infamous in the Junior Nordic community for his creative trail fun during dismal snow levels. Parents and kids would often thank him for not cancelling Junior Nordic. Games wearing ice cleats and orienteering courses saved the last two seasons, keeping hundreds of kids engaged and active, and parents relieved to have outside winter options for their kids.

One of Art's favorite aspects of coaching is watching the kids continue with the sport and tracking their progression in high school, college and local races.

"Skiing is a lifetime sport," he said. "It's much harder to play football at an old age but skiing can continue for many years."

Art's drawn to coaching because sports keep him happy and healthy, and he has high hopes for his own kids to experience this. With a 10 year old and 3 year old, Art is already counting up the years that he plans to be with the Junior Nordic program while sharing exciting family news.

"I have many more years in the program with a newborn on the way!"

– STORY BY ERIN BEAM, NSAA

the ALASKA nordic skier

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The Alaska Nordic Skier is a publication representing the nordic ski clubs of Anchorage, Eagle River, Fairbanks, Homer, Juneau, Mat-Su, Salcha, 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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Articles, letters and advertisements are welcome. Please ensure all names are correct and information is accurate. Submissions may be edited for clarity, content and space limitations. Deadline is the 15th day of the prior month. E-mail nordicskiereditor@gmail.com.

***On the cover** – Anchorage photographer Jan Hazen captured the energy, fun and colorful costumes of the recent Alaska Ski for Women.*

2017 Alaska Ski for Women: Snow, sun, success and fun!

BY JENNY DI GRAPPA
Alaska Ski for Women Director

If you were one of the lucky 863 participants in the 2017 Alaska Ski for Women, you know what a great day we had at Kincaid Park. The temperature was a balmy 25 degrees, the sun was (mostly) shining, and the trails were perfectly groomed. Although the morning started out a bit foggy, the sun broke through just as the costume contest began, providing visibility for our celebrity costume judges to choose their favorites.

After several years of poor weather, participants were finally able to ski on the regular event course. We had 49 women participate in the Duathalon; 118 in the freestyle/skate race; and 216 in the classic race. Over 400 women participated in the party wave, many of whom were skiing for the first time! The Mardi Gras of the North costume contest did not disappoint, as women of all ages were clad in sometimes elaborate costumes that took months to prepare. Most popular this year: Super Woman! The final events of the day included a wonderful silent auction, with many donations provided by local community members, and our first-ever mimosa reception.

Of course amidst all of the fun, this event raises both awareness and funds for a very serious issue facing women in Alaska: domestic violence. One hundred percent of race entries, donations, merchandise sales and funds raised during the silent auction will be donated later this year to programs and organizations who are actively working to stop the cycle of domestic violence against women and children. Funds are also distributed to organizations that provide resources to domestic violence victims and their families.

Events like the Alaska Ski for Women couldn't happen without the support of major sponsors. Please help us by thanking ConocoPhillips, our 2017 Platinum Sponsor and race bib sponsor. We would also like to thank our Gold Sponsors, Continental Auto Group and KTUU, for their continued support and promotion of the event. Other sponsors include: Anchorage Women's Clinic; Banker Law Group; Denali OB-GYN; Great Harvest Bread Co.; Premier Alaska Tours; Bristol Bay Native Corporation; Moose's Tooth & Bear Tooth; Kaladi Brothers Coffee; REI; Magic 98.9; K&L Distributors; The Stud Run; TOKO; Skinny Raven; and Midnight Sun Brewing Co. Additionally we received over 30 in-kind donations for our silent auction from Anchorage businesses and community members.

Finally, I would like to give praise to our 2017 ASFW event committee: Tamra Kornfield, Meg Stehn, Diane Moxness and Mary Vollendorf. I would also like to thank the numerous volunteers who helped make the REI registration and event day run smoothly: Brian Ross (event MC and host), celebrity costume judges Beth Helgeson, Mark Murphy, Natalie Lowman, Astrid Stark and Ariel Tweto; Greg DuBois (parking lead); Paulette Compton (chalet lead); Bob Stehn (timing); Jan Hazen (photos); Patrick McGownd (kick wax crew); Michael Henrich (massage crew); Marti Pausback (winners' crowns); Becky More (AWAIC); Darlena Fritzler (YWCA); Loyd Bradley, Daniel Gonzales, Neeta Wilson, Kevin Tran, Gretchen Nelson, Steve Bentley, Tim Alderson, Ruth Bratz, Karla Huntington, Katjana Stutzer, Amber Adams, Erin Beam, Molly Mikan, Nate Bushek, Mary Havents, Katherine Rawlins, Pam Jones, Jessica Limbird, Sarah Pullen, Charlea Allen, Kristen Lewis, Marilyn Bost, Samantha Cherot, Lisa Rieger, Ros and Jon Singleton, Elaine Nelson, Toby Wong, Patrick Holmes, John Weddleton, Randy Hessong, Ruth Carter, Polly Hessing, Elvis Macpherson, Mike Miller, Iain Miller, Tim Brabets, Paul Stone, Ben Elbow, Scott Belier, Steve Beardsley, Dick Snyder, Rosie Frankowski, Marisa Escher, Fiona Peichel, Anson Moxness and the West High ski team, the timing crew, Anchorage Nordic Ski patrol, and many, many more! Thank you!

PHOTOS BY **JAN HAZEN**

Event results

Racing

Duathlon — 1. Stephanie Arnold; 2. Sarah Freistone; 3. Rachelle Kanady.

Freestyle — 1. Aubrey Leclair; 2. Hattie Harvey; 3. Meredith Noble.

Classic — 1. Mimi Allen; 2. Isabella Goodman; 3. Suzanna Caldwell.

Costumes

Best Group — Recyclers

Best Duo — Snails

Best Kiddo — Kid Doctor

ASFW swag

We have quite a bit of 2017 event merchandise still available for purchase at the NSAA office in downtown Anchorage, including the purple event T-shirt, sweatshirts and lots of socks.

Save the date and volunteer!

The next Alaska Ski for Women will take place on February 4, 2018. It takes numerous volunteers to put on this great community event. Whether you can commit a few hours that day or a few hours each month, there are a variety of ways you can help make the 2018 event another success. Email alaskaskiforwomen@gmail.com to learn more!

AROUND THE BOWL

Continued from Page 2

NSAA calendar of events

MARCH

Wednesday, March 1 — ASD Middle School Race, Kincaid Park

Thursday, March 2 — Ski 4 Kids bib pick up, REI

Friday-Sunday, March 3-5 — NSAA Backcountry Tour — Denali View Chalet

Friday-Saturday, March 3-4 — Biathlon State Championships

Friday, March 3 — Tour of Anchorage bib pickup, REI

Saturday, March 4 — Tour of Anchorage bib pickup, REI

Saturday, March 4 — Ski 4 Kids, Kincaid Park

Sunday, March 5 — Tour of Anchorage

Saturday, March 11 — Ski Train

Saturday, March 11 — Anchorage Junior Nordic equipment return, Kincaid Park bunker

Sunday, March 12 — AMH Anchorage Cup – Phat and Freestyle (Fat Tire and Ski Duathlon)

Saturday, March 18 — NSAA Backcountry Tour — Mystery AT/Tele-ski, TBD

Saturday, March 18 — Oosik Ski Race/Tour, Talkeetna

Monday, March 20 — Anchorage Junior Nordic equipment return, Kincaid Park bunker

Tuesday, March 21 — Anchorage Junior Nordic equipment return, Kincaid Park bunker

Saturday-Sunday, March 25-26 — SKAN 24 race, Kincaid Park

Saturday, March 25 — NSAA Backcountry Tour — Skookum Glacier

APRIL

Friday, April 28 — Last day to return Junior Nordic skis

For more events and details, visit the NSAA calendar at **www.anchoragenordicski.com/calendar.**

Virtual competitions create real national exposure for Alaska ski jumpers

BY KAREN COMPTON

During a few Saturdays this winter, Alaska ski jumpers took to the air competing for awards and prizes against their teammates in Anchorage. Simultaneously, they were taking part in a second, very unusual competition against jumpers from across the nation.

It's called the U.S. Cup Junior Series/Virtual Nationals and it is just that – a virtual competition between U10, U12 and U14 boy and girl jumpers from every club in America. Here's how it works: Jumping clubs hold regular competitions and send the results and videotapes of the top jumps in each age group to USA Nordic Sports, the national organization for ski jumping and Nordic combined. USANS compiles the videos and jump distances, finds judges to watch the videos and award style points, then edits it all together to look like a broadcast of a real competition complete with commentary and graphics.

It's a simple concept, but takes a huge amount of time to execute. Jeff Hastings, who created the competition, says it takes two to three weeks of intense work by several people each year.

Hastings explained his labor of love process as, "Gathering the names of qualified skiers, sending out invites to get videos, finding judges, building the judges' scorecard and the judging reel of jumps to be judged, creating the final results from the judged jumps and then editing the final video with tease, music and voiceover, then uploading those to Vimeo or YouTube and releasing them one day at a time over six days."

Virtual Nationals also builds a stronger ski jumping community by bringing kids from New Hampshire to Alaska together in cyberspace. It gets them more excited about competing with their local clubs and keeps them motivated. From USANS's perspective, it shows them who is up-and-coming in the sport and connects them with the organization.

