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the ALASKA nordic skier

APRIL/MAY 2020, VOL.21, NO.7

PHOTO BY **JEN AIST**

Thank you for reading and supporting Nordic skiing and trails! Enjoy this special, 20-page, season-ending edition of the Alaska Nordic Skier!

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Anchorage Nordic Skier
Newsletter Of The Nordic Skiing Association Of Anchorage, Inc.

203 W. 15th Ave., #204 Anchorage, Alaska, 99501
Phone — 276-7609 **Fax —** 258-7609
Hotline — 248-6667
nsaa@alaska.net

NSAA, trails bring us together even as we are encouraged to stay apart

A Message from NSAA President – Joey Caterinichio

The 2019-2020 Nordic ski season was amazing and historic. Currently sitting bear the end of one of Southcentral's largest snow seasons in recent memory, one would have thought prior to New Year that we would all be pulling out our water skis instead. But the early snowmaking loop, created by NSAA Operations and many volunteers, kicked off and bridged the ski season as the community waited. With Mother Nature observing countless snow dances while looking down on Anchorage, January came and it snowed, and it snowed, and it was still snowing into April! What brings us all together is snow and so many unique snowflakes.

We have all heard that no two snowflakes are alike. "Snowflakes are one of nature's most fragile things, but just look what they can do when they stick together," wrote Vesta M. Kelly. That quote reminds me of NSAA membership and our ski community – we certainly "stick together"! When thinking about our community and organization, thousands of unique individuals come together, fulfilling an incredible mission. We are a community that emulates the magic of snowflakes making snowy trails. Our community comes together: creating manmade ski loops, magical programs and memorable events; maintaining the trails in winter and summer; enhancing quality time between family and friends; providing opportunities to give back; and a time to learn. It reminds us how special and important every one of you are to this organization. Sometimes it can seem complex, NSAA's simple yet ambitious mission to maintain trails and promote Nordic skiing. But with all of you, it becomes so easy. We pause to give thanks for 54 years of partnership between NSAA and our community.

Fast forward to April 2020. None of us ever thought we would be in the place where we are deal-ing with a world pandemic, forcing practices that this lifetime has never encountered. NSAA was lucky enough to have completed most of the season with only a few programs and events can-celled. We may not be able to host programs right now, but with our amazing board, staff, volun-teers and members we were still grooming the trails as late as we could. With the blessing from the Mayor of Anchorage, during social distancing, NSAA continued to maintain the trails to help everyone spend important time outside. I have never seen so many skiers and families enjoying our trails and the outdoors. This crucial action shows just what impact kind of NSAA can have through hosting events, but also in reminding of us of what this really all about: our organization's mission. Grooming and maintaining trails for our city and all the people that live here.

With this pause, we hope you are staying safe, enjoying your families, and taking the time to count every moment we have had together as a blessing. When we return, with all of you, the future will be bright. We are individual snowflakes that together make an amazing community. Thank you for an unforgettable season. You make NSAA great!

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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.

NSAA Season Roundup

Junior Nordic skiers loved lessons, snow and fun

Junior Nordic 19/20… what a season! We had a record number of skiers this year, over 900 registrants. We had programs at Hillside, Russian Jack, and Kincaid. Some groups met Mon/Wed/Sat, and others met Tues/Thurs/Sat. This was a lot of groups, and it certainly couldn't be done without Junior Nordic's truly amazing Site Directors who put in countless hours of time to make Junior Nordic a success. A huge thanks to those individuals: Hillside Site Directors: Dave Ward, Dan Bosch, Sabrina Farmer and Holly Hill. Kincaid Site Directors: Geoff Wright, John Hemmeter, Tyler Henegen and Martin Hanson. Russian Jack Site Director: Art Harmon.

We started the season with variable snow conditions, but the resourceful and enthusiastic Junior Nordic coaches were able to provide quality practices with hiking, games, running, dryland drills and lots of outdoor fun. The Anchorage Skate Club invited our skiers to try speed skating at the oval, which was a blast. Then the snow arrived, with some perfect ski conditions for on snow practice. Thanks to Great Harvest Bread Company, all of our kids were able to use our annual Cookie Tour to get sorted into ability groups. This was followed by a cold January with some unfortunate practice cancelations due to extremely cold temps. After that, the conditions were excellent and Anchorage trails were flooded with hundreds of happy Junior Nordic skiers for the rest of the season.

Several of our advanced skiers participated in our Ready2Race program, superbly coached by Addy Wright. They learned how to wax skis and worked on various skills to be ready to ski race. Many of our Junior Nordic kids participated in the AMH Cup series this winter as well as the

Tuesday Night Ski races. Thanks to a ConocoPhillips for their generous sponsorship, which covered all Junior Nordic entry fees and enabled all kids to race for free.

Our Polar Cubs learned the basics, how to put on their skis, how to "pizza pie" (snowplow) down the hills and how to "duck walk" (herringbone) up the hills. Other skiers were introduced to skate skiing for the first time. Our advanced Hawks mastered various techniques including V1, V2, V2 alternate, how to kick-double pole and much more. It's safe to say that most of our classic skiers moved from

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Thank you to all of this season's volunteers! Check out the list of those generous and energetic folks who helped fuel the season on Page 13.

ROUNDUP

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shuffling to true striding this season. In addition to learning to be faster and more proficient skiers, we hope that we taught all of our Junior Nordic kids to love skiing and have an appreciation for the outdoors and the amazing trails that Anchorage has to offer.

Thanks to all of our parent volunteers who helped throughout the season, we truly could not run this program without all of you. Another huge thanks to Alaska Cleaners who commercially washed and sanitized all of Junior Nordic jackets so they will be clean, germ free and ready for next ski season.

— Shannon Donley , NSAA Junior Nordic Director

PHOTO BY **ANDY ROMANG**

Tour of Anchorage 50K bike champ David Arteaga.

PHOTO BY **MICHAEL DINNEEN**

Tour of Anchorage women's winner Jessica Yeaton.

Tour of Anchorage: Variable conditions, awesome competition

The 2020 Tour of Anchorage went from a speedy trail to a bit of a slog for skiers and bikers alike as six inches of snow fell in a localized storm that buried the Coastal Trail and Kincaid Park.

In the marquee 50K event, UAA freshman Magnus Noroey of Norway chased down and passed Olympian Erik Bjornsen for the win, while Jessica Yeaton dominated for the women. In the 50K bike, David Arteaga claimed a six-rider sprint up the final hill while Stephanie Arnold won going away.

At age 90, Reno Deprey completed the 25K classic and received a standing ovation at the awards ceremony.

The TOA turned out to be the last major gathering in Anchorage for a while as the cancellations due to COVID-19 began just a few days later.

Thank you to our Gold Sponsor ConocoPhillips for their continued support! Thank you also to our Silver Sponsors: KTUU Channel 2, Alaska Airlines, 49th State Brewing Co., Alaska Pacific University and Alaska Colorectal Surgery and 2020's Bronze Sponsors: Elite Sports Performance, Great Harvest Bread Co., and Premier Alaska Tours! We appreciate all their support, not just for Tour of Anchorage, but year round.

— Matias Saari, Race Director

Ending the Ski Jumping season strong

Blessed with cold weather and abundant snowfall, the NSAA Ski Jumping club ended Winter 2020 with a bang. While some families sought warmer climates and many of our athletes traveled to out of state events, we hosted a fun Spring Break camp in Anchorage.

Our athletes and coaches were rewarded in the final weeks of jumping with many athletes stepping up to larger hills. This February and March, we had a handful of first 40-meter flights and our first Alaskan girl jumping the 65M (our largest hill) in a couple years. All of these young athletes overcame the challenges of higher speeds and bigger commitment with the mental strength of champions and the support of their community behind them.

New jumpers were also attracted to our club in the final weeks as a result of outreach and word of mouth efforts.

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EDITOR
Josh Niva
nordicskiereditor@gmail.com

LAYOUT
Kevin Powell
kevin@powelldesign.net

AD REPRESENTATIVE
Michele Hansen
nordicskieradvertising@gmail.com

LOCAL EDITORS

ANCHORAGE
Josh Niva
nordicskiereditor@gmail.com

EAGLE RIVER
Barbara Johnson
sbejohn1@mac.com

FAIRBANKS
Eric Troyer
newsletter@nscfairbanks.org

KACHEMAK
Jeannie Woodring
jwoodring50@gmail.com

JUNEAU
Frankie Pillifant
frankie@gci.net

MAT-SU
Ed Strabel
matsuski@gci.net

SALCHA
Jim Ostlind
jostlind@ptialaska.net

SEWARD
Julie Robinson
julieprigge@gmail.com

SOLDOTNA
Penny McClain
262-6257

TALKEETNA
Chris Mannix
733-2427

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On the cover: And they're off! Young skiers from across Southcentral Alaska skied fast and had a blast at this season's Ski 4 Kids at Kincaid Park. Photo by Jen Aist.

UAA students help make Ski 4 Kids a success

"This is so fun! How do I get my own skis?" Nikki Holmes, a volunteer at this season's Ski 4 Kids, recalls hearing these words during the February event held annually at Kincaid Park. This is of course music to the ears for members of the ski community. The event itself is a sight to behold: hundreds of kids of all ages zooming through obstacle courses, teetering on sit-skis for the first time, learning how to use a laser biathlon rifle, and crossing the line of perhaps their first ever ski race.

One of the special parts of Ski 4 Kids is that it doesn't just draw kids from ski families. It has become one of the biggest avenues for children of diverse backgrounds to get a chance to try out skiing.

Holmes knows this well. She and several fellow UAA graduate students helped organize and ensure participation from nine Title 1 Elementary Schools, many of which are located far from the Kincaid and Hillside trail systems. About 195 kids arrived by bus, thanks to the organization of Holmes and her colleagues, as well as PE teachers from the schools.

"Our mission is to help kids get on skis who would otherwise not get to experience skiing," Holmes said. "Our job was to make sure things ran smoothly for these kids and their teachers and chaperones, but my favorite part was the interactions with the kids. I loved seeing them get off the bus. Everyone was so excited to be there – kids and adults alike. They couldn't wait to experience the day."

Holmes is a Tom Case Leadership fellow at UAA, a program through the School of Business that involves mentorship, leadership, and community service. For the community service component, she and colleagues Jenny McConnel and Valerie Westdahl

wanted to support underserved kids getting outdoors and physically active. They soon realized their interests lined up perfectly with the mission of Ski 4 Kids.

Overall, about 70 volunteers pitched in to make the event run smoothly. Temperatures in the low teens and a brisk wind did not deter young skiers, and plenty of free hotdogs, cookies and cocoa on hand helped replenish energy and warmth. "It's great to watch the community come out to support our next generation of skiers," said volunteer coordinator Lia Slemons. "I grew up skiing here and now my kids are learning to ski on these trails. It's pretty special."

As the school kids got back on the bus, Holmes recalled seeing a visible mix of exhaustion and accomplishment. "Our goal is for this to be just one of many days that kids enjoy skiing on Anchorage trails," she said.

— Darcy Dugan, Erin Whitney Witmer, Ski 4 Kids Directors

Spring skiing is in full effect!