For Alaskans, it takes away the isolation of being the only ski jumping club for thousands of miles. And it gives Alaska jumpers the opportunity to compete without the expense of plane tickets and hotel rooms. Eight-year-old ski jumper Jamay Wingard, in the lead for the Alaska U10 girl division, summed it up: "It's fun to see yourself on YouTube! And I might win a t-shirt. That's cool!"

Check out past US Junior Cup Series/Virtual Nationals online at **www.usanordic.org/clubs/virtual-nationals.**

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

PHOTO BY **KEN HATCH**

Eight-year-old ski jumper Jamay Wingard tops the podium at the Karl Eid Memorial Jumping/Nordic Combined Competition. Julia Oswald finished second and Riley Panter placed third. Jamay is a contender in the U-10 Girl division in Virtual Nationals this year.

REGISTER

There are 4 easy ways to register for Ski 4 Kids. (Recommended $20 entry donation)

ONLINE

It's quick, easy, no additional charge AND no standing in line. **anchoragenordicski.com/events/ski-4-kids/**

MAIL-IN FORM

anchoragenordicski.com/events/ski-4-kids/

BIB PICKUP & IN-PERSON REGISTRATION

When — Thursday, March 2, Noon - 7 p.m.
Where — REI Community Room, 1200 W. Northern Lights Blvd.

EVENT DAY REGISTRATION

When — Saturday, March 4
Where — Kincaid Chalet, Noon. - 1:15 p.m.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Activities for all ages! A 3km ski loop for timed racers and untimed skiers PLUS indoor activities, speedskating, ski jumping, an obstacle course, and more!

EVENT SCHEDULE

SATURDAY, MARCH 4

Where — Kincaid Chalet and Stadium
12:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Inside Ski Bear Fun Pass Activities — Speedskating, Ski Jumping, Photo with Flat Kikkan
1 p.m. - 3 p.m.
Outside Ski Bear Fun Activities — Snowshoeing, Orienteering Treasure Hunt, Sit skis with Ira, Obstacle course
1:30 p.m.
Mize Moose Loop Race (timed and untimed) — 3 km and Blue Bear Story Book Trail (1 km) Group Start
3 p.m.
Great Harvest Bread Station
3 p.m. - 4 p.m.
Ski Bear Fun Pass Prize pick-up

Kachemak Nordic Ski Club
Homer, Alaska

P.O. Box 44, Homer, Alaska 99603
kachemaknordicskiclub.org
kachemaknordicskiclub@gmail.com

Holly Brooks training clinic improves skill of KNSC coaches

BY STACEY BUCKELEW

Last month, the Kachemak Nordic Ski Club (KNSC), through the Homer Women's Nordic program, held a three-day training clinic with two-time Olympian and retired World Cup champion Holly Brooks. The clinic was focused on improving the skill of KNSC coaches to foster adult and high school-level skiing across the Kenai Peninsula.

The training clinics, which took place at the Lookout Mountain Ski Area, drew eight coaches from across the Homer Women's Nordic, Junior Nordic, Homer Mariner High School and Kenai Central High School programs. Coaches were saturated with specialized coaching knowledge imparted by Holly, which ranged from ski technique and drills to goal-setting, training plans and team dynamics.

In conjunction with the coaches' clinic, Holly taught a special Homer Women's Nordic ski session to adult-level female skiers. Beyond technique work, Holly enthusiastically endorsed "skiing strong" regardless of age or ability and integrating a positive psychology into all aspects of skiing.

The weekend wrapped up with a race-specific training session that drew both high school and adult skiers.

PHOTOS BY **STACEY BUCKELEW**

"Today I am happily retired from my career as a professional athlete and have turned my attention and passions towards helping other athletes," Brooks said. Part of this help involved teaching Homer-area skiers race tactics coupled with individual video technique analysis to make them more competitive on the race course.

KNSC and Homer Women's Nordic is grateful for all who helped make the clinic a success! Thank you to Holly Brooks for working with the KNSC coaches to improve their own performance and provide enhanced levels of coaching to local athletes. Thank you also to Grace Ridge Brewing, Ulmer's Drug and Hardware, Lisa Wood and the Lookout Mountain groomers for all the support! With the sunshine, warm community welcome and stellar conditions on the Lookout trails, we won't be too surprised to see Holly bounding around Homer again real soon!

AROUND THE BAY

Inspired by Olympian, Alaskan Brooks

There was ceaseless appreciation for the rippling insight and inspiration from Holly Brooks in her visit to Homer last month. Holly came to Homer for a very full weekend of clinics, coaching and illumination. She worked with coaches from Homer High School Mariner Ski team, Kenai High School and Homer Women's Nordic. Holly incorporated all aspects of coaching from technique to the psychology of the whole athlete. Holly held a race development clinic for emerging ski racers in the area. Homer Women's Nordic also enjoyed a bluebird day of skiing and solidarity with this amazing woman. See more about her visit and work in a story in this Nordic Skier issue.

All that practice pays off

Bluebird weather and perfect snow were the order of the day for the Homer Invitational, hosted by the Homer High School Mariner Nordic ski team in early February. The event was held at the Lookout ski area.

PHOTO BY **MARYLOU BURTON**

Wine & Cheese/Wooden Ski Tour volunteers Ruth Dickerson (barmaid), John Miles (chief Lookout groomer), and Kevin Walker (event coordinator). Whatever is on John's head was once alive.

Skiers came from throughout the Kenai Peninsula, and they were all smiles, smiles, smiles. But the biggest smile of all was on the face of Homer's own Jacob Davis, who blew away the boy's varsity competition in both the classic and skate races. Home advantage? Sure. But practice and hard work help, too.

Kachemak Nordic Ski Marathon – You don't want to miss this race!

Last year's Kachemak Nordic Ski Marathon was pretty darned good – not point to point, and the long race did a double loop. But the weather was gorgeous and the course was challenging. And with a little luck, this year's race on Saturday, March 11, will be even better. Groomers have been blasting out the marathon connector which connects the Sunset trail on Diamond Ridge to the Lookout trails, and it's looking great. It's a lot of work – the willows in the Bridge and Twitter Creek valleys have grown tall and bushy during our recent warm years – but those guys are determined to make it happen.

PHOTO BY **JANNA DAVIS**

All that practice pays off! Jacob Davis leads the pack – by a lot! – at the Homer Invitational.

If you haven't done this race before, you owe it to yourself to do now. But word to the wise: There is a shorter version (about 25K vs. 40K), but there is no "easy" version. Be prepared for big ups and big downs, and if you're new to either, consider doing the Tour instead. Same as the 25K race, but you get an hour's head start.

For more details, check the KNSC website: www.kachemaknordicskiclub.org.

Young skiers manifest love for Nordic skiing

With more than 110 Junior Nordic participants this season, Homer's young skier program was a huge success. Volunteer coaches worked with skiers ages 5-12 for five consecutive weeks. Kids wore smiles and skis each weekend as they learned to love Nordic skiing. Coaches taught specific skills through

See **AROUND THE BAY**, Page 7

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Winter Backcountry Film Festival
Dan Del Missier

AROUND THE BAY

Continued from Page 6

games and fun activities, and kids at all levels increased their abilities and passion for skiing.

After all the races and events are done – Spring skiing!

So far this has been a great season. We have plenty of snow, world-class engineered trails at Lookout, variety at Baycrest, and snow-cat groomed trails at McNeil. They are all different, and they are all beautiful. But beyond our 100+ kilometers of groomed trail systems are endless possibilities for crust skiing. With the sun warming faces this time of year, the Caribou Hills' pristine beauty, and the hard covered snowfall, Homer's spring skiing is a secret we're more than happy to share. In fact, some folks would argue that the real skiing starts in late March, early April. Come check it out.

Ongoing Homer Women's Nordic

Beyond Session Two of Homer Women's Nordic, women get together and organize themselves for ongoing training, camaraderie and company in various outdoor recreational activities. Rain or shine, sleet or gale force winds, this group of women continue to meet. April is a time for rest, recovery and fun times outdoors with each other. Then, moving towards building base fitness with all the increased daylight since "skiers are made in the summer."

Learn more about the program at **homerwomensnordic.com.**

STATEWIDE

Ready for a classic Alaska race? The Oosik Classic is here March 18!

BY ARTHUR MANNIX
Secretary, Denali Nordic Ski Club

The 2017 Oosik Classic Ski Race/Tour will be – as usual – over the third weekend in March. This year it falls on Saturday, March 18, starting at high noon. There will be a 40-60 kilometer event as well as a 20-30 kilometer race. And there's a pretty lively and entertaining Junior Oosik for kids.

The first Oosik Classic was hosted back in 2000 by Adam Verrier and Zack Steer at Sheep Mountain. They ran it until 2005 before the Denali Nordic Ski Club took over and has hosted it at the end-of-the-road in Talkeetna ever since. This will be the 17th Oosik Classic, the 12th held in Talkeetna.

The number of entrants will be limited to 750. To register, go online to the Denali Nordic Ski Club's website: **www.denalinordicskiclub.org/oosik/**.

The Oosik has always been a fun way to begin crust season. Talkeetna has received lots more snow then it has seen in a number of winters. Here's hoping that the spring crust skiing season will last well into April.

Remember, the Oosik puts the coool back in classic.

PHOTOS BY **DOUG GUALTIERI**

The nation's best in Fairbanks: NSCF hosts USSA Spring Series in March

BY JOHN ESTLE

The U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association's Distance National Championships and SuperTour Finals are coming to Birch Hill in Fairbanks in March. Fairbanks-based Doyon Utilities is the title sponsor; presenting sponsors are Advanced Physical Therapy (Anchorage) and L.L. Bean.

The event calendar includes three national championship events and one non-national championship event. Nearly $20,000 in prize money will be awarded to the first six finishers in each national championship and SuperTour final event. The late afternoon starts make it easier for spectators to watch the high-quality competition. We are hoping for some beautiful springtime Interior weather, as well.

Races feature the nation's top senior skiers, as well as some top juniors. All members of the World Cup group of the U.S. Ski Team should participate, including Kikkan Randall (she also helped design our new sprint course). Spectators can see the USST athletes who have made appearances on World Cup podiums.

"To be the best, first you have to see the best, then know how to ski like the best," said NSCF-FXC Head Coach Pete Leonard. "The SuperTour Finals give our club's youngest skiers an inspiring opportunity to see – and then emulate – some of the world's best compete on our home trails. Older juniors can learn firsthand what sort of speed it takes to ski at that level as they toe the line with them. These are the moments that ignite competitive ski careers."

In addition to the USST skiers, we are expecting all of the major senior programs, including Alaska Pacific University, Craftsbury Green Racing Project, Stratton Mountain School, Sun Valley Ski Education Foundation, Central Cross Country, Bridger Ski Foundation, Ski and Snowboard Club Vail and others. We also expect participation from all of Alaska's junior-oriented club programs.

Races are held on Birch Hill's newly designed courses. A high percentage of each course will be on "old" Birch Hill trails. However, construction of a small number of short, new trail segments over the past five years gives us the ability to put together existing segments in new and more interesting, as well as technically and physically challenging, ways.

The new courses, as is characteristic of Birch Hill, will have plenty of longish hills. Over the past few years we have changed the typical "sit in the tracks and tuck" downhills so that most descents are now active, technical downhills that offer the fittest and most skilled skiers a chance to make some time and distance on the downhills and uphills. Keeping lots of climbs and making the downhills active reflects international course design.

With the exception of the 50Km and 30Km, all events will be held on relatively short loops and even long races will feature multiple laps and passes through the stadium.

In addition to being demanding, the courses are also spectator-friendly. Those who stay in the stadium/Ramp/upper stadium area can see the skiers "up close and personal" in all the races. It's also possible to walk a short distance out of the stadium to see some of the more exciting downhills and difficult ascents.

The Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks hosted this race series in 2008 and 2009. USST members Liz Stephen, Ida Sargent and Simi Hamilton were all gold medalists on the Birch Hill trails at the 2003 Junior Nationals (at that time, the event was called the Junior Olympics). All three have appeared on World Cup podiums this season!

Event sponsors also include Denali State Bank, Golden Heart Emergency Physicians, Usibelli Coal Mine, Wedgewood Resort, Craft Sportswear and the U.S. Ski Team. Wedgewood Resort is the official race headquarters.

The Chief of Competition is John Estle; Scott Jerome and Greg Whisenhant are Assistant Chiefs. Chief of Course: Bill Husby; Chief of Course Control: Van Mitchell: Chief of Timing: Anna Sorensen; Chief of Secretariat: Beth Zirbes; Chief of Stadium: Susan Faulkner with critical assistance provided by Margaret and Dan Darrow. Volunteer Coordinator: Norma Haubenstock; and Sponsorship Coordinator: Aelin Allegood.

The Competition Jury is Allan Serrano, Technical Delegate; Jeff Ellis, Assistant Technical Delegate; Robert Lazzaroni, USSA Representative; Lin Hinderman, Jury Member; and John Estle, Chief of Competition.

Learn more at www.**supertourfinals2017fairbanks.us** or contact John Estle at sportalaska@gci.net. To volunteer, contact Norma Haubenstock at norma.haubenstock@gmail.com.

USSA DISTANCE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS AND SUPERTOUR FINALS SCHEDULE

MONDAY, MARCH 27

Skiathlon

5 p.m. — Women's 7.5Km Classic + 7.5Km Free

Junior Women 7.5Km Classic (simultaneous start with skiathlon)

Junior Men 11.25Km Classic (simultaneous start with skiathlon)

6:15 p.m. — Men's 11.25Km Classic + 11.25Km Free

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29

Sprint Free Technique (qualification round and heats)

Women's 1.5Km & Men's 1.6Km

4 p.m. Qualifying with 6 p.m. Heats

FRIDAY, MARCH 31

Relay Mixed Gender/Mixed Technique

6:30 p.m. — 2 x 5Km Classic + 2 x 5Km Free

SUNDAY, APRIL 2

Mass Start Free Technique

10 a.m. — Women's 30Km

12:30 p.m. — Men's 50Km

Amazing Besh Cup action catapults Alaskans to national events

BY LAURI BASSETT
CROSS COUNTRY ALASKA

A season full of snow made for one that allowed CCAK to operate its schedule as planned. It gave young skiers the opportunity to experience the best trails in each area of the state. Juneau skiers even ventured to Besh Cups! Thank you to host clubs – Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage, Tsalteshi Trails Association in Soldotna and the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks for being as hospitable as ever to the racers of Cross Country Alaska.

The overall Besh Cup trophy was awarded to two of the top U18/U20 skiers with the most points. Congratulations to Josiah Alverts of Alaska Nordic Racing and to Jenna DiFolco for being at the top of the list at the end of Besh Cup 6!

The goal for many skiers was to make Team Alaska representing our state at either Junior Nationals in Lake Placid, New York, or at Western Regional Championships in Sun Valley, Idaho. In addition to those who prequalified at either Senior Nationals or World Junior Biathlon tryouts, the team was named at the culmination of Besh Cup 6 in Fairbanks. Coaches from each of the clubs around the state will accompany the team on March 1 to Boston and take a road trip up to Lake Placid. In addition to personal goals that each skier has set for themselves, Team Alaska hopes to bring home the Alaska Cup. This is awarded to the team with the most points comprised of individual results from each race. It has been a few years since it was brought home from this event.

The U14 skiers who competed in this year's Besh Cup races vied for the opportunity to attend the Western Regional Championship races at the end of February. CCAK made it a priority to offer a championship series to this age group; 18 skiers accepted the positions they earned at the end of the racing season. CCAK hopes to offer this opportunity during the years that the Arctic Winter Games aren't offered, but an evaluation will be made upon the end of this year's trip. If there is enough interest from skiers as well as volunteer coaches, both trips could be offered.

This year's Besh Cup champs are Josiah Alverts and Jenna DiFolco.

Important Alaska-based races continue

While the following events aren't CCAK managed, we do want to bring your attention to some high level ski events that Anchorage and Fairbanks are posting.

- USSA Distance National Championships and Spring SuperTour Finals, March 26-April 2, 2017, in Fairbanks
- Senior Nationals Cross Country Ski Championships, January 6-11, 2018, in Anchorage

Contact the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks if you are going to be in their neck of the woods. The crew of the 2018 event is in early stages of planning. If you would like to be on the mailing list for volunteer opportunities, contact Lauri Bassett via CCAK at info@crosscountryalaska.org.

Pick.Click.Give. to CCAK

CCAK is once again eligible for Pick.Click.Give. You can search for Cross Country Alaska in the list of eligible agencies. Also, we are connected to the Fred Meyer Rewards program. To enroll in the Fred Meyer Rewards Program, create an online account and use the CCAK organization number of 88571.

CCAK Spring Summit on April 9

The CCAK Spring Summit will be held on Sunday, April 9; tentatively from 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m. and the location is likely in a meeting room at the ConocoPhillips building in downtown Anchorage. While at this point there are not any CCAK board members who have shown an interest in leaving, CCAK would always be interested in potential board members and/or participants at large. If you would like to attend, please notify Lauri Bassett at info@crosscountryalaska.org. This is your big chance to be part of the continuous improvement of CCAK!

Girdwood Nordic Ski Club
Girdwood, Alaska

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AROUND GIRDWOOD

Girdwood Nordic hosts its first NCAA race

On February 8, the Girdwood Nordic Ski Club hosted the NCAA 4x5km mixed gender classic relay with teams from the Rocky Mountain Intercollegiate Ski Association. This was the largest race we have hosted, and a great success thanks to the leadership of Lin Hinderman, Peter Zug, Jim Braham, Brian Burnett, Briana Sullivan, The Alyeska Resort groomers, and many local volunteers. This was a great opportunity for us to support the UAA Ski Team program and host a collegiate race on the Girdwood trail system.

Stumpy's Snowball Biathlon on March 24

The annual Stumpy's Snowball Biathlon & Obstacle Course will be held in Stumpy's Meadow (first meadow next to the new parking lot at the end Arlberg Rd) from 5-7 p.m. Friday, March 24. This is a fun family event consisting of a 1K Nordic cross-country ski loop (skate or classic) with three targets and various obstacles. This is an untimed event, and all skiers will receive a reward for participating.

Start times (Subject to change): 5-5:30 p.m.: Obstacle course; 5:30 p.m.: Ages 6 and under; 5:40 p.m.: Ages 7-12; 5:50 p.m.: Ages 13-17; 6 p.m.: Ages 18+ (1.6 Sprint / Short Loop on Nordic Trail); 6-7 p.m.: Bonfire, hot dogs, potluck, obstacle course, kid ski games.