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NSAA Partner Spotlight: Alaska Mountaineering and Hiking (AMH)

NSAA is lucky to have such amazing and supportive friends in the Anchorage small business community. For decades, Alaska Mountaineering and Hiking (AMH) has been the most stalwart of NSAA's partners, supporting recreational and competitive skiing in the Anchorage area. We had a virtual sit-down with Jason Buttrick, who with his wife Britta Sonerholm, purchased the beloved local gear shop from Paul Denkewalter at the beginning of 2018, to chat about AMH's operations, Nordic skiing in Anchorage and the current coronavirus situation's impact on skiing and small business.

Can you tell our members a bit about AMH's ownership and staff?

My wife Britta and I own AMH together. I have worked at AMH since 2007 and we purchased the business from Paul at the start of 2018. AMH has a great staff composed of a mix of long term and seasonal staffers - currently 16 in total. Rene is our General Manager/Buyer - she picks out what we offer in the store. Rick is our warranty manager and handles the website. Alex manages inventory. Nick and Travis run the ski room. Wilfred is the boot fitting master. And Galen is our Nordic specialist.

How are things at AMH during our current community, coronavirus mitigation efforts?

Things during the hunker down order have been difficult at AMH. We are open only for curbside pickup from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day, with minimal staff on-site. Everyone else is working from home. So far we are happy to report that our entire staff remains on the payroll and we are hoping to weather this storm intact.

Why does AMH support Nordic skiing in Anchorage today?

Nordic skiing is a great way for people of all ages to stay active and outdoors during our longest season.

What types of Nordic events and programs is AMH most excited about supporting?

We like to support as many Nordic events as we can but are particularly interested in events and races that get kids outside and active.

What hopes/goals/aspirations does AMH have for Anchorage and its Nordic skiing community?

We love seeing the community that has developed over the years around Nordic skiing. The trail access and grooming that NSAA provides in Anchorage is really unusual and special. At this point our hope is to see ski programs resume next year and we are crossing our fingers for snow! We would love to see big groups of Junior Nordic kids out on the trails and Sunday Anchorage Cup races.

Is there anything else AMH would like NSAA's membership to know?

Yeah! We are a small, locally-owned ski and climbing shop on Spenard since 1974. We do our best to carry the highest quality gear and hire the most knowledgeable and friendly staff. We love our community and have really missed seeing you all this Spring. We hope folks are finding time right now to get outside and stay well!

NSAA is continually impressed by Jason and Britta's commitment to their staff. When things return to normal in Anchorage, we know our members will be first in line to show their support to this incredible small business. Thanks much to AMH for their decades of support, especially their sponsorship of the AMH Anchorage Cup race series!

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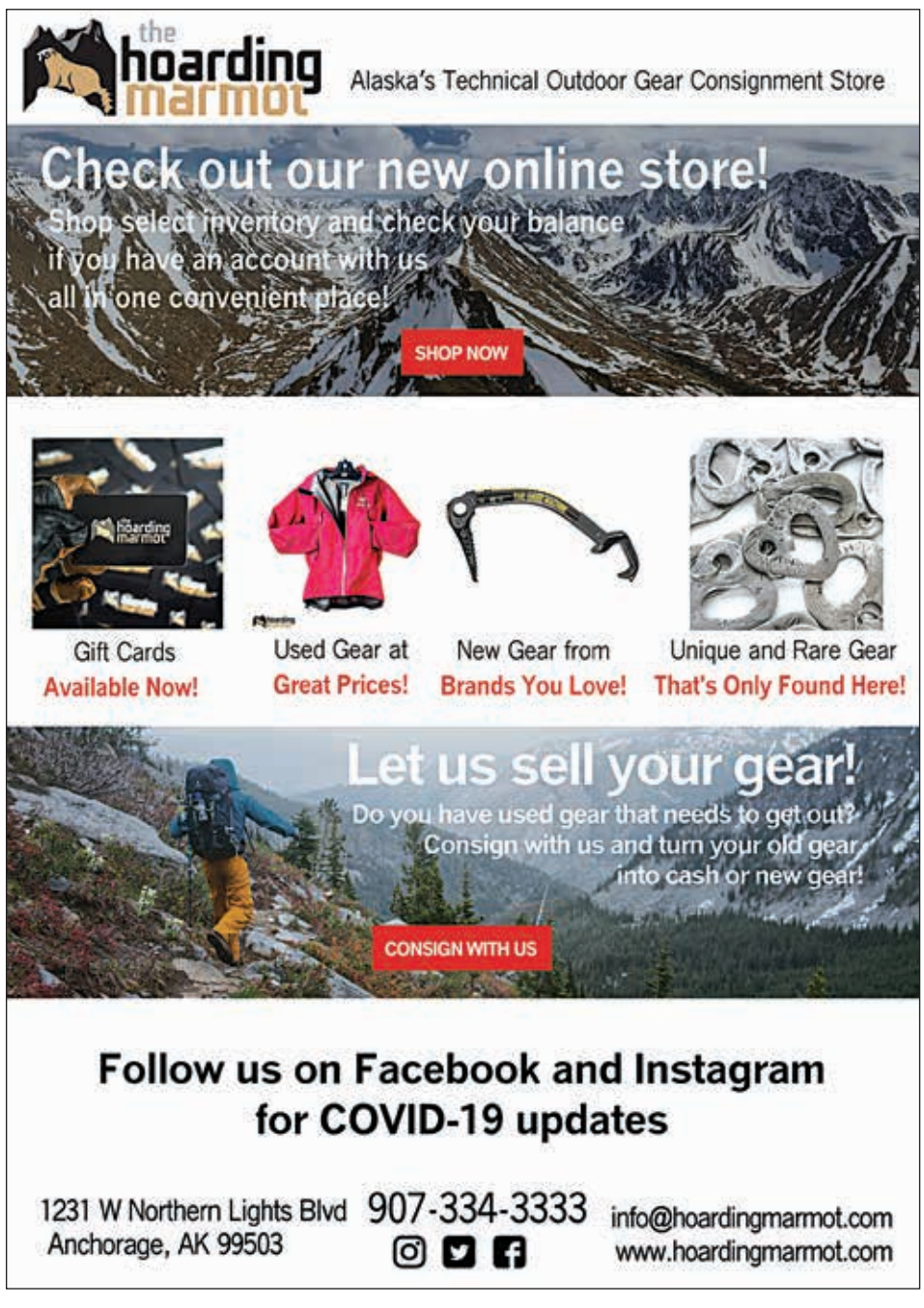

ROUNDUP

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We had eight new ski jumpers attend our spring break camp! These kids – some as young as 5 – got their first taste of flying over the snow just in time to beat the end of the winter season.

Spring is always a time for a break from the jumping world. April and May will be a chance to rejuvenate our minds and bodies as the snow melts. Come June, NSAA Ski Jumping will be back in session with another summer season ahead. We'll be back on the hill with our artificial snow surfaces on all of our jumps. Long days, moderate temperatures and fresh energy make for summer stoke. As the saying goes, "skiers are made in the summer!"

— Adam Loomis, NSAA Ski Jumping program coach

Ski for Women: Another big success

A gritty and giddy group of 560 women gathered at chilly Kincaid Park to have a good time on the snow while raising funds for local nonprofits that help stop the cycle of domestic abuse against women and children at the 24th annual Alaska Ski for Women on February 2.

Thank you to all the volunteers, sponsors and participants for making this a day to remember! The volunteer committee works year-round to make this event fun and fulfilling for Alaskans. We also want to thank our top sponsors – Platinum: ConocoPhillips Alaska. Gold: KTUU. Silver: Banker Law Group, The Alaska Club, Magic 98.9, Premier Alaska Tours, Great Harvest Bread Co.

PHOTOS BY **PAL PHOTOGRAPHY**

Save The Date for the 25th Anniversary of the Alaska Ski for Women, taking place Sunday, February 7, 2021. Be on the lookout for more details in Fall 2020 and in the meantime think of a great costume idea for you and your friends. If you wish to sponsor the 25th anniversary please email alaskaskiforwomen@gmail.com.

NSAA groomers, volunteers make trail magic for Tour, all season

I have a huge "Thank You!" that needs to be presented. Eric Egelund took charge of assembling and coordinating volunteers for cutting brush (pesky alders) on the Sisson and Tony Knowles Coastal trail.

The Sisson Crew: Eric Egelund, Ben Arians, Rick Rodgers, Art Alexander and the AK Winter Stars Midday group 9 hours total. Tour trail from Westchester to Kincaid: Eric Egelund, AWS masters and Jr. coach Brett Egelund, Rick Rodgers, Art Copoulos, Ben Arians, Alison Arians, Dave Schwartz, Bruce Ralbut, 22 man hours. I'm sure there are others that may have participated … sorry if your name isn't listed.

Also, another huge "Thank You!" goes to the volunteer group that helped with snowmachine grooming and setting track on the Chester Creek Center section, Northern Lights Bridge to Westchester lagoon, the might of the Tour of Anchorage. Steve Carroll, Chris Seaman, Tim Miller, Iain Miller. They pulled a 9-hour shift!

Another bunch of volunteer heroes, lurking in the background, are the Snowmaking crew: Tim Brabets, Tim Stone, Jack Porter. Big thanks to those guys, also. The Tour finish would have been a whole lot narrower without the additional manmade snow. These guys definitely saved the day!

Our cats need to be fed ... and that means fuel! Shoreside Petroleum has made every effort to deliver fuel in our (my) hour of need! They deserve recognition for their effort.

— Craig Norman, NSAA Operations

In a big backcountry, skiing dreams stay with you

The 2019-20 NSAA Backcountry Ski Tours were well attended, with happy skiers appreciating all the wonderful snow this year! The first tour to Archangel Road was postponed for two days to allow the snowpack to settle after a large storm. Then skiers had the fun challenge of sidestepping quite a few little streams on the Iditarod National Historic Trail at Turnagain Pass. On the Middle Fork Loop tour, it was reported that "the skiing was as good as it gets, with lovely fresh powder!" The overnight weekend tours to Sheep Mountain and the Denali View Chalet were very popular, with delicious food and excellent skiing conditions. Despite having to cancel the last two tours of the season due to the scourge of the COVID-19 coronavirus, we enjoyed another great season of backcountry adventures! And as always, we are grateful for the Anchorage Nordic Ski Patrol volunteers who provided valuable support to keep skiers safe and happy!

— Mary Vavrik, NSAA Backcountry Tours lead

Middle School Racing a big-time success

Want to know where the serious action was this past ski season? Middle School racing of course! With more skiers than a high school race and more chaos than a Junior Nordic practice, over 600 middle schoolers from Girdwood to Mirror Lake braved night-time races to have some fun.

The 2020 race season would not have been possible without the dozens and dozens of NSAA and parent volunteers. Thank you for showing up, doing what's needed and being the best bunch of folks to hang out with in the dark! We appreciate every single one of you!

Our start crew had 2,791 race starts with Saturday Night Live-level humor. Extra style points to flag dropper, Steve, who didn't get run over no matter how hard Ed tried. Our timers had 2,791 finishers, in the dark and 3,001 of them had obscured bib numbers. You are miracle workers with numb fingers and toes! Our course marshals had a 100 percent return rate (but it could be 99 percent). Your encouragement will keep 105 percent of them skiing into the future! Our medical crew didn't lose a single patient and when kids were dropping like flies this crew separated the drama queens from the 911 calls like the pros they are. The Crossing Crew of Professionals had zero skier/spectator collisions and I believe zero use of physical violence. Well done! The sweeps showed amazing patience and perseverance, how is it even possible to take 70 minutes to ski 2.3 kms? True angels on skis. Thank you to this big village of volunteers who makes skiing safe and fun for the kids.

A special round of applause to the man who makes this all work - Bob Stehn! Course designer and map maker by day, gear hauler by afternoon, timer by evening and result tabulator past midnight. All with good cheer and simultaneously doing the same thing for four other races. You are irreplaceable!

Interested in joining this amazing group of volunteers next season? Contact Diane Moxness, NSAA Middle School Race Coordinator at middleschoolxcski@gmail.com. We'll add you to our list of "usual suspects."

— Diane Moxness,
NSAA Middle School Representative

Mat-Su Ski Club
Palmer, Alaska

1150 S. Colony Way, Suite 3
Palmer, Alaska 99645
(907) 745-SKIS
www.matsuski.org

AROUND THE VALLEY

In these troubling times, skiing and our club fix (just about) everything

Odd times for sure. I know for a lot of people their lives are completely different from "normal," but I am one of those who has been fortunately labeled essential, and my day-to-day is very similar to once it was. With regards to skiing, I have been practicing social distancing before it was en vogue. My times to ski, coincides when the general population is choosing to eat or sleep, or possibly both. Not by choice mind you, but by requirements of my schedule. Of course, no one will argue the main reason for skiing is the physical conditioning, health benefits, but lately my decision to go skiing is more for mindful reasons.

These times are stressful for most. The way in which most people's schedules have been thrown in the air like a toddler destroying a boardgame from frustration, is downright depressing. And I am not even going to begin to address all the other soul crushing news that is occurring for others in our society. But with a short drive and a few extra articles of clothes (depending on the day) we all have an excellent method for coping with these stressors.

I have two main means to defogging my brain when too many thoughts are occupying the limited (very limited) space between my ears. The first is just getting out on to the trail. I am sure I am not dropping any amazing "truth bombs" to this readership by making this proclamation, but sometimes I need to be reminded to just take those steps out the door, to put those ski boots on, to fulfill my need for outdoor time whether I realize I need it or not. This usually leads to a nice zone 1-2 hour-plus ski and miraculously, life seems palatable afterwards.

My second life coping method I like to refer to as the "please make it stop" technique. This method goes by many names; intervals, VO2 Max training, lactic threshold training, hill repeats, etc. While many seasoned athletes have some component of their schedule dedicate to this type of workout, I am more fond of just throwing it in when mind is ready and by "ready," I mean needing a little butt kicking. The principles that make this method effective are similar to the experience you may have had in Hawaii, or some other tropical beach, in which you have just tried to bodysurf a wave that has quickly turned into a bad decision and you are no longer riding a wave, but have somehow magically been transported into a wash machine. That feeling where the amount of remaining oxygen inside your lungs is the only thing that your mind can possibly conjure. The difference is that with intervals, you are feeling like there isn't enough oxygen in the world to possibly keep you going at this rate, and instead of an outside force (the wave) imposing this "uncomfortable" experience, you only have yourself to blame.

The motivation to keep you going through the next X number of minutes/seconds, or to continue pushing to reach the top of hill, is purely to honor your commitment to completing what you set out to do. For most of us, there is no coach watching, or spectators peering (other than that elderly couple I saw last time who I imagined where thinking "how is this guy breathing so hard, while moving so slow …") this is purely a masochistic experience, but then it's over. For me this is where the best benefit arises. I have spent some amount of time thinking only of how will I survive the next 30, 20, 10 minutes? I was incapable of thinking about anything else and that "mental break" has provided me just a wee-bit of relief to that previously mentioned crammed space in my head.

These workouts usually leave me with a good time to reflect positively during a cool down or on the drive home. Recently I was making my way down the hill from GPRA, it was nearly 10 years ago that none of the trails, parking area, chalet or road to these entities existed. In fact, the MSSC was so much smaller back in those days that handcrafted coffee mugs were given out when one signed up as a member.

The club has grown in leaps and bounds in the past decade. The number of families that are members is now measured in the hundreds rather than the tens. And our community has been a huge proponent to the skier's cause. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough has supported the club and our projects from the early days, and every year covers the costs for fuel and maintenance of our grooming equipment. Many local corporate sponsors have risen to the cause and this year was no different.

Because the MSSC has grown so much and has taken on more to offer more skiing opportunities, the rally call for volunteers has happened more frequently and it never fails, you all answer. Thank you so much to those who have helped out at our race events, trail maintenance days, and the multitude of other events throughout the entire year.

Our Junior Nordic program continues to grow every year and Steering Committee did a fantastic in managing the entire program, thank you! Additionally, the Junior Nordic coaches did a wonderful job in providing a fun, entertaining and engaging program.

The club is run by an all-volunteer Board of Directors, whose hours of volunteering measure in the hundreds every year. These persons are the full-time behind the scenes (and sometimes lead cast) people responsible for ensuring the success of the club. Thank you, Board!

And where would we be without our amazing groomers, who have worked tirelessly to ensure we all have no excuse but to ski every day. Thank you, folks for facilitating our addiction.

Additionally, it has to be mentioned that the ever-expanding role of the club does come with a financial obligation and as such the MSSC does as often for donations to continue offering these skiing opportunities in the Valley. Thank you all for contributing to the betterment of skiing in our community. And consider thanking our local sponsors who have contributed substantially.

Thank you all for making our club something to be proud of. And as this season slowly (hopefully) comes to an end, the club will continue to provide skiable trails as long as Ullr allows and with those trails, a means to manage these difficult times. See ya on the trails!

— Hans Hill

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Biathlon at GPRA?

Development of a biathlon range at the Nordic ski trails of Government Peak Recreation Area is a long-term goal of the Mat-Su Ski Club and the Mat-Su Borough. The first step toward that goal was recently taken when the Alaska Department of Natural Resources amended regulations governing GPRA to permit eventual construction of a biathlon range (https://aws.state.ak.us/OnlinePublicNotices/Notices/Attachment.aspx?id=120976). However, several steps remain before a biathlon range becomes a reality.

The next step will be a professional feasibility assessment to determine where a biathlon range can be safely located and built on the quirky soils of GPRA, followed by drafting of range plans. Range location and plans will require approval from the Mat-Su Borough and the Mat-Su Ski Club Board of Directors, with opportunity for input from users of GPRA. Then,

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Eagle River Nordic Ski Club
Eagle River, Alaska

P.O. Box 770117, Eagle River, Alaska 99577
Club hotline — 689-7660
Junior nordic hotline — 689-7661
cernsc.wildapricot.org

Participants shout aloha to tropical skiing fun and we miss you to Erin Johnson and Ben Schneider prior to the 2020 Ski the Beach race.

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Club celebrates life, love, skiing, and spring in annual Ski the Beach for Erin

It's hard to believe it's the third year that CERNSC has remembered Erin Johnson at the Ski the Beach Race and promoted the race with donations going toward the Erin K. Johnson Memorial Fund. There were a wide variety of skiers at this festive event remembering Erin's spunky, "get after it" outdoor spirit and her joy of life.

Erin wasn't the only one on ski club members minds this year, however.

There were many who came to the race with Ben Schneider and his family on their minds and in their hearts, as well. Ben has been a local club Junior Nordic coach for years and is currently in critical care after being in a car accident in early February. When everyone gathered for the traditional photo prior to the race, club president, Jason Dennis, asked everyone to yell, "Ski the Beach for Erin … and for Ben" and we all yelled it with emotion, loud and clear.

Over 140 skiers registered for the race. We celebrated the joys of life, good health, family and friends, and appreciated the pure joy of skiing. Certainly, Erin and Ben would've been there if they could have been, dressed up in tropical outfits, and enjoying every second. So we all skied for them, and others who couldn't join us who were on our minds.

Rish Harty, club board member and a coordinator for Junior Nordic, made sure there were plenty of festive decorations, tropical leis, tattoos, and hula skirts! Alycia Beiergrohslein made beautiful, highly coveted, handmade medals for the top three winners in four categories of races. First and second place racers also received fresh pineapples, and third place winners received mangos. All these special touches make this a fun and unique end of the season race.

A huge thank you to all of the wonderful businesses that continue to support the race and make it a fun

See **SKI THE BEACH**, Page 9

The kids are alright! 3.5K top skiers included girls Sophia Kristich (third), Maryah Castillo (first), and Riley Harty (third), and boys Nyle Brown (third), Leif Konrath-Bera (second), and Tom Ringsmuth (first).

SKI THE BEACH

Continued from Page 8

event for all of the participants with many prizes for racers of all ages. These businesses include Alaska Mountaineering and Hiking, Barneys Sport Chalet, Carrs/Safeway, Coldstone Creamery, Jitters, REI, Skinny Raven Sports, and Three Bears Alaska, We appreciate your generous donations!!!

We appreciate everyone who came to participate and all the volunteers who made this race another huge success. To see complete race results, go to: **cernsc.org**

Ros Singleton, front, and Mary Krusen go cruising during the Ski the Beach race.

Leif Konrath-Bera and Quinn Urbanus Ski the Beach.

We're thinking of Ben Schneider and his family

It goes without saying that the Chugiak/Eagle River Junior Nordic community is a tight-knit one. Our all-volunteer coaches are all someone's father or mother, someone's wife or husband. When something wonderful happens, we celebrate together. And when something devastating happens to one of our own, we mourn together. Ben Schneider is more than a ski coach to all of us. His energy and spirit have sent positive ripple effects throughout our entire community since his family moved to Alaska. He has been a friend, mentor and teacher to so many of us that you have to look hard to find someone who is not impacted by the inexplicable accident that changed the course of his and his family's life in an instant.

Ben has been an integral part of our skiing community, so much so that there are now high schoolers to whom he taught the "angry penguin" when they were just 4 and 5 year olds. Most recently, he started an after-school skiing program at Birchwood ABC. He has been a Boy Scout leader, Eagle River Get Out and Go hiking group leader, a co-founder of the Chugach Mountain Bike Riders, PE teacher, and a fierce advocate of getting families outdoors. His gift will always be to impart the love of family outdoor activities to everyone and anyone who's been blessed to cross paths with him.

So it is with sad hearts but a hope for the future that we should all do Ben justice by embracing his gift to us. Let's all do that with a new-found energy fueled by Ben, because if you know Ben, you know he would want us to get out and go!

– Written by Yorisha (Rish) Harty

Rish Harty with a photo collage of Ben Schneider and a book for people to sign well wishes at the recent Ski the Beach race.

Ben Schneider

Kachemak Nordic Ski Club
Homer, Alaska

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

AROUND THE BAY

Groomers, Mother Nature and our amazing trails make for special spring skiing

Have you been on the trails in Homer this March and April? Skiing doesn't get any better. The groomers at Lookout, McNeil-Eveline and Baycrest have kept up the grooming – even between meltdown, late spring snow falls, and thawing snow. You'll find perfect crust skiing, especially in the mornings, when the sun hasn't melted the snow surface. Sunshine starts early in the morning and lasts into the evening.

The Marathon Trail currently provides outstanding skiing, thanks to Marathon organizer Deland Anderson and his army of volunteers. Though the current pandemic called for cancelling the race, skiers can still enjoy this magnificent trail.

The Lookout Mountain trail system is groomed every day, usually early in the morning, by dedicated groomers like John Miles and Brian Harrison.