If you would like to volunteer, make snowballs, donate prizes, or have any general questions, please contact Ari Stiassny at arimelak@gmail.com.

Girdwood trails, club get big race spotlight

BY LEX TREINEN

On February 8, Girdwood Nordic Ski Club (GNSC) held the largest profile event of its nine-year existence when it hosted the NCAA 4x5km mixed gender classic relay for teams from the Rocky Mountain Intercollegiate Ski Association.

"I think it legitimizes these trails," said Jim Braham, a GNSC board member and one of the main race organizers. "I think people in town took notice of the good sized race."

The 5K "Race Loop" trail, opened less than five years ago and designed by former Olympian and former APU Nordic Ski Center head coach Jim Galanes, have become a favorite training ground for local aspiring Olympians, but have been un-skiable for much of the last two years due to poor snow conditions in the Girdwood Valley.

Andrew Kastning, UAA head coach and race host, said he had his eye on the Girdwood trails for a college race for years.

"The kids always thought (the trails) were really good," he said, "They're going to beat down someone who is not in good shape. On the other side we see a lot of courses get dumbed down in the downhills these days. These still have something to keep you on your toes."

While the snow conditions across Southcentral Alaska left the 2.5K manmade snow loop at Anchorage's Kincaid Park the only viable option when UAA hosted NCAA races two years ago, Kastning saw his chance to change venues this year.

"The GNSC trails are obviously missing a stadium, but we knew we could host an interval start or at least a small mass start," he said. "I proposed a relay to the coaches at the spring meeting, because the athletes have expressed that they were bored with the usual distances: 10-, 15- and 20-kilometer individual races."

PHOTO BY **FORREST MAHLEN**

From left, Dag Frode Trolleboe (Denver Univ.), Martin Bergstom (Univ. of Utah), Reese Hanneman (Alaska Pacific Univ.) and Martin Mikkelsen (Univ. of Utah) approach the high point of the course during the first leg of the recent NCAA Mixed-Gender 4X5 Relay Races in Girdwood.

Kastning also saw an opportunity to save some money, especially important after UAA recently cut its entire ski program to save money and only reinstated it after hours of public testimony and protests. Kastning said that due to the tough conditions two years ago, UAA footed a grooming bill for a 2.5K manmade loop at Kincaid Park.

The Girdwood Nordic Ski Club, which uses about a dozen volunteer groomers, meanwhile, offered to groom for the race for free.

"Lin Hinderman (the course director) and Peter Zug hit a home run with it," wrote Kastning of the courses. "They took it on as a challenge."

Brian Burnett, a founding member of the GNSC, who also serves as Alyeska Resort Ski Area General Manager, also chipped in by offering Alyeska's Sno-Cat, gas and drivers.

"We basically groom with snow machines all the time so when the snow gets really deep we ask them to come over," said Braham.

These days, snow machine grooming is insufficient for high-level races because the snow is too soft and ski pole tips are too narrow to push off the snow, so getting a Sno-Cat grooming was critical for trail conditions.

Deb Essex, another founding member of GNSC, added that the volunteer support has been essential for the success of the races.

"We set out to create a race trail and what we ended up creating was a local community ski club," she said, which is able to provide the funding mostly through $40 annual membership donations and volunteer support for races. "Our membership keeps growing every year."

Essex, who was out of town for the races, said she saw them as a step toward bigger races.

"The future is hosting a FIS (International Ski Federation) race on these trails," she said.

The trails have currently not undergone the final step in their homologation (or certification that they meet certain international quality standards), but have easily passed all of the other standards. According to Essex, the only step left is a ski-through, which was impossible during the last two near-snowless winters. Braham and Kastning both said they heard only positive reactions about the trails and the courses.

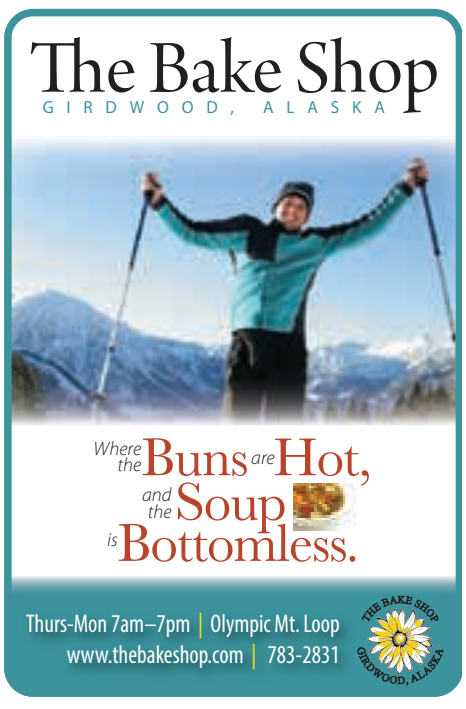
"The coaches thought it was a great event. I don't know if they would have said that if it were pouring rain, but we lucked out with the weather," said Kastning, whose team also took a day to work on the trails during the fall a couple of years ago.

Josefin Nilsson, a racer from the University of Utah who is currently dating Kieffer Christianson, a Girdwood grown Alpine skier skiing on the U.S. Ski Team, agreed with the positive reviews.

"It was the most fun race of the year," said the 23-year-old native of Sweden who has visited Girdwood several occasions. "It was the way Nordic skiing should be. It was cold and blue sky and had the sun shining. The tracks were really well groomed. In Utah we ski on golf courses where it's really flat and open all around."

To emphasize the beauty of the trails, Nilsson told how Christianson used to talk constantly about how he hated Nordic skiing. Then for Christmas his mother gave him a pair of Nordic skis, on which Nilsson took him out on the Girdwood trails.

"He liked it so much that he now travels with Nordic skis to all of his alpine races," she said.



Eagle River Nordic Ski Club
Eagle River, Alaska

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Junior nordic hotline — 689-7661
cernsc.wildapricot.org

AROUND EAGLE RIVER

Adventures in skiing and learning for Junior Nordic

Eagle River Junior Nordic is in full swing this season with lovely snow at the Beach Lake Trails. Junior Nordic meets at the Beach Lake Chalet Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/Thursday, and is led by fearless leader, Will Taygan (pictured here on his way out to coach). This week, Junior Nordic took a field trip to the Coyote Trails at Mirror Lake Middle School. The public can access the Coyote Trails from the back of the school parking lot and ski along the fence to the 5 kilometers of groomed trails.

PHOTO BY **ROS SINGLETON**
Eagle River Junior Nordic leader Will Taygen

Masters meet to improve, have fun

For adults learning to ski or looking to improve their ski technique, the Chugiak/Eagle River Master Ski Program is the place to go! Over 30 adults have participated in the program this season, which meets at 6:30 p.m. every Tuesday and Thursday at the Beach Lake Chalet.

"The ski trails have been incredible this year," says Kati Rehm, Director of the Masters Ski Program. "Plus, our master skiers are having so much fun while also improving their technique, it's hard to believe this is considered 'exercise'."

Adult skiers of all skill levels are welcome to sign-up for these popular weekly lessons, which are scheduled to continue through the first week of March. Not ready to try skiing in a group setting yet? Then sign up for a private lesson. Contact Kati Rehm at kathleen.rehm@gmail.com for more information on group and private Nordic ski lessons for adults.

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My joy of skiing

BY CODY PRIEST

Like many people who grew up in Alaska or high latitudes, winter finds me strapping boards to my feet in utter darkness to join friends and competitors for a ski. You might feel alone as you glide through the dark intervals between the lights, only to discover others sharing in the wonderful feeling you get blazing down the trail not knowing if a moose might be waiting, mid-trail, just around the next sweeping downhill turn. That kind of excitement has turned me into a cross-country skiing enthusiast.

I learned to ski at age 13 when I joined the Palmer High School ski team. I would not describe myself as fast – I finished 62 at the Alaska State High School Championships my senior year. I enjoyed the sport then, but I didn't love it. The love affair with skiing began while I was a freshmen attending college at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. It was March 2007 when I signed up to race the Sonot Kkaazoot, a 50-kilometer skate race. The course includes 30 kilometers of hilly terrain at the Birch Hill ski area. For competent and well-prepared skiers, the Sonot course is challenging; for overconfident and unprepared skiers like myself, it can be overwhelming.

Early in that Sonot I was feeling good and completing the race seemed an easy task. I fell into a casual pace, skiing mid-pack with some faster-than-me masters. I held that position for 40 kilometers. Then, with just 8 kilometers left, my body did something it had never done before: it seemed to quit working. My vision became blurry and moving in a straight path became almost impossible. I didn't know it then but my blood sugar had crashed making it impossible to ski without falling over. Those familiar with long distance racing may know the feeling; for me it was unexpected and miserable.

PHOTO COURTESY OF **CODY PRIEST**
The author, foreground, takes on the Sonot Kkaazoot and its many challenges and challengers.