Thanks to the cooler temperatures at Homer's higher elevations, the McNeil-Eveline trail systems are still in great shape. Groomers like Derek Stonorov and Nikki Szrarzi spend a lot of time keeping the trails in order, then ski the magic they have created.

All of us skiers are grinning like hyenas as we whiz along the trails. If there is anything good about this current pandemic, it's that we have time and few restrictions if we want to go skiing. It's easy to keep your social distance when you have several kilometers of trail.

Here in Homer, we love it when we can ski through April. The hard-core skiers brag about skiing late into June in the hills surrounding Kachemak Bay.

So get your skis on – and we'll see you on the trails!

Junior Nordic wraps up another great season

Even snow blizzards can't stop Homer's fun-loving Junior Nordic participants from having an end-of-season farewell party on Saturday, February 22, at the Lookout Mountain ski area.

"It was a crazy last practice, but we pulled it off," recalls JN director Kathy Sarns.

Even though the snow was blowing around her house, Sarns had heard that Ohlson Road, the road to Lookout, had been plowed. So she emailed all the JN participants that the practice and party were on and borrowed a friend's 4WD to get to Lookout.

But the snow kept on. Sarns got stuck going to Ohlson Road because the plow turned around before Lookout and she drove beyond that and found 3.5 feet of fluffy snow burying her car.

"The good news is that I was the first one there to get stuck," says Sarns. "That kept everyone behind me from getting stuck, too."

In Homer fashion, the humans out in the snowstorm came to the rescue of the JN party. Parents parked on Ohlson Road behind Sarns. Nine very nice snowmachiners pushed her out – which took a while.

"Then I managed to back the car all the way onto the plowed section," Sarns says, "and I saw JN cars parked as far as the eye could see."

One of the JN volunteers, Melissa Cloud, came over Sarns to brainstorm about what to do for the party.

"She had the brilliant idea to go to the high school and ski on the fields," Sarns says. "So we told everyone that was parked to head to the high school."

Another volunteer, Kris Holderoid, stopped all the rest of the cars at the intersection of Skyline and Ohlson Road and told them to go to the high school.

When the party started, more than 70 kids showed up to ski around at the high school ("probably a record there," Sarns adds).

Somehow the pizza from local restaurant Fat Olives also made it to the party. Hot chocolate and cups were on hand as well.

Fortunately, "it all worked out," Sarns concludes.

A warm bonfire kept skiers warm at the Wine & Cheese event when the clouds rolled in.

Wine and Cheese event enjoyed by over 100 skiers

The sunshine in Homer on Sunday, February 16, helped lure more than 120 skiers to the KNSC annual Wine and Cheese Event.

This year's event was held at the McNeil-Eveline ski trails with two stops. Kim and Martin Schuster's stop at Eveline featured fantastic views and a wonderful Swiss version of macaroni and cheese – prepared every year Martin and his wife Kim have hosted the event.

The second top, at Bill Gee's house a few kilometers down the trail, provided a warming fire and all the party effects of the Wine and Cheese event.

With beer from Grace Ridge Brewing and wine donated by the Grog Shop and Bear Creek Winery, skiers sampled libations along with tasty cheeses, sausages, and crackers – all available inside a warm barn. Since clouds had replaced the sunshine, skiers packed the space around the blazing fire pit.

And the annual events brought a lot of laughter and winners. The annual "best period costume" contest, led by volunteer Robert Archibald, found the crowd favorite in Gus Beck, dressed as a crusty hunter/trapper on skis. Door prizes – donated by Lisa Wood, Dave Brann, Cynthia Morelli, Homer Saw and Cycle, Kachemak Gear Shed, Ulmer's Drug and Hardware, trips to State Park cabins and on water taxis, and many other donators – delighted the lucky ticket holders.

As with all KNSC events, the army of volunteers behind the scenes makes the wine and cheese event so enjoyable.

Bill Gee and his wife have hosted the tour three times in the past six years. "We volunteer for the event because it is just so darn fun, and the Nordic community in Homer is such a great bunch of people. Besides, I've always been kind of snow and Nordic ski addict," Gee admits. "It's a pleasure to host."

"There are so many folks involved in putting events like this together for the club," he adds. "This tour is such a great example of that. From the KNSC Board, the registration people, the servers, those in charge of procuring all of the goodies, those in charge of procuring prizes for the drawing, those who made the neat signage, the dedicated groomers, etc., there are just a bunch of folks who work behind the scene to pull these things off."

Thanks, all!

Patrons make things happen for the KNSC

As with all Alaskan communities that have a vital Nordic ski presence, the KNSC appreciates the ongoing invaluable support from its generous patrons. The patron level of support comes from those businesses and individuals who provide more than $1,000 worth of goods and services each year.

The following Homer businesses gave generously as patrons during the past ski season. They're open year-round, so stop by during the year and thank them for their patronage – and give them a little business.

GRACE RIDGE BREWING

This delightful brewing company, owned and operated by the Stead Family, donated a lot of finely crafted beer to many of the KNSC events this year. The brewer uses the freshest

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Friday Night Lights
Stacey Buckalew

Kachemak Bay Ski for Women & Haven House
Kris Holdereid/Shelly Laukitis

Wine, Cheese & Wooden Ski Tour
Mike Gracz

Kachemak Bay Marathon Ski
Deland Anderson

Homer Epic 100
Homer Cycling Club

Sea to Ski Triathlon
Derek Bynagle

AROUND THE BAY

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hops available and mills its own malt to "bring a smooth, rich taste to each and every batch" brewed in-house.

Beyond selling beer, the brewery notes, "Now that we're a bit bigger, we hope to give back and each month we will donate all of our tips to a different local group or charity."

Grace Ridge Brewing also hosts in-house presentations by locals, from travelers to artists. In addition, the brewery donates its products to other local non-profits like the KNSC.

THE GROG SHOP

A longtime supporter of the KNSC, as well as many Homer non-profits, The Grog Shop has donated countless bottles of wine to ski events.

The shop is famous for having over 1,500 different wines in a temperature-controlled wine room and over 50 single malt scotches. Fishermen and travelers alike appreciate The Grog Shop's accessibility – it's open seven days a week, from 8 am to midnight or 1 am (on Fridays and Saturdays) – make it easy to pick up whatever beverage you need, no matter the hour. And for beer drinkers, a refilling station is available if you bring empty growlers.

BEAR CREEK WINERY

Many skiers at the KNSC's wine and cheese event sampled the wines generously donated by Bear Creek Winery. As with other KNSC patrons, Bear Creek also donates to many Homer non-profit organizations.

Started in the 1990s as a home-grown hobby for Bill and Dorothy Fry, the winery opened commercially in 2003. As business grew and wine began earning awards, the Frys built a new facility in Homer that is operated by their son-in-law Louis Maurer. Today, Bear Creek Winery offers tastings, lodging, 9 core varieties of wine and 5 seasonal wines.

"Thanks to all of our local supporters and traveling visitors who have helped us grow."

FRITZ CREEK GENERAL STORE

The fine-tuned grooming done on the McNeil-Eveline Nordic trail systems in Homer is powered by $1,000 in gas donated by the Fritz Creek General Store. Co-owner of the store, Diana Carbonell, is a champion Nordic skier herself and donates the gas because she loves skiing with her dog, which is allowed on both the McNeil and Eveline trail systems.

When she's not skiing, Carbonell helps create the many food items for which the store has become famous. Here you'll find the best $3 generous slice of pizza in town, barbecued ribs and chicken to take home at night, different salads and casseroles in the refrigerator, and baked goods that you can't walk away from. And then there's the generous homemade giant sandwiches that have powered many skiers and outdoor winter enthusiasts.

ULMER'S DRUG AND HARDWARE

Nearly every Nordic event in Homer benefits from the patronage of Ulmer's. The store donates many raffle items to KNSC events, as well as those sponsored by other non-profits. KNSC members get a 10% discount on ski equipment and winter gear. School Nordic team members and coaches and the Junior Nordic participants and coaches get 15% off equipment and gear. Ulmer's also donates to Nordic races and events at all school levels.

And if you want help getting a pair of boots or skis that fit or want to discuss your unique needs for hitting the trails, Ulmers has experts such as Steve Soistman to give advice.

Don't forget the groomers!

Five months and counting. That's how long we've been able to ski this winter. And most of the reason is because of our great groomers.

Take our Nordic crown jewel: the Lookout Mountain trail system. The regular 13.5K of trails expands to another 10-20K, depending on snow conditions – and grooming. Often, groomers like John Miles, Brian Harrison, Mike Byerly and Taro Sasakura are out on the trails as the sun rises, firming up the snow for school races, hard-core skiers who like hills, and regular skiers who want varied terrain. Lookout is groomed more than any of the other Nordic trail systems in Homer, so if you can't ski anywhere else, try Lookout Mountain.

The McNeil-Eveline-Wolf Ridge Trail System offers 26.2K of trails, with some lovely hills and lots of flat terrain for superb skate skiing. Regular groomers on these trails include Derek Stonorov, Nicky Szarzi, Bill Gee, Stan Purington, and Andrew Peter. Occasional groomers include Lance Haggerty, Lance Williamson, Lauren Seaton, Mike Olaire and Ben Stanistreet.

The Baycrest trail system has 24.2K of trails. Lying closer to Kachemak Bay, the trail system needs a good winter of cold temperatures for the snow not to turn mushy or icy.

Fortunately, the experienced groomers at Baycrest know when and how to keep the trails in pristine condition. Dave Brann and Robert Archibald lead the grooming at Baycrest. They are assisted by Wim Steenbakkers, Ben Stanistreet, Richard Rosenbloom, Myles Purington, Bruce Hess, Roy Wilson, Pete Alexon, Dave Stutter, and Billy Day.

If you're on the trail when a groomer approaches, wave – and if you can – thank them for keeping the trails so perfect.

MAT-SU

VALLEY

Continued from Page 7

pending approval, comes the big step of construction and making the range a reality. Each of these steps will require time and money, now made a bit easier by the change in DNR regulations. This will be a long-term process, and a biathlon range at GPRA is not likely in the near future.

The Mat-Su Ski Club envisions a small, 10-lane training range that would cover approximately 1.5 acres of the 300-acre Nordic area at GPRA. The Mat-Su Borough will have final authority over range operations. However, consistent with the rules governing biathlon, the club will expect biathletes that use the range to complete safety training, only shoot .22 caliber rifles, use a lower (standard) velocity ammunition that is quieter than most ammunition, and only shoot during designated openings when a range safety officer is present. This will not be a general use shooting range open to anyone shooting any firearm.

Those who ski, bike, or hike at GPRA know it's a special place. The Mat-Su Ski Club's goal is to preserve the character of GPRA while providing opportunities for biathlon.

For more information, if you have comments, or if you would like to help, please contact Jerry Hupp (jerry.hupp@matsuski.org).

— Jerry Hupp

Mat-Su Ski Club thanks its groomers

The Mat-Su Ski Club would like to thank the team of groomers who contributed to the exceptionally long and wonderful ski season in the lower Mat-Su Valley.

At Independence Mine, where we started grooming on October 5, the team of Mark Strabel, Jeff Kase, Chris Smith, Ben Raevsky, John Ferri, and Doug Warner kept up with the challenging conditions including heavy snowfalls and 8-foot-high drifts to provide corduroy, tracks and even a 3.7K loop on the east side of the valley that had properly banked downhill turns.

At Archangel Road, Ashly Wise and Zack Steer faced similar conditions along with several avalanches that presented unique grooming problems. They still kept the road groomed most of the winter for skiers seeking a flatter, dog friendly venue with great views and solitude.

At the Government Peak Rec Area the team of Mark Strabel, John Ferri, Jeff Kase, Stan Hooley, Doug Warner, Lori Straub, and Ed Strabel kept the trails groomed for the Junior Nordics, high school teams, races, adult lessons and the skiing public while also keeping the Pioneer Loop groomed for pedestrians and dogs as well as skiers.

At the Moose Range the team of volunteer groomers included Karen Hopp, Gene Backus, Kirby Spangler, Keith Weineke, Billy Hahn, Bill Weiss, and Shane Barber. These volunteers covered a large area with a spider web of trails, and in several cases used their own snow machines and fabricated groomers.

The ski/grooming season is still not over. We anticipate grooming into May. We also plan on being ready to start grooming in early October. Make sure your skis are ready!

— Ed Strabel

Pick.Click.Give.Ski! Alaska PFD application deadline extended to April 30

If you haven't applied yet, you can do it online. Please consider the Mat-Su Ski Club in your Pick.Click.Give. contribution. If you have already applied for your PFD, you can add us as one of your PCG recipients.

Our new website!

We have been working on a new website, **matsuski.org**, since last fall and are now rolling it out for you to marvel at. We ask that you contact us at info@matsuski.org with any problems or comments.

Girdwood Nordic Ski Club
Girdwood, Alaska

P.O. Box 337
Girdwood, AK 99587
skigirdwood.org

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At least there is this ...

BY DEB ESSEX
Girdwood Nordic Ski Club, Founder/Director

Like most of us, I'm reading the news about our COVID-reality, and wondering what the new normal will look like for Alaska. My daily routine has forever changed. There is discovery through isolation – like the ridiculous amount of edamame in my freezer, or the importance of "mute" during video conferencing, or how I know most Super Tramp lyrics. Outside the house is a bit surreal. Without tourism, Girdwood feels like a ghost town. When I head out to groom trails, I am the only person driving on the road. From this new perspective, I'm looking back at our snowy season with even more gratitude. Let's recap first, and then reflect second.

We groomed until April 19 last year. Because of the lack of snow pack, we cancelled the annual Skimeister event (but Peter Zug rolled the trails one last time for sport).

In the summer, we managed to remove half of the large that came down in December's wind storm hemlocks (nice chainsaw work Jim Braham), and offered free firewood to the community.

In October, we hosted the Girdwood marathon (Brian Burnett created this masterpiece) linking up all the Girdwood trails. All the money is donated back to the trails. It's an underground race with a handshake trophy. We offered a half-marathon this year, so that doubled the entries. I doubt we remembered to add this race to the runner's calendar, so it looks like the same word-of-mouth event with hand drawn maps for 2020. Old school.

In December, we hosted our annual Solstice Event. This event has been gaining momentum, and we had the biggest turnout yet. With a lighted one-kilometer ski, bonfires, music, and tasty treats from The Bake Shop (thank you Brian Kari) we all had a great time celebrating the fresh snow and incoming sun. I am already thinking about new lighting displays for this year, and now with time to research these ideas, add the Girdwood Solstice Ski event to your calendar.

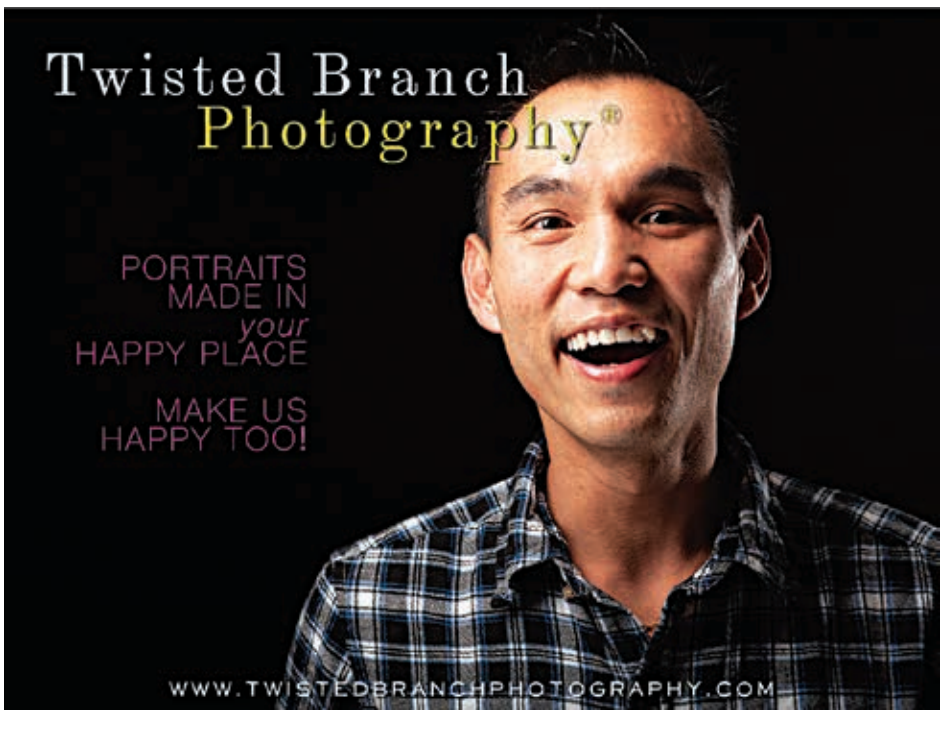
It started really snowing in January … just in time for the Four Valley Community School Nordic Ski programs. These programs are growing and make Mondays my favorite day to ski in Girdwood. The kids are coached by fantastic volunteers (like Briana Sullivan, Nels Barber and Karen Loso).

That brings us back to coronavirus and Spring in Alaska. At our last board meeting (attended by the youngest guest speaker, 8-day-old George, son of Justin and Mary Thomas) we voted to again, cancel the Skimeister. Nordic skiers are a snot-blowing bunch, so there was zero possibility of a safe race. So like you, we are now enjoying beautiful spring trails. With Alyeska Resort closed, the Girdwood multi-use trails have quadrupled in usage, and serve as a mental and physical outlet from home-isolation. Smiles seem bigger, and all the new faces brighten up everyone's social break. The shared joy of spring is a luxury, and we know it. Love for Alaskan trails is a shared love. The GNSC chose a rainbow moose this year to support the concept of inclusion of ALL on trails … love is love.

I groomed yesterday and watched a family pull out lawn-chairs along the Moose Meadow loop. We groom this trail the most. Of all the winter trails, it is the most heavily used. I pulled up, and asked if I could take a photo. Girdwood kids had built a cool snow-maze and their child was investigating. The man said, "Normally we would be alpine skiing, but at least there is this." Yep, "at least there is this." As I groomed, I thought a lot about that family. They cheered skiers, walkers, and bikers from their perch. I loved their enthusiasm of their new normal. I wondered if I knew them. As years have passed, I no longer wonder if people are members, or if they know volunteers groom and maintain the trails, or if our board members (all name dropped throughout this article) may know them, or if they even cross-country ski. I don't care. We create, maintain, and groom trails to create "this." All of this. And the importance of this, for our community and yours, is paramount. At the end of my groom, I backed the snowmachine into the conex, locked the doors, looked back at Moose Meadow and finished with, "there is this" and smiled.

Thank you to all the volunteers, groomers, coaches, business, and cheerleaders along the trails. As the GNSC continues to develop and maintain multi-use trail in the Girdwood Valley, we appreciate your support and shared joy. With immense gratitude from our board members to all the 2019-20 members making all of "this" possible. Stay healthy and

See **GIRDWOOD**, Page 13



GIRDWOOD

Continued from Page 12

wash your hands.

Adkins Family, Alaska Stone Care, John Amore, Anderson Family, Arians Family, Barber Family, Lauri & Jeff Bassett, Rachel Beissmann, Kim Blommel & Charlie Crangle, Eryn Boone, Kathy Peters & Jim Braham, Thomas Brewer, Brockman-Elsberg Family, Dan Brokaw & Erin Bashaw, Sally and Jim Burkholder, Brian & Ellie Burnett, Carriage House Accomodations, Guido & Natasha Casciano, Cassens Family, Vicky Clark & Mark Yezbick, Clark & Jody Clingenpeel, Jackie Collins

& Ruby Moser, Connor Family, Denis & Debbie Corral, Barbara & Paul Crews, Buffie Cubit, Daniels Family, Kristin Denton, Derrick Family, Kevin Desmond, Russ DeVries, Kevin and Shannon Donley, Donnelly Family, Donovan Family, Chuck & Kerry Dorius, Liz & Bud Dow, Kirstyn Draper & Chad Washburn, Eileen Driscoll & Reid Bahnson, Earl Family, Mike Edgington, JR Eker, Emerson Family, Deborah Erickson, Eriksson Family, Deb & Keith Essex, Elizabeth Finch, Fleming Family, Flora Family, Four Valleys Community School, Rosie Frankowski, Zoe Fuller, Beth Fuller, Nicole Geils, Becky Germain, Girdwood Cross Country Ski Team, Goens Family, Jill & Joel Gordon, Lily Grbarach, Kalie Harrison, Hauser Family, Kari Hendrich, Holly Hill, Gail Hille, Holly & Darby Hobson, Danell Isaacs, Johnsen Family, Aleph Johnston-Bloom, Jonas Family, Jones Family, Joy-Holmes Family, Kamienski-Zartman Family, Kari Family, Janet Kellam & Andy Munter, Kelley Family, Donna Knutson, Allison Kristensen, Joseph Kurtak, Maggie Laufenberg, Lokovsek-Tryck Family, Loso Family, Kari Lovett, Kathy & Nelson Lowe, Lukes Family, Howard Magoon, Mapes Family, Michael Matteson, Dave & Elaine McCambridge, McDermott Family, Sally & Bob Messing, Charles & Mary Jane Michael, Richard & Ann Mize, Catherine Moncrieff, Henry Munter & Family, Naspinsky Family, Nathan Lukes DDS, Meghan Nedwick, Oakley Family, Judy Onslow, Susan Opalka, Jehn Pahl & Rachel Duffy, Teresa Paquet, Peterson Family, Peterson EM LLC, Pat & Betsy Preis, Quesenberry Family, Sally Randich, Cyrus Read, Jim and Susan Reeves, Rebecca & Jerry Reichlin, Richter Family, Jess Roberts, Dave Robinson, Robinson Family, Rosay Family, Leola & Barron Rutherford, Jane Sauer, Mark & Kathy Saugstad, Jessica Schaeffer, Leah & Cody Scholz, Schumacher Family, Carolyn Seramur, Shannon Family, Karen Shoemaker, Sieling Family, Luke & Amy Smith, Gwen Sovitski, Jennifer Spain, Sparrow Family, Wilson-Steer Family, Sterling Family, Stiassny-LeClerc Family, Stinson Family, Fred & Laurel Stutzer, Briana Sullivan & Marc Esslinger, Sasha Swift, Swygman Family, Szundy Family, Ron & Michelle Tenny, Lou Theiss & Kerstin Johansson, Justin and Mary Thomas Family, Scott THomas Family, Alan Thomas-Gellert Family, Kathy & John Trautner, Max Treinen, Lex Treinen, Nick Treinen, Ethan Tyler Family, Kristy & Chris Urstadt, Waugaman Family, Chelsea Ward-Waller, John & Ronni

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ANCHORAGE

Thank you 2019-20 NSAA Volunteers!