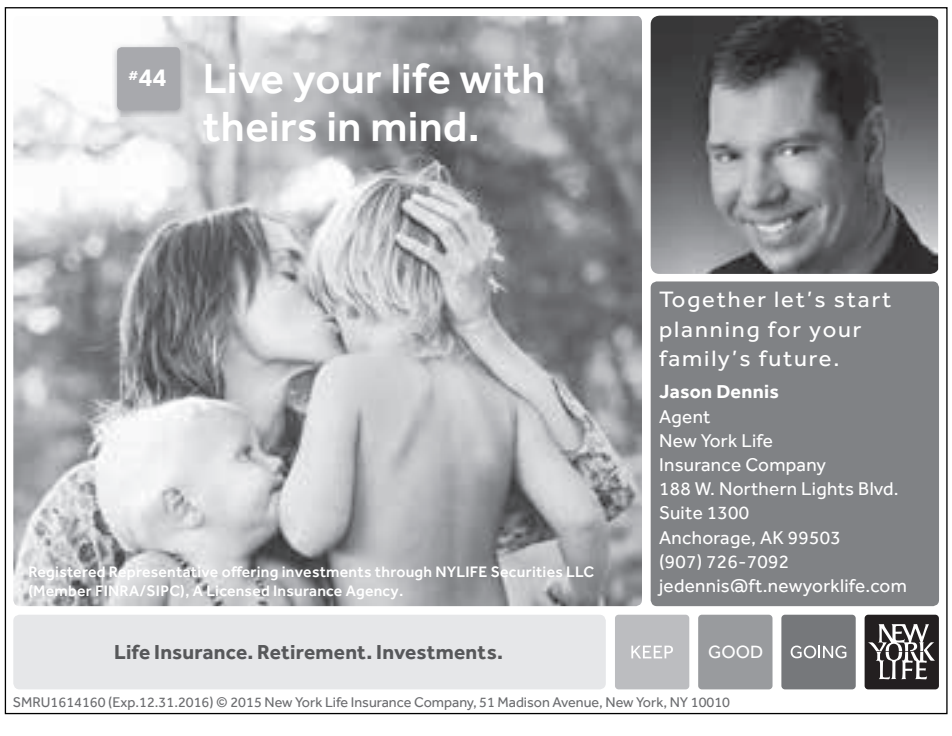
The only way I could make forward progress was to step into the classic tracks, do my best to raise my arms and then collapse my body on the poles. As I struggled toward the finish, just about every person who had been behind me skied past. As bad as I felt, I must have looked even worse. Twice people stopped and offered to loan me their phones so I could call for help. I refused and struggled on. If I didn't finish last, but I was close.

While the experience might sound like a disaster, I felt empowered. The sense of accomplishment that I felt when I finally finished was quite incredible. I had skied a challenging 50-kilometer course, overcome a "bonk" and finished under my own power. I liked the feeling and I wanted more.

This experience started me on an unexpected path and I began to ski or run every day. Soon I befriended members of the UAF ski team who gave me advice on training and technique. Training with these members allowed me to hone my skills and increased my passion for the sport. Four years later, I had a post on the roster of the UAF ski team.

I graduated in the spring of 2012 and went to work as a surveyor, but I felt like something was missing from my life. I left my job and went to work as a cross-country ski coach for Alaska Nordic Racing and Chugiak High School. I continued to race, and each spring I returned to the starting line of the Sonot to test myself on the course that changed the direction of

See **JOY,** Page 11



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Ask a groomer

You have questions … NSAA's Eagle River area groomer Bill Brion has answers!

How often do you usually groom around Eagle River? When it snows? What if there's no snow that week? And when do you usually groom?

Bill Brion: The contract shoots for grooming twice a week; the only time that happens is when we have good base depth, very little new snow and stable temperatures. This year, for example, I find myself at Beach Lake Trails three to four times a week dealing with new snow. It usually takes a couple of grooms to harden fresh snow enough for fast skating. Lately I've been starting between 8:30 and 9 p.m. after Junior Nordic.

How long does it take to groom the entire Beach Lake Trail system, say if it has two inches of fresh snow?

BB: If there is new snow I can generally do the whole park in six hours. In hard conditions I can't get the whole park done in one shift.

How many kilometers are in the Beach Lake Trail system?

BB: The number of kilometers is a good question. With the addition of No Way and the Lower Lot trail, we now have 20.6 kilometers of trails.

How do you groom when there's very little snow?

BB: Until we get about four inches of base or a good ice layer, I have to groom with a snowmobile. It takes a lot of snow to make four inches of dense base; for instance we have probably 7-8 inches of base now and about 16-20 settled but unpacked in the woods.

How do you groom when it's icy to make the trails skiable?

BB: When the trails are icy I grind them into something fine and let it take a set. This is best done with the Piston Bully with its tiller but can also be done with a cutter bar on a snowmobile; both methods are really time- and energy-intensive. You can work a whole day and get just a couple of kilometers when the ice is bad.

How can skiers help keep trails in good condition?

BB: Skiers can help me keep the trails in good shape in many ways. One of the greatest helps is throwing sticks and debris off the trail after a windstorm. It's also helpful if you happen to see me out there working not to ski directly behind me but let the newly worked snow "set up" for a couple hours.

Who should skiers notify if they notice a trail hazard (like a tree down)?

BB: If you see a hazard such as a downed tree or anything else that could be a danger notify Eagle River Parks and Rec right away.

How many inches of snow do you need to put in a classic track?

BB: About the same time I switch from a snowmobile to a Pisten Bully I start putting track in. That's generally around four inches of base. The stadium and some trails at Beach Lake are smoother and can take a track earlier than others. On those I have set track with a snowmobile and an Elliot sled to get something going for our classic skiers.

JOY

Continued from Page 10

my life.

In spring 2014, I entered my seventh consecutive Sonot. Just one day after a disappointing 50-kilometer race at U.S. Nationals in Anchorage, I toed the Sonot starting line on the Chena River. I only had one goal that day; I simply wanted to survive. I started slowly but soon realized I was able to ski with the frontrunners. I dug deep and found unexpected reserves of strength. Several times the leaders skied away from me but I hung on and caught back up. I persevered; I pushed myself harder than I had ever imagined and eventually pulled ahead.

Seven years earlier, I was close to collapse at this point in the race. Now with less than five kilometers to go I was out front, alone and feeling strong. I held the lead and won the race – I felt an overwhelming sense of triumph. It was astounding and familiar, the same feeling I had when I finished my first Sonot years before.

I realized I had transformed myself from survivor to champion.

While race results aren't the gauge of one's passion for a sport, they can reveal your progress and bring you a sense of accomplishment. I have spent thousands of hours on skis, completed many workouts and enjoyed every minute of it.

Cross-country skiing has led me down paths that brought me to unexpected destinations, including coaching. It brings joy and satisfaction to my life. I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to coach young skiers and give something back to the sport though I doubt the debt of gratitude I owe to this wonderful sport will ever be repaid.

Mat-Su Ski Club

WASILLA, ALASKA

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AROUND THE VALLEY

Big Besh Cup results a springboard to Junior Nationals for Mat-Su youth

The Besh Cup season has wrapped up after three weekends of racing that took place in Anchorage, Soldotna and Fairbanks. Mat-Su skiers showcased their skiing abilities with strong performances and representation in all age categories from U20 down to the U10s.

At the end of the season it was Palmer High and Alaska Nordic Racing (ANR) athlete Josiah Alverts taking home the Besh Cup trophy for U18 boys. Not only had he accumulated the most Besh Cup points following three weekends of racing, he qualified for the Junior National team that will be heading to Lake Placid in early March. He will be joining an amazing group of young men that includes Colony High and ANR athlete Tracen Knopp. Tracen qualified early for the JN team and subsequently did not need to participate in the entire Besh Cup series.

The girls' Junior National team will also feature Mat-Su valley skiers. Palmer High and ANR athlete Rya Berrigan qualified for the U18/U20 team and Colony High's Annika Hanestead qualified to represent the U16 girls.

Not making the JN team, but still letting his presence be known was Colony High U16 athlete Gavin Block, who attended all six races and narrowly missed qualifying. Jeremy Houston (U18) and Joseph Walling (U16) each raced four of the six races and Glenn Steer and Garrett Streit (middle school U16) participated in the Fairbanks weekend of racing.

New in 2017, Alaska will take a team of U14 athletes to the Western Regional Championships in Sun Valley, Idaho. The Mat-Su is going to be well represented there. Four of the girls invited to attend are Mat-Su ANR athletes: Katey Houser, Aila Berrigan, Brittyn Werner and Nicole Bell. Jaxon Lee, another Mat-Su ANR athlete, qualified for the boys. Other U14 Mat-Su ANR skiers that raced all six Besh Cup races were Mykennan Rinella and Ian Rogers. They both learned a lot and saw notable improvement throughout the season.

In the U12 category Aiden Houser, Clayton Steer and Keenan Berrigan each participated in a weekend of racing. And the Mat-Su was even represented in the U10 category as Huntyr Borum took on the Ski-Cross and classic races in Fairbanks.

Serenity Falls Hut trip on March 10-11

Imagine this: you hit the trails for a long ski. The views are gorgeous. The trails are freshly groomed and there are very few others on the trails to distract from your great day of skiing. At the end of your 20-kilometer ski, instead of crawling into your car, you walk in to one of the nicest recreation cabins in Southcentral Alaska. This is the Serenity Falls Hut trip and it really is a fantastic opportunity.

The club will be conducting this trip over March 10-11. The best part about this trip, besides the trails being groomed right before the trip, is that all your overnight gear and meals are shuttled to the hut, so all that you have to carry is your day gear. Meals will be communal. If interested, please reach out to Ed Strabel at 745-4190 or edstrabelak@gmail.com.

Race to the Outhouse #2 on April 1

Hopefully you raced in #1 of the series and are ready for #2. If not, that is no excuse not to take place in the season racing finale, Race to the Outhouse #2! With all the serendipity of the first race, this sequel inspires you to test yourself and prove your training accomplishments from this season, or at least polish the season off with one last hurrah. The race will occur on April 1 at Archangel Road

See **AROUND THE VALLEY,** Page 12

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AROUND THE VALLEY

Continued from Page 11

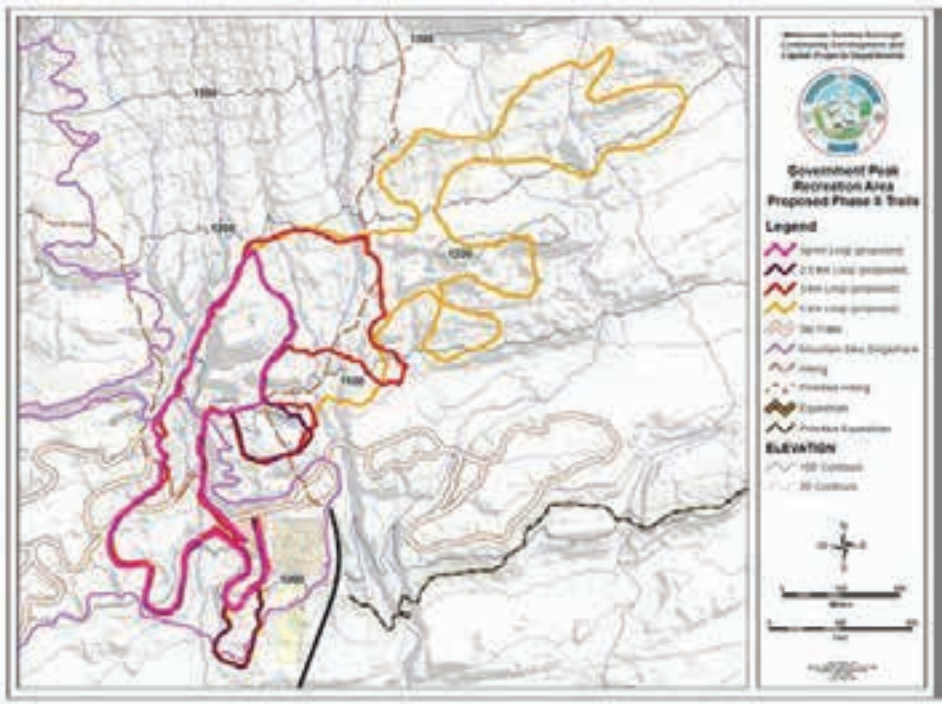
(conditions permitting). Mark your calendars for this season's pinnacle race.

Expand the Peak needs your help

Well in case you have missed our advertising in our emails, newsletters, website, meetings and of course, here in the Alaska Nordic Skier: the club has been fundraising for an exciting new project, Expand the Peak! This project is an expansion of the existing trails at Government Peak, to include 5.5 kilometers of intermediate grade trails.

The MSSC has received a number of donations (thank you!) and grants, but has not reached its funding goal as of yet. We hope that you will consider donating to this amazing cause. For contributions of $2,500 or more we will put your name or your organization's name on a sign on one of the stream crossings on the new trail. For contributions between $1,000 and $2,499, your name will be put on a plaque to be displayed in the stadium area.

If fully funded, these trails will be constructed this summer and opened to skiing the following winter. The new trails were laid out with the help of the world renowned Bill Spencer and will meet FIS homologation standards. We hope that these trails may be the host of some substantial races. High school state meet? Besh Cup? Collegiate races? Arctic Winter Games? All we know is the future is bright for GPRA.



Fourth annual Mat-Su Ski for Women a sunny success

BY SHERI MUSGRACE
Event Director

Realizing the success of the Alaska Ski For Women in Anchorage, four years ago the Mat-Su Ski Club members and leaders decided they should have their own version. Since that decision, the Mat-Su Ski for Women has been blessed with plenty of sunshine and great skiing every year. Our first Super Bowl Sunday ski event began with about 40 skiers. The 2017 Mat-Su Ski for Women had 129 registered skiers, most dressed in spectacular (and funny) costumes! We added a snowshoe division this year and we are thinking of expanding our 2018 event to include a fat tire bike division, as well.

The skiing was fabulous, the sun was out and wow, what a potluck we had afterwards. Attendees brought plenty of homemade food to share. We had chicken potpie, soups, cookies, brownies, salads and much more. Everyone was given a raffle ticket for a great drawing for featuring prizes like outdoor clothing, ski waxes and gift certificates for facials, massages and tires. Our costume contest was won by a family of jellyfish. (You have to see them next year!) All in all, it was a great event.

The ski club presented a check for $2,019 to Donn Bennice, the CEO of Alaska Family Services, on February 15. AFS was established in 1979 to respond to the needs of women and children in crisis, with the only nationally accredited domestic violence/sexual assault shelter in Alaska. Jeaninne Milne and Heather Hanes, from Alaska Family Services, explained the many other services they provide, including family counseling, anger management, etc.

We would like to thank our ski club volunteers who do incredibly hard work to produce the Mat-Su Ski for Women and express our sincere thanks to Mat-Su Health Foundation, Backcountry Bike and Ski, Gate Creek Cabins, Skin Like A. Rose Aesthetics, Alaska Mountaineering & Hiking, Morning Ski Massage Therapy, Alaska Artisan Coffee, Diversified Tire and Active Body/Active Soles. You helped us create a wonderful and fun event that helps Alaska Family Services to continue providing services for our Mat-Su community.

Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks

Fairbanks, Alaska

SKIING UNDER THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

P.O. Box 80111, Fairbanks, AK 99708-0111
Competition Office — 907-474-4242
Competition Fax — 907-474-2073
Racing Hotline — 907-457-4434
nscfairbanks.org

Young competitors vie for position during the ski-cross race of the 2016 Interior Youth Festival.

Who's Who in the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks

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457-4437

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AROUND THE INTERIOR

ConocoPhillips Interior Youth Festival made for young skiers

The ConocoPhillips Interior Youth Festival will be held at Birch Hill Recreation Area on Saturday, March 18. This fun, daylong event is all about elementary and junior high skiers and is put on by NSCF-FXC, the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks' junior race-training program. The shorter distances are geared for youth and allow skiers to try multiple formats in a single day. To keep with the kid-centered theme, the event ceremony features awards, raffle prizes and a pizza feast. Watch for more information on the NSCF website (www.nscfairbanks.org) and the NSCF-FXC Facebook page **(facebook.com/fairbankscrosscountry).**

Get your costumes ready! It's Ski for Women time!

The Fairbanks Ski For Women is scheduled for Sunday, April 9. A big part of the fun for this female-focused affair are the costumes. Now is a good time to start putting them together. Want some ideas? Check out the Fairbanks Ski For Women Facebook page: **www.facebook.com/skiforwomenfairbanks/.**

NSCF Calendar keeps you updated

Remember to check our NSCF Calendar for upcoming club events. This is a busy time of the season, so it's good to check it regularly. See the calendar at **www.nscfairbanks.org** > Calendar. Some of the upcoming events include:

March 4 — Goldstream East Ski Tour (other tours are added regularly)

March 18 — ConocoPhillips Interior Youth Festival

March 19 — Skiathon at UAF Trails

March 25 — Sonot Kkaazoot

March 27-April 2 — U.S. Ski Association Distance National Championships and SuperTour Finals

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 **http://tinyurl.com/npmcles**

Beyond Birch – Head to the rivers

Birch Hill is an incredible trail system for cross-country skiing, but there are many other places to ski in the Fairbanks area. During early spring/late winter, when temperatures start to climb, a great place to go skiing is on the rivers. The Chena River runs through town and can be accessed from several points, including the Cushman Street Bridge (where the Sonot Kkaazoot starts), Graehl Park, Pioneer Park, and Pike's Landing restaurant. You can make a loop if you include Noyes Slough. The Tanana River also offers miles and miles of snowmachine trails and has several access points, including the boat launch off the end of Chena Pump Road and Tanana Lakes Recreation Area. Rumor has it that someone is grooming trails for skiing downstream of the Chena Pump boat launch. Whenever skiing on rivers please be cautious of thin ice, open leads and overly exuberant snowmachiners. To find some of the borough parks mentioned, see the Fairbanks North Star Borough Parks and Recreation website: **www.co.fairbanks.ak.us/pr/pages/default.aspx.**

Adventure on Skis! – Northwest Alaska

Fairbanksan Seth Adams recently wrote an Alaska Dispatch News article about a skiing adventure he took last year with Bob Gillis of Fairbanks and Robin Beebee of Anchorage. Here's an excerpt:

"We skied through true wilderness, including Kobuk Valley National Park, but we traveled on a (mostly) hard-packed trail and spent our nights in villages, sleeping indoors every night. In that respect, the experience is more comparable to a hut-to-hut ski trip in the Alps than most Alaska trips — albeit with a decidedly rural twist. No one is likely to offer you muktuk in the Alps."

Read the article at **http://tinyurl.com/z8dwlrw.**

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

Get your Alaska Nordic Skier online and the links below are just a click away. To get only a PDF version, or a PDF and printed version, please send an email request to nordicskiereditor@gmail.com. You can also get PDF versions at **http://www.anchoragenordicski.com/newsletter/.** Getting the online newsletter only saves our club money, too!