Thank you for a wonderful season!

The volunteer force of this community is strong and we appreciate all that individuals and organizations give each year to ensure this NSAA's success. Thank you to these people for your support. We do our best to thank each and every volunteer, but it is not always possible to capture every name. Please forgive us and let us know if we inadvertently left your name off of these lists. Your contributions to NSAA are greatly appreciated!

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Ski Train — Lead: Travis Taylor. Even with the cancelation of the event, we want to thank the NSAA Ski Train team for all the pre-planning, especially the Director, Travis Taylor! The Alaska Railroad's David Greenhalgh and Sarah Streiffert, David Dempsey, Russel Dudley, Joel Loosli, Mike Olive, Tom Plowman, Emily Taylor, Megan Taylor, Cami Timothy, and Matt Tomter,. Shoutout to the Anchorage Nordic Ski Patrol for the planning and the Polka Band for practicing!

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Before abrupt season ending, young skiers bring home Alaska Cup, international gold and other honors

BY LAURI BASSETT
CCAK

By the time this issue of The Alaska Nordic Skier goes to press, the list of canceled sporting events range from community races to the 2020 Summer Olympics. While Anchorage volunteers were setting up for the Tour of Anchorage, the cancellation of the 2020 Arctic Winter Games was announced. At that very same time, Team Alaska was settling in to their accommodations in Truckee, California for the 2020 U.S. Junior National Championships, known as JNs. The Auburn Ski Club organizers were adjusting the event on a daily basis and by mid-week, after two events, the decision was made to end it.

Alaska skiers were primed and ready to go for this year's JNs. In the 10K individual start classic race, the podiums were full of Alaska skiers. Alaska went 1-2-3 on the U20 podium with Ari Endestad, Everett Cason and Kai Meyers taking the top spots. Alaska Skimeister Alexander Maurer secured second place on the U18 podium. The U16 5K event also had a podium appearance by Aaron Power placing third.

The temperatures were climbing and by the freestyle sprint race day, Alaska skiers who usually ski in cool temperatures at sea level were feeling the effects of sking in over 40 degrees Fahrenheit at 5,800 feet elevation. Most were wearing fewer layers under their racing uniforms for the qualifying races and by the end of the day many skiers raced in short sleeves and even some in shorts!

U16 skier Maria Nedom had an outstading day; qualifying in the 12th position and ending the day in second place. Fresh off of her appearance at World Junior Championships, in the U18 division Alaska Skimeister Kendall Kramer also placed second. Joining Kramer in the U18 A Final was Tatum Witter who finished fourth. Two Alaska skiers were in the U20 finals: Helen Wilson finished fifth and CCAK Besh Cup champion, Adrianna Proffit, finished eighth. Four U18 Alaska skiers were in the A and B Finals with Michael Earnhart on the podium in third place and Alexander Maurer placing fifth. In the B Finals Joel Power secured eighth place and Dimond High School exchange student attending JNs as a guest skier, Nils Kolb, placed 12th overall. Again, in the U20 male division, an Alaskan was crowned National Champion. CCAK Besh Cup Champion Kai Meyers took the gold racing in the A Final with teammates Ari Endestad and Everett Cason who placed second and fourth, respectively.

PHOTO BY **TOBIA ALBRIGTSEN**
Alaska's Maria Nedom, left, sped to a second place finish in the U16 sprint at the 2020 U.S. Junior National Championships in Truckee, Calif.

Alaskans swept the U20 10K classic interval start event at the 2020 U.S. Junior National Championships in Truckee, Calif., with Ari Endestad placing first (center), Everett Cason second (left) and Kai Meyers third (right).

In addition to the skiers who placed on the podiums at JNs, Alaska ski talent was deep enough after two races to earn enough points to bring home other awards. Most importantly, the team brought home The Alaska Cup. This award goes to the region with the highest points as allocated based on World Cup point allocation on race results.

Though teams from all clubs join together to become Team Alaska, the JN event awards training clubs and high schools with awards. For 2020 JNs, APU Nordic Ski Club (APUNSC) earned the Club Award for the men's division at 600 points. With the next closest club at 361 points, this club was on a trajectory to take this award home even after four events! The APUNSC women placed third, which helped the club as a whole to win the overall club award. Additionally, the skiers of JNs who represent both the boys' and girls' teams of Service High School helped to take home the Roger Weston High School Award. West Anchorage High School girls placed second and West Valley High School girls placed fourth. Nice job Alaska!

One of the last international ski events to take place was in Oberwiesenthal, Germany, with Alaska skiers showing gutsy, top-notch performances at the World Junior Championships. Alaska Winter Stars skier and member of the U.S. Ski Team, Gus Schumacher, earned the first gold medal by an American junior skier. Schumacher skied the 10K Individual Start Classic event in a time of 26:31.7. U.S. Ski Team, and member of the University of Utah ski team, Luke Jager, placed tenth. On the final day, Schumacher and Jager teamed up with fellow teammates to defend their championship in the 4x5K relay. They each had lonely moments on the ski course thanks to a classic scramble leg by Jager passing off a 25.8 second lead that increased to a 35.5 second lead by the time Schumacher crossed the finish line holding a giant United States flag.

As the second leg of the relay skiing classic discipline, Kendall Kramer helped the United States junior women find their way to the silver medal position in the 4X3K relay, working their way up from a fourth place finish at the 2019 World Junior Championships. Other Alaska skiers at the World Junior Championships were Zanden McMullen of Montana State University and U23 skiers Hailey Swirbul and Hunter Wonders both of APUNSC. Swirbul was the second U.S. skier in the 10K Individual Start Classic race placing seventh and the top US skier placing 15th in the 15K Freestyle Mass Start. Wonders was the top U.S. skier placing eighth in the 15K Invidicual Start Classic race. As part of the 4X5K mixed relay team, Swirbul and Wonders took the team to fifth place edged out by Sweden by less than two seconds.

Another event that was not able to run to completion was the NCAA Cross Country Ski Championships in Bozeman, Montana. This event also had many skiers who representate Alaska as part of their collegiate ski teams. Congratulations to 10K Skate: Zanden McMullen (MSU) 15th, Tristan Sayre (UAF) 22nd, and Logan Mowry (UAF) 38th. In the 5K Skate: Anna Darnell (UAA) 10th, Emma Tarbath (MSU) 13th, Molly Gellert (Dartmouth) 29th, and Aubrey LeClair (MSU) 32nd.

Congratulations to all Alaska skiers and thank you to the following who participate with CCAK planning the season and keeping the organization functioning. To our title sponsor, ConocoPhillips – THANK YOU for your continued financial support.

Board of Directors: Lin Hinderman, Anson Moxness, Kevin Donley, Calisa Kastning, Ja Dorris, John Pothast, Kent Slaughter, Mark Strabel, Susan Faulkner. Competition Committee: Eric Strabel, Sam Sterling, Jan Buron, Alison Arians, Ja Dorris, Mikey Evans, Anson Moxness, Trond Flagstad, John Estle, Nick Crawford, Asne Hoveid, Scott Jerome, Susan Faulkner, Eliska Albrigtsen, Mark Strabel, Matt Pauli, Joey Caterinichio, John Pothast, Jan Spurkland, Branden Fontana, Stan Carrick. Team Alaska Junior Nationals Coaches: Eric Strabel, Sam Sterling, Stan Carrick, Branden Fontana, Aasne Hoveid, Sarissa Lammers, Marion Woods, Karina Packer, Ja Dorris, Tobias Albrigtsen, Eliza Rorabaugh, Nick Crawford, Cam Johnson, Anson Moxness. Team Alaska Arctic Winter Games Coaches: Galen John-ston, Conner Truskowski, Naomi Kiekintveld. CCAK Technical Wizard: Cory Smith. Also, a huge thank you to the host clubs: Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage, Kachemak Nordic Ski Club, Mat-Su Ski Club, Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks and Tsalteshi Trails Association. While the CCAK Summit will not happen in its usual format in 2020, please watch the CCAK webpage (**crosscountryalaska.org**) for information on this year's meeting plans. Thanks also to the par-ents and athletes who participate in the ConocoPhillips Besh Cup races. CCAK appreciates your support.

Alaska National Guard Biathlon Team is golden during 2020 season

PHOTO BY **SGT. NATHANIEL FREE, U.S. ARMY NATIONAL GUARD**

Alaska Air Guard Tech Sgt. Jacob Case, right, and Army Guard Spc. Michael Bertelsen, compete in the Western Regional National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championship at Soldier Hollow Nordic Center, in Midway, Utah, January 10.

BY 2ND LT. BALIDNA O'NEAL DRESEL
Alaska National Guard Biathlon Team

The Alaska National Guard Biathlon (AKNG) Team kicked off its competition season by receiving gold medals at the 2020 National Guard Bureau Western Regional Biathlon Competition at the Soldier Hollow Nordic Center, in Midway, Utah, January 10-11.

PHOTO BY **SGT. NATHANIEL FREE, U.S. ARMY NATIONAL GUARD**

Alaska Army Guard 1st Lt. Erik Gorman, competes in the Western Regional National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championship at Soldier Hollow Nordic Center, in Midway, Utah, January 10.

The Alaska women's team took first place and men's team took second for their speed on skis and accuracy with their rifles. Individual winners included Chief Warrant Officer Five Tracey Dooley, first place in women's master's pursuit race, and Spc. Everett Darrow, first place in men's senior sprint and pursuit races.

Triumph continued at Soldier Hollow during the 2020 Chief, National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championships, Feb. 28-March 5, where the AKNG women's team took home a second-place trophy for the overall women's team and Dooley took third place in the women's master's pursuit race.

"This is only the second year the AKNG has brought a women's team to the National Guard compe-titions and they continue to impress me," said Staff Sgt. Jack Androski, the team noncommissioned officer in charge and a mortarman with 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment. "We are looking to grow both the men and women's teams in the future."

Androski said that he would like to have men's and women's beginner, novice, developmental and master teams with five to 10 people on each team.

"I was talked into joining the team at first, but stayed because I really enjoyed the camaraderie," said 1st Sgt. Angela Horn, a beginner biathlete on the AKNG women's team. "The other teams were awesome at competition and it felt so great to have them cheering you on."

In addition to the kind accolades for her teammates and competitors, Horn said that biathlon speaks to the Alaska military readiness model of shoot, move and communicate in the arctic ter-rain.

"You have to have endurance," said Horn, who said that biathletes seem to be the most fit service members and it reflects in their high physical fitness scores. "It's also important to provide ways

PHOTO BY **ALASKA NATIONAL GUARD**

The Alaska National Guard women's team, from the left, Staff Sgt. Heather Percy, Chief Warrant Of-ficer Five Tracy Dooley. Maj. Bonnie Wickham, Capt. Julie Kane, and 1st Sgt. Angela Horn, at the 2020 Chief, National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championships, Feb. 28-March 5, at the Soldier Hollow Nordic Center, in Midway, Utah.

for service members to create unity amongst each other and I think biathlon offers this."

In February, the AKNG purchased five new biathlon target systems, allowing for greater training at the Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson biathlon range in Arctic Valley.

Androski said that more growth is on the horizon with the National Guard Bureau purchasing new rifles for the AKNG team and the prospect of the AKNG hosting the 2021 National Guard Bureau Western Regional Biathlon Competition.

Androski credits the success of the biathlon program to Alaska Guard senior leadership for their en-couragement of the competitive discipline and understanding that it leads to better arctic warriors within their ranks.

A Czech sees – and skis – Alaska

BY ANEZKA HENDRYCHOVA

While much of Europe has had a brown winter I have been seeing white -- from above the Arctic Circle to a temperate rainforest, I have skied the Alaska snowy trails.

I am Anežka Hendrychová, a foreign exchange student, from the small village of Husí Lhota, Czech Republic. I wanted to experience American culture, improve my English language and of course ski! Fortunately, an Eagle River family found me and I have been skiing non-stop.

Beginning in October I found snow at Independence Mine and later skied all the trails in Anchorage, Eagle River, Palmer and Girdwood – hundreds of kilometers of groomed trails. The Besh Cup races took me to Birch Hill trails, Lookout Mountain and Tsalteshi.

I raced the U.S. Biathlon's Team USA trials in Jericho, Vermont – placing fourth overall youth women (if only I was an America, thank you Coach Jean). Skiku took me to Noorvik where I skied above 66 degree latitude and minus 31 Celsius with motivated and rambunctious Inupiaq children. And again with Skiku I coached the skiers and biathletes at Golovin on the Seward Peninsula (thank you Robin and Brian).

PHOTO BY **WEYMULLER PHOTOGRAPHY**

Anežka Hendrychová's speeds along during her skiing tour of Alaska.

Eagle River High School Wolves' coaching team took me to the State Championships (thank you coaches Liz, Chris and Cam) where I bettered my classic race technique and improved my strength (thank you Mr. Senden and Coach Bryce).

A trip to Alaska's capital took me to the deep snows of Eagle Crest in Juneau. The perfect Chester Creek trails of the Tour of Anchorage allowed me to ski to third place in the 25km free. Overall, I have skied over 22 degrees of latitude while in the USA.

Under the tutelage of Alaska's expert coaches and wax technicians, my skiing and biathlon skills have improved. I better my weight transfer, am able to jump ski up the hills now and clean the "bulls" under a rapid heartbeat. And thank you to all the club groomers for excellent trails.

I know I will return to Alaska ... a skier's paradise.

ANCHORAGE

NSAA member spotlight: The Wright Family

The JN era ends, but a lifetime of skiing ahead

When Cathy Wright enrolled son Duncan in NSAA Junior Nordic 14 years ago, she and husband Geoff had no clue how their lives would be transformed.

"It was just one of those things you hear about as a mom," she recalled. Cathy and Geoff moved to Anchorage from Baltimore, Md., in 1995, and with East Coast and Midwest roots, they just weren't cross-country skiers. That all changed with Junior Nordic.

Duncan is now 21, sister Addy is 19, and Oliver turned 14 this season. That means an era has ended for this ardent Junior Nordic family – but they're already forging their way into a new one as a family of coaches.

Geoff explains in what he titled, "A Short Junior Nordic Love Letter," sent to NSAA at the end of the program's second session.

"So tomorrow is a big day for me and Cathy: It'll be the official end of our 14-year run as Junior Nordic parents, since Oliver is officially aging out of the program. Being involved in Junior Nordic as skiers, parents and coaches has been a life-changing experience for our whole family. I don't know how I could overstate its impact.

Each of our kids is now an ardent lover of Alaskan trails and cross-country skiing. All three are active and enthusiastic volunteers in the 'Nordic community,' and all three have an amazing group of friends born from their time cross-county skiing. Both Duncan and Addy have become passionate about coaching, and Oliver is hoping to follow in their footsteps. And their time in Junior Nordic inspired all of this.

For me and Cathy, Junior Nordic was the cross-country skiing 'gateway drug.' Neither of us came from places with any cross-country ski community, and I honestly wasn't even aware that it was a sport before I moved to Alaska! Our involvement as parents in the program led us both to a wonderful new community and to a passion that inspires us to look forward to every Alaskan winter.

So thanks to everybody for your part in making in Junior Nordic happen over the years. This really is a program that transforms lives in the best possible way. And of course the whole Wright clan will continue to be around as coaches and to help out however we can.

And speaking of our family of coaches, I wanted to say a special thanks to John Hemmeter. I'm not a 'sports guy' in any way, shape or form. So it took a lot of strong-arming on John's part to get me to put on a coach's jacket and take up the mantle of 'Coach Geoff.' And of course that set up a chain-reaction that now has four people in our family actively coaching with a fifth on the way. And, at this point, I honestly couldn't imagine not being a coach, since it's the source of a disproportionate amount of joy in my life. John has been both a wonderful coaching mentor and fun coconspirator in making the 'Kincaid M/W' site what it is.

My single regret as I write this is that I don't get to share this particular moment with Ellen Toll. Fortunately I think she clearly understood just how big an impact that Junior Nordic has on our community.

My best to all of you guys!"

PHOTO BY **ADDY WRIGHT**

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

AROUND THE INTERIOR

New Fairbanks-area recreation area considered

Fairbanks skiers may have some new trails to ski on if a new project unfolds as planned. The details are few at this point, but a resolution supporting work toward creation of a "recreational trail system and wildlife area" was passed unanimously by the Fairbanks North Star Borough Assembly at its February 27 meeting.

According to the resolution, some Fairbanks citizens "are seeking support from and working with the Fairbanks North Star Borough Parks and Recreation Department, the State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources, other Federal Land Managers, the Alaska Congressional Delegation and other local user groups to solicit funding for project planning and development."

The resolution states that the assembly "supports and encourages collaboration between Borough departments, other agencies, and interested citizens to create the Greater Fairbanks Recreation Area Trails System and Wildlife Area, and it endorses the work of citizens to secure external funding for project planning and development."

A map of the area being considered for the area has not yet been distributed, but it reportedly would include some of the lands bordered by Farmer's Loop, Steese, University and College roads. That means the trails would most likely tie into the Creamer's Field/Alaska Dog Mushing Association trail network, a popular winter playground.

Boro Trails Commission seeks applicants for vacancies

Skiers needed! The Fairbanks North Star Borough Parks and Recreation Department is seeking applicants to fill four vacancies on the Trails Advisory Commission. Commissioners need to have a general interest in trails and trail access. Having skiers represented on the commission is always a plus for the skiing community. Anyone who would be willing to serve or would like to know more should contact Bryant Wright, FNSB Trails Coordinator (BWright@fnsb.us; 907/459-7401).

Tackling the Winter Trails Challenge in one day on skis

BY ERIC TROYER

My wife, Corrine Leistikow, and I love the Trails Challenge put on by the Fairbanks Borough Parks and Recreation Department twice a year. We wanted to do it this winter, but we needed to incorporate it into our endurance training. We were signed up for several races, including some distance ski races.

The Trails Challenge encourages people to get out on local trails. Signs are posted on a variety of borough-area trails and directions are published that show generally where they are. To participate, people take a selfie with each one they find. Anyone who finds at least 10 of the signs by the deadline gets a Trailblazer Award.

After looking over the locations of the 13 signs, we realized we could ski to almost all of them. We decided to do the Trails Challenge in one day, skiing to all but three. We figured that would make for a good ski training day.

Last summer we did the Summer Trails Challenge in one day and that was definitely challenging! It took us just over 11 hours from the first sign to the last. We drove just over 300 miles and spent about 30 miles on the trails, most of it biking.

But finding all the signs in one winter day? Less daylight. Colder temperatures. That seemed more, well, challenging. But Corrine said let's do it, and I'm usually game for silly stuff.

Part of this challenge is the preparation. We downloaded a list of the sign directions and Corrine mapped out an efficient itinerary that started with the signs in Goldstream Valley, where we live.

See **CHALLENGE**, Page 19

PHOTO BY **ERIC TROYER**

Corrine Leistikow strides along the 5.7-kilometer loop trail of the Chena Lake River Park on her way to bagging another Winter Trails Challenge sign.

Who's Who in the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks

JUNIOR NORDIC HOTLINE
457-4437

PRESIDENT
Chris Puchner
president@nscfairbanks.org

VICE PRESIDENT
Steven Hansen
vicepresident@nscfairbanks.org

SECRETARY
Ann Jamieson
secretary@nscfairbanks.org

TREASURER
Anna Sorenson
treasurer@nscfairbanks.org

AT-LARGE MEMBERS
Eric Buetow
Peter Delamere
Helena Rueter
Bruce Jamieson
Davya Flaharty

ADULT LESSONS COORDINATOR
Shelly Soderstrom
adultlessons@nscfairbanks.org

FAIRBANKS JUNIOR NORDICS
Shelly Soderstrom and Sally Endestad
juniornordics@nscfairbanks.org 371-9564

FAIRBANKS CROSS COUNTRY
Nick Crawford
Head Coach, Program Director FXC@
nscfairbanks.org

RACE PROGRAM DIRECTOR
John Estle
competitionevents@nscfairbanks.org

BIATHLON
Jim Pasek
biathlon@nscfairbanks.org

TOURING
touring@nscfairbanks.org
Eric Troyer | fbxskierparent@gmail.com

NEWSLETTER EDITOR
Eric Troyer
newsletter@nscfairbanks.org

facebook.com/anchoragenordicski

Fairbanks ski season starts and ends with storms, but members take it in strides

BY ERIC TROYER

The 2019-20 ski season began and ended amid storms, real and metaphorical, and while we might want to forget some (such as the pandemic that cut the season short) we had lots to celebrate.

The ski season started on November 2 when NSCF groomers packed a thin layer of snow at Birch Hill Recreation Area. (We used to be able to count on skiing in October, but climate change is, well, changing things, and November is a more reliable start month.)

A few days and snow inches later, we were ready to get ski programs started! And then came wind strong enough to cancel the first sessions of Junior Nordics and Adults Lessons. The first Wednesday Night Race of the season was held on November 13, but competitors fought the wind more than each other.

After that, we had a great season. Good, plentiful snow and warm temps. Well, until the start of one of the coldest climatological winters (December to February) in Fairbanks in more than 40 years. Lessons, races, and events were postponed due to the cold and sometimes postponed again! But things held together. And we got lots of opportunities to practice our classic technique!

Despite the cold, Fairbanks skiers were warmed by the results of Fairbanks skiers competing in Europe. Kendall Kramer had some outstanding finishes in the World Junior Olympics, including a historic silver medal as part of an American relay team. David Norris, Logan Hanneman, and Becca Rorabaugh competed in World Cup races, with David and Logan both scoring World Cup points and becoming the first Fairbanks skiers to finish the Tour de Ski. Maggie Druckenmiller also competed in the Scandic Cup in Sweden.

In domestic racing, Fairbanks names kept popping up in the standings, especially some outstanding performances by Kendall Kramer and Ari Endestad at Junior Nationals.

Finally, the temperatures warmed. Just in time for the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic, which cut the organized season short with the social distancing requirement and ban on group gatherings. Classes, races, and events were canceled, but the Denali State Bank Sonot Kkaazoot, did go on in virtual form (see story in this issue). Several storms in late March brought lots of snow, so people were able to get out and ski, but the increased grooming made a dent in an already low grooming budget, increasing financial worries for the club's board. Sigh. However, local skiers did respond with donations to keep things going!