Bakers, volunteers, are the heart of the Sonot

Volunteering for the Sonot Kkaazoot offers rewards, benefits

BY ROBERT HANNON

PHOTO BY **MAX KAUFMAN**

Denali State Bank Sonot Kkaazoot founders Bob, left, and Sharon Baker race in the 2016 Sonot.

While it's tempting to say nothing competes with the excitement racers feel at the start of a big Nordic ski race, it could be strongly argued volunteering is every bit as fun as racing, with a lot less perspiration.

"You may not even need a shower at the end of the day," quipped Denali State Bank Sonot Kkaazoot race founder and organizer "Bad" Bob Baker in a recent interview that included his wife Sharon.

As it happens, volunteerism as well as irony is woven deeply into the fabric of the race's history. Bob says he dreamed up the Sonot because Fairbanks needed a long distance ski event, and he wanted to win it. However, it turned out organizing the 50K/20K race put that dream to bed.

In the early years, he and Sharon did almost everything with the help of family and friends. The day before the race, Bob groomed the river. There were no road guards on Ft. Wainwright. Skiers were urged to look both ways before crossing. And all Bob had to do was alert the Army post of the race's date.

Next day, Sharon organized bib pick-up and feed stations while Bob staffed the timing hut. He sat poised with a couple of Seiko watches to track times. Then he would peck out the results on a typewriter, make copies and rush over to Tanana Middle School for the awards banquet to announce the winners. Oh, and the Bakers also provided the soup.

There was no fee to begin with, Bob remembers.

"The idea was race sponsors would pretty much pay for everything. Of course, that kind of went by the wayside," he reflected with a sigh. "It's a much bigger race today. In those days we only had about 50 or 60 skiers."

Feed stations loomed large in importance for Bob.

"The three things I base a race on," he shared, "are the course, the feed stations and the timing. Most skiers who have a course that's well laid out, feed stations that don't run out of stuff and they get the results, they're happy."

As it happens, feed stations were one of the first tasks that got farmed out. Local high schools organized and staffed them. At first they received something like $50, Bob recalls. There was also a little rivalry on which school had the best stations. The winning school got a little extra money.

Nowadays, a wide range of individuals and organizations come together each spring to make the race a success. The SCUM training group has assumed organizing responsibilities. They work with Ft. Wainwright to get permission for skiers to cross from the Chena River to the Jim Whisenhant Cross Country Ski Trails at Birch Hill. They organize volunteer timers, road crossing guards, feed station groups, bib pick up, run the awards ceremony, and make the celebrated "Woodel" trophies that are cut from small birch trees, individually branded and varnished.

It's a big job, the Bakers say.

"Putting together a race is thirty times more important than racing. If you have a bad race, oh well, it's just you. But if you put on a bad race and something goes wrong with everybody, there's a huge responsibility that lies on the key people."

Bob said there is a lot to be gained if participants try volunteering, at least once: "I like stories of skiers who maybe hurt themselves or whatever and volunteer and they find out how important it is. And how much effort has been put out to help them enjoy what they're good at. Many of them are humbled and come out with a whole new outlook."

Sharon agreed, saying: "I realized there is a whole other race behind the scenes of the race, because you need to get all these things done by start time. As I racer I wasn't fully aware of that."

But it can go the other direction, too. Bob and Sharon know skiers who now participate in the Sonot who began as volunteers or bystanders.

"Tim Mowry covered the race for the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner for years," Bob said. "Then he started skiing it."

For the Bakers, volunteerism remains the heart of the race. It wouldn't be the Fairbanks tradition it is without all the groups and people who come together, they say.

And Bob still holds out hope for a win.

"I stay competitive in the hopes that one year no one good will show up, or conditions are bad," he said.

"Or you don't quite mark the course correctly," Sharon teased.

The 30th annual Denali State Bank Sonot Kkaazoot 50/40/20K Nordic Ski race is scheduled for Saturday, March 23. If you want more information on signing up or volunteering go to **sonotkkaazoot.org**.

Waxing stations, sponsors, skier safety on board's plate

BY ERIC TROYER

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

• Working with borough to improve the waxing set up in the Warm Up Hut. Borough will be building two tables with waxing stations. The club will get two waxing stations.

• Overseeing Sponsorship Coordinator Aelin Allegood, who has recently gained additional sponsorships from Usibelli Coal Mine and Denali State Bank (on top of its sponsorship of Sonot Kkaazoot).

• Formulating a plan to replace sponsor banners in stadium that were damaged by storm, and exploring ways to protect the banners from future damage.

• Working on an injury/incident protocol to better coordinate responses to injuries during NSCF-sponsored events and programs.

• Working with borough on safety of borough facilities. A skier recently slipped and fell in team pod of the Birch Hill Cross Country Ski Center. Borough staff members are monitoring the situation to help ensure the safety of all the athletes.

• Working on an absence/sabbatical agreement for salaried employees.

• Monitoring the trail donations and memberships, which are in the ballpark of recent years.

• Approving a revised Outreach Committee charter. Several NSCF members have agreed to serve on the committee including Don Pendergrast, Chel Ethun, Eric Engman and M.K. and Gary Romberg.

• Continuing to work on new weather station and website.

• Monitoring the completion of the new equipment building.

• Working with the borough on the long-planned expansion of the Birch Hill Recreation Area parking lot, which will take place this summer.

• Scoping out possible uses for remaining funds from the Sunnyside/Cliffside trails project.

• Exploring the addition of mats to the flooring of the Cave in the basement of the Birch Hill Cross Country Ski Center.

• Exploring the addition of an air venting system to the old equipment building so that it could be used as a waxing facility during special events.

Meet the board
Helena Rueter

NSCF helped Rueter quit skiing 'wrong,' now she helps NSCF

I grew up mainly in Florida and was very excited to purchase my first beginner-level ski package when I arrived in Fairbanks to attend UAF in 1985. I skied wrong for over twenty years, and finally started taking lessons regularly in 2006 through the NSCF Adult Lessons program. It was a great feeling to eventually ski well enough to start participating in local and statewide ski races (at my own pace).

This is my second year on the board of the ski club, where I currently serve as chair of the Skier Development Oversight Committee. This committee supports Junior Nordics, adult lessons and FXC.

My husband José and I have served as Junior Nordics coaches for over 10 years, and both of our children, now 18 and 14, have participated in Junior Nordics and FXC. Our whole family embraces cross-country skiing as a sport for life. We hope to continue to enjoy it and to share the joy with others for years to come.

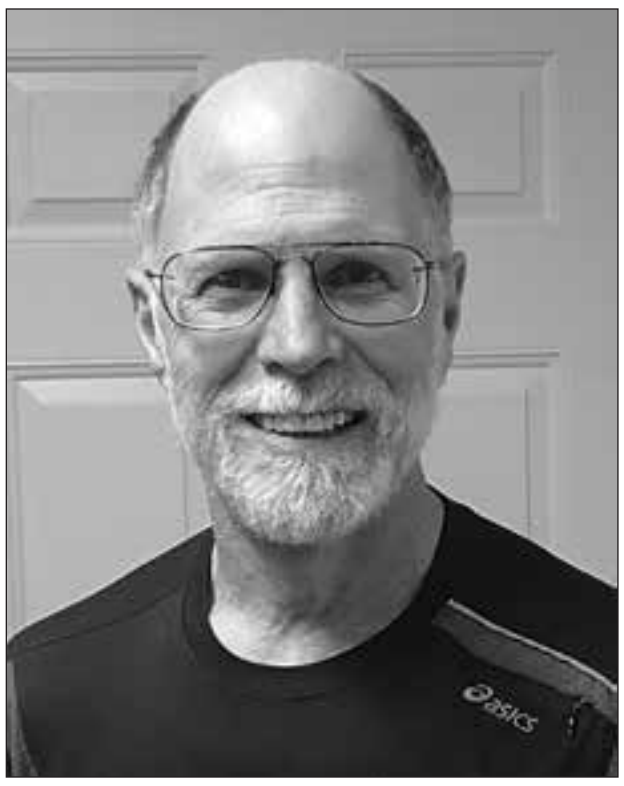
In my non-NSCF life I am a mechanical engineer.

Meet the Board introduces the Board of Directors of the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks to NSCF members and the general public.

Bruce Jamieson

Jamieson finds post-retirement "volunteer passion" with NSCF

I was born and raised in Montana and grew up alpine and backcountry skiing in remote parts of the Montana Rocky Mountains. I came to Alaska in 1969 to work as an assistant big game guide and worked the next six years as a hunting and fishing guide throughout Alaska. I moved to Fairbanks in 1975 with my wife, Ann, and developed first a construction company and then a computer contracting company while raising our son and daughter – both of whom became skiers.



I sold the computer business and retired in 2002 and started looking for some way to give back to the Fairbanks community while still pursuing my interests in outdoor activities and travel. I served six years on the FNSB Trails Commission and ultimately found my volunteer passion with the NSCF helping to develop a long-term community recreational plan for the Birch Hill Recreation Area in conjunction with the FNSB and the U.S. Army at Fort Wainwright. I started with the club as their Special Projects and Grant Coordinator in 2008. I was then asked to serve as president starting in 2012 and have remained in that position to the present.

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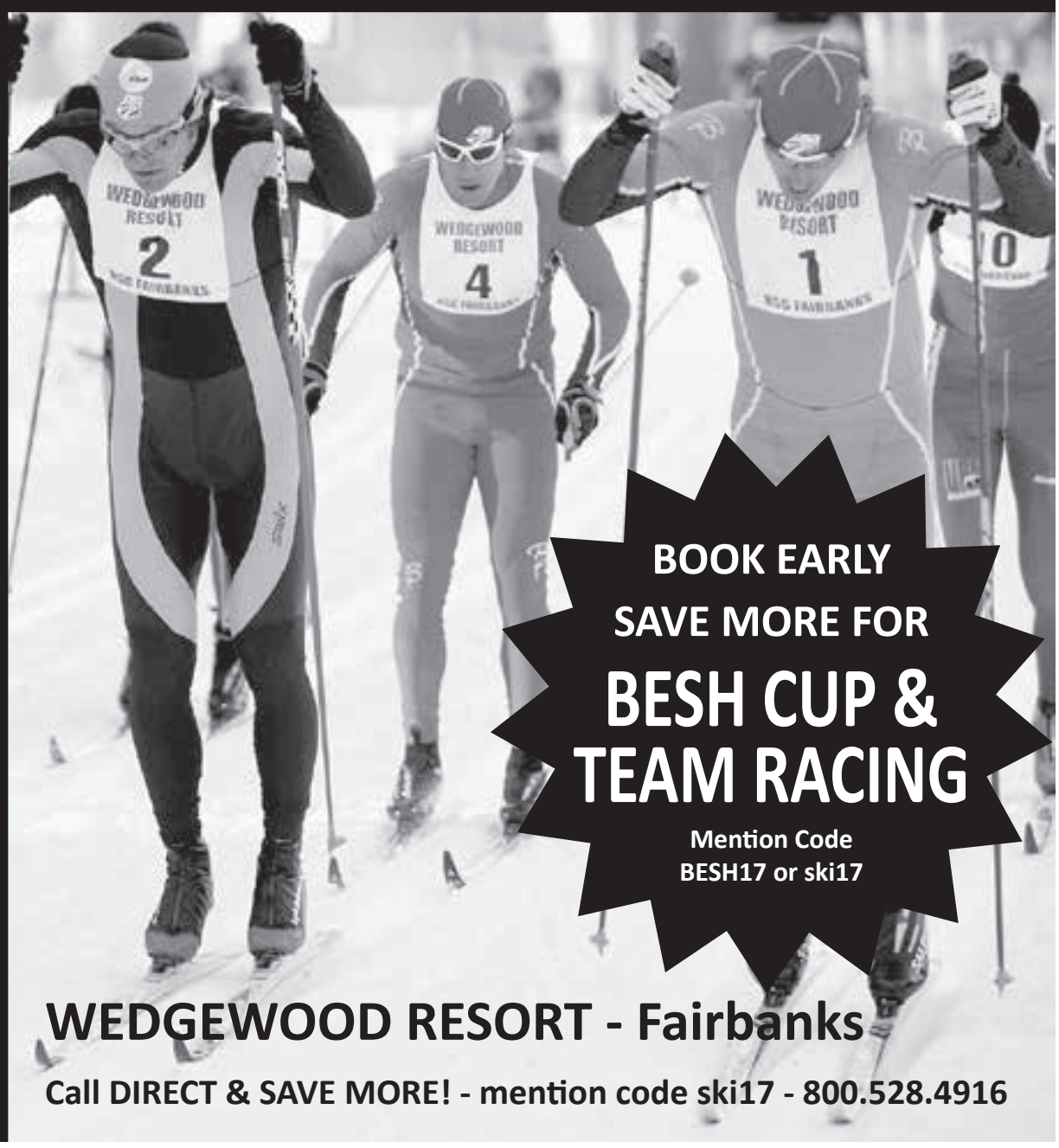

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Fairbanks sends a baker's dozen to Junior Nationals

BY ERIC TROYER

Fairbanks will be well represented at Junior Nationals. Thirteen young athletes – six girls and seven boys – have earned spots on Team Alaska. The USSA Cross Country Junior National Championships will be held March 3-11 in Lake Placid, New York. For more on the venue and event, see www.xcjuniornationals2017.com/.

At Junior Nationals, athletes compete in age categories against other skiers their own gender and age. Categories are divided into two-year segments. Athlete categories included at the JNs are Under-16 (years old), Under-18 and Under-20. Fairbanksans named to Team Alaska are:

U16 Girls — Kendall Kramer, Kaya Ratzlaff, Tjarn Bross and Maggie Druckenmiller

U18/U20 Girls—Jenna Difolco; Alyeska (Aly) Daniels will also be attending as an alternate.

U16 Boys—Jonathan Burrell and Samuel Delamere

U18/U20 — Max Donaldson, Ti Donaldson, Logan Mowry, Benjamin Koenig and Ari Endestad

Skiers qualify for the team based on points earned at the statewide ConocoPhillips Besh Cup series or through their results at U.S. National Cross Country Championships (aka Senior Nationals). The last two Besh Cup races were held in Fairbanks in early February. Results from those races finalized the teams. Learn more about Cross Country Alaska and the Besh Cup races at www.crosscountryalaska.org.

PHOTO BY **ERIC TROYER**

Ari Endestad, left, shown here racing at the 2015 Interior Youth Festival, will be skiing for Team Alaska at this year's Junior Nationals.

PHOTO BY **ERIC TROYER**

Maggie Druckenmiller, left, and Tjarn Bross, shown here at the 2015 Interior Youth Festival awards ceremony, will be skiing for Team Alaska at this year's Junior Nationals.

Almost all of the athletes representing Fairbanks competed last year in the Junior Nationals, which was held in Wisconsin, or in the Arctic Winter Games, which was held in Greenland. (The Arctic Winter Games are held on even years only.)

All of the athletes are or have been members of NSCF-FXC, the junior race-training program of the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks. Learn more about NSCF-FXC at www.nscfairbanks.org/index.php/fxc2 or at its Facebook page, **www.facebook.com/fairbankscrosscountry**.

Skiing the Equinox Marathon Trail not for everyone, maybe anyone

BY ERIC TROYER

Most people think of the Equinox Marathon Trail as a running trail. However, many don't realize that part of the inspiration for building the trail was that it might be used for cross-country skiing.

In his recently published book "The Equinox: Alaska's Trailblazing Marathon," Matias Saari interviewed Nat Goodhue, one of the Equinox founders. Goodhue wasn't optimistic about starting such a race.

"My initial reaction, which I decided to keep to myself, was this is crazy. Hardly anybody will do a marathon," Goodhue told Saari (p. 6).

Still, Goodhue saw an advantage to the effort. "But before I said anything discouraging about it, I thought, 'Well, maybe at least we could get a 42-kilometer ski trail out of this … even if the marathon doesn't last.' "

The marathon has been going for more than 50 years, but no one considers the course as a long ski trail. Parts of it, certainly, but not the whole thing. Doing research for the book piqued the curiosity of Saari, a skier and runner who has won the marathon several times. He decided to try to ski it. Below is an excerpt from his book about his effort. (It is in Chapter 38, on page 256 of the book. Find out more about the book at **http://equinoxmarathonbook.com/.**

Creating a 42-kilometer ski trail was part of the motive for the U of A ski team when they helped found the Equinox.

This writer had never heard of anyone skiing the route and wondered if it was feasible. So at 3 p.m. on a sunny and brisk March 13, 2013, I began my mission of skiing the current course and hoped to finish within five hours.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MATIAS SAARI

The author doesn't have photos of his Equinox Trail ski, but here he is in action at a recent Tour of Anchorage.

I decided to start at Goldstream Sports (mile 8.1) in order to tackle Ester Dome first and leave most of the true ski trails for the final third. Given that I would be skiing several miles on gravel-strewn roads, I used a pair of beat-up classical-technique skis.

On the new Ester Dome trail off St. Patrick Road, I mostly hiked with my skis on. Once I re-connected to the original Equinox trail, the route became wider and packed—but the going was still slow.

Looping around the North Towers, I was forced to remove my skis.

"As I feared, the trail has not been broken out and it's knee- to thigh-deep sugar snow," I dictated into a hand-held recorder.

Soon I was traversing the rolling hills of the Out-and-Back amid strong winds.

I took my skis off for the second and final time at the top of The Chute. "It's way too steep (on Nordic skis), but it's actually easier to run down it this time of year because there are no rocks or roots or ruttiness," I said.

Founder Nat Goodhue once said the perfect ski trail should be completed without removing one's skis—so I'd already proven the Equinox's limitations.

My hands became chilled as I coasted down the Aspen Trail. Then came Henderson and Gold Hill roads, which I'd been dreading. By sticking to the far shoulders, I found enough snow—and less gravel than feared—to reach mile 25 and regain an actual ski trail.

I figured the first eight miles of the course back to Goldstream Sports would be the easiest. However, the historic Skarland ski trail was littered with leaves, sticks, and other debris. On this section, I also had to navigate some pavement, which kept progress tediously slow.

After 5 hours and 55 minutes, I finally finished in waning light. It took twice as long to ski the trail than it typically takes me to race it on foot.

I concluded that the Equinox has never been a popular ski trail because there are plenty of better places to ski for six hours.

I'm glad I did it. I won't repeat it.

Anyone else who wants to try it can find course information here: **https://equinoxmarathon.org.**