So, as this story goes to press, we are blessed here in Fairbanks with lots of fluffy stuff still to play on (and the temps to keep it here a while), but also with some uncertainty as to what the future brings.

PHOTO BY **ERIC ENGMAN**

Ari Endestad poses for a photo with mom, Sally, left, and dad, Audun, after winning the U20 classic interval start race at Junior Nationals.

PHOTO BY **CARRIE DERSHIN**

The Candlelight Ski brings out more than candles to light the trails at Birch Hill Recreation Area.

(Did I mention the oil price war and how it impacts the state?)

Below are some NSCF program reports (as of mid- to late-March)

MEMBERSHIP

We started the ski season uncertain of how the state's current fiscal crisis would impact membership in our club but I'm happy to report that membership remains strong with almost 1,000 current members. Despite the overall decrease in our borough population, budget cuts at the local level, and this being the coldest winter we've seen in 44 years, the NSCF welcomed 211 new members to the ski club this season, many of whom were first-time skiers. Many of our new members benefited from the REI grant program that allows us to make skiing more accessible by offering free gear for beginners of all ages. This has been a huge boost to our club's membership.

SPONSORSHIP

This year the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks saw nearly $50,000 of pledged community support for events such as the Turkey Day Relays, Town Race Series, Distance Races and Trails Support. Sponsors were flexible and worked with the club when event dates were adjusted to accommodate the cold.

New sponsors for this year included Walter and Marita Babula, who helped provide every Junior Nordic skier with a neck warmer. Wedgwood Resort, a long-time supporter of NSCF events, became the race sponsor for Town Race Series 3. Subway of Alaska sponsored the Terrain Garden and Recon LLC became a trails supporter.

BIATHLON

Biathlon has had about 35 new members since September! We've served 55 kids and 10 adults during our programs this year, (although some have done multiple programs hence the 35 new member number). We offered eight unique programs throughout the season including both youth and adult options, 38 sessions total.

PHOTO BY **ERIC ENGMAN**

Elias Engman skates a downhill during the freestyle sprint qualifiers at Junior Nationals.

PHOTO BY **ERIC ENGMAN**

Dale Baurick crests a hill during the freestyle sprint qualifiers at Junior Nationals.

We held one novice race that drew around 20 participants, roughly half of which were brand new.

"It's been a really fun season rebuilding the Biathlon program in Fairbanks!" said biathlon instructor Hilary Saucy. "We started off by offering a four week fall program where interest exploded. I capped the class at 12 and had a waitlist of at least that many! We had no idea the level of interest out there."

FXC (AND FXC MASTERS)

The club welcomed Nick Crawford in the fall as the new FXC head coach. The program also expanded FXC Masters from a single class to a whole slate of classes offered Monday-Friday. FXC Masters was led by Nick and Christina Turman, both of whom coached, and included several other great coaches who taught a variety of classes include, weight training, intervals, and technique.

FXC, the junior race-training program for the NSCF, also had a great year. Here are some FXC numbers:

- 66 FXC athletes overall (20 athletes in Competition, 12 athletes in Comp Bridge, 34 athletes in Devo)
- 19 FXC athletes new to the program
- 4 athletes qualifying for Arctic Winter Games
- 13 athletes qualifying for Junior Nationals
- 2 athletes qualifying for the Intermountain Youth Festival

TRAILS

Our trail groomers (Tom Helmers, Ken Coe, and Bill Husby) put in lots of hours and grooming kilometers to keep all our wonderful snow in great shape for skiing. Most of the work was done at Birch Hill Recreation Area, but "Bad" Bob Baker also put in many hours to prepare the Chena River for the Sonot Kkaazoot. (The Chena cooperated but not for long! See Sonot story this issue.)

Here are some numbers (as of late March):

- More than 875 hours for Birch Hill grooming
- More than 840km on the PistenBully
- More than 1,300km on the five snowmachines used for grooming
- More than 40 hours by Bad Bob Baker preparing the Chena River for the Sonot

JUNIOR NORDICS

Junior Nordics had a great season despite having the first sessions canceled because of wind and the Spring Session canceled because of the pandemic:

- At least 330 participants through the winter season
- 65 coaches, not counting the subs that stepped up to help out

ADULT LESSONS

- About 100 registered students
- 6 coaches

TOURING

- Tour sign-ups: 71 (some did more than one tour)
- Number of tours: 9
- Tour leaders: 7

EVENTS

- Ski Your Age in Kilometers: 106 skiers (22 skied their age); 1424 kilometers skied
- Candelight Ski: 150-200 skiers
- Backcountry Film Festival: 160-175 ski movie watchers

Thank you to everyone – staff and volunteers – involved in making this a wonderful season!

Eric Troyer is the Fairbanks editor for the Alaska Nordic Skier

Pandemic affects land deal that would protect ADMA Trails

BY ERIC TROYER

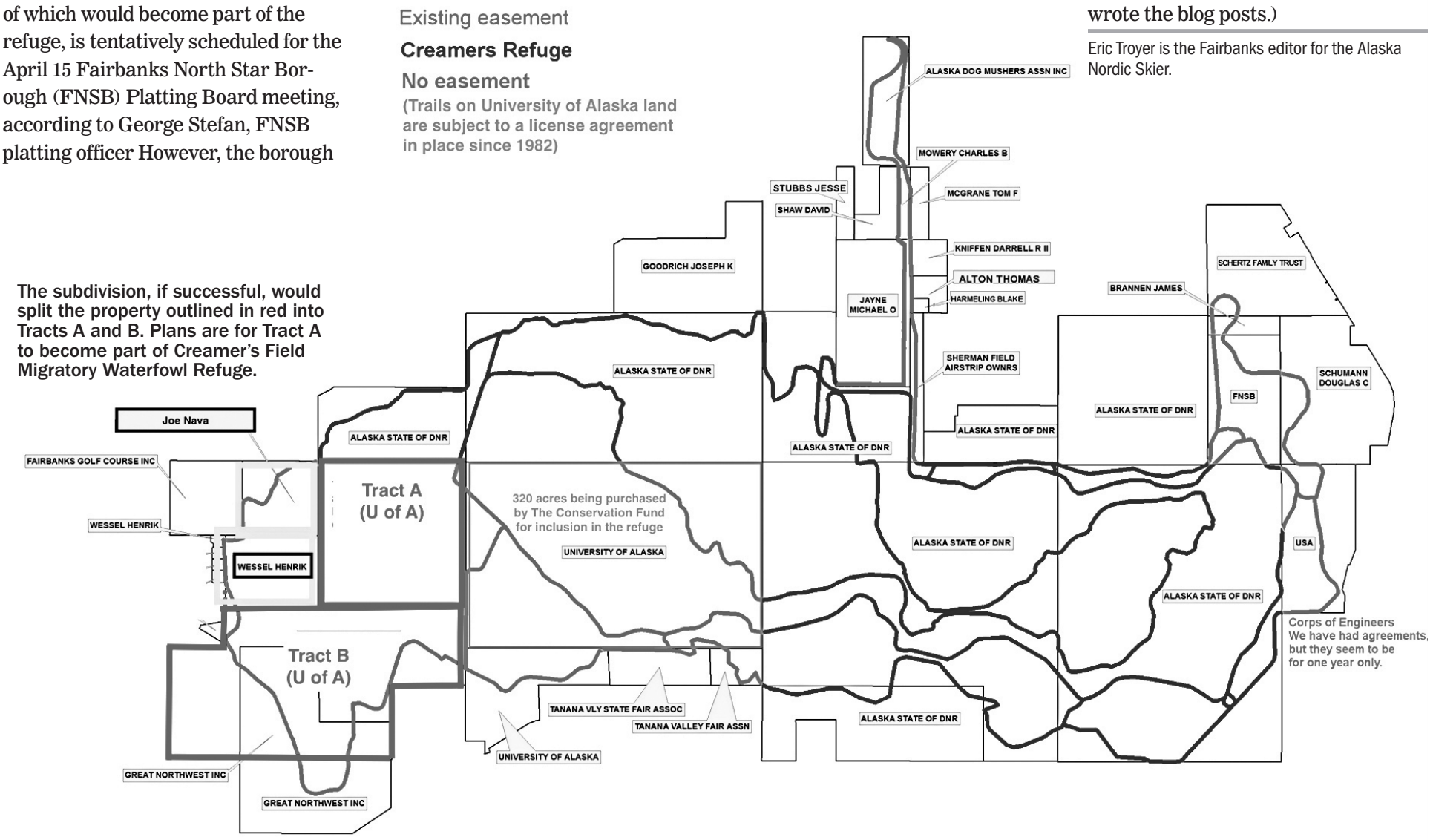
Efforts to increase the size of the Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge, which would help protect a portion of the Alaska Dog Mushing Association (ADMA) trails, are on hold due to coronavirus/COVID-19 restrictions. The ADMA trails are popular with skiers and skijorers.

A request to subdivide a block of University of Alaska land, one portion of which would become part of the refuge, is tentatively scheduled for the April 15 Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) Platting Board meeting, according to George Stefan, FNSB platting officer However, the borough administration is working on possible ways to allow for "virtual" meetings and public hearings. It is uncertain if group gatherings will be allowed at that time. The request to subdivide the land had been on the Platting Board's March 18 meeting agenda but that meeting was canceled.

The request to subdivide is a part of a series of events that must take place in order for the land to be purchased from the University of Alaska and transferred to the refuge, a deal being shepherded by The Conservation Fund. The most controversial of those steps, allowing a variance request from dedicated trail easements on the UA land, was approved by the FNSB Planning Commission in February. Local trail advocates disagree on whether that decision was good for trails.

The issue is highly complicated and was outlined in three Interior Alaska Trails blog posts: December 10 (**tinyurl.com/r29c5vx**), February 7 (**tinyurl.com/wbh8xph**), and March 14 (**tinyurl.com/txh6kxm**). (The Fairbanks editor of this newsletter also wrote the blog posts.)

Eric Troyer is the Fairbanks editor for the Alaska Nordic Skier.



The subdivision, if successful, would split the property outlined in red into Tracts A and B. Plans are for Tract A to become part of Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge.

CHALLENGE

Continued from Page 17

During the preparation phase, Corrine learned that one sign is on the Big Dipper Ice Arena walking track and that walking is allowed on Sundays but not Saturdays. We set the date for Sunday, February 23.

We watched the Trails Challenge Facebook page, looking for clues on where to find the signs from other people's posts, and communicated with friends also doing the challenge. We learned that some people were having trouble finding the Eldorado Creek Trail sign. Corrine looked for it on a couple of her fat bike commutes but didn't see it. We began to worry. The forecast also called for the temperature to start dropping Saturday night. We worried more. We were facing failure and freezing! So, we took action.

On the Friday before, Corrine found that while the Big Dipper is closed to walking on Saturdays, the building would be open, and we could access the sign. Hurray! We rescheduled our challenge day for Saturday, which would be warmer.

Also on Friday, I went skiing with my buddy Mike Mathers and we searched for the Eldorado Creek Trail sign. We found the Tanana Valley Railroad Trail sign, but not the other. I thought I knew where it was based on information I got from another sign nabber, but no luck. Mike and I searched several possible trails for two hours, but no luck. (But it was all good because we were skiing!) We finally gave up and headed back to the cars. And then there it was! We had skied right by it earlier!

Friday night Corrine and I packed everything we might need and estimated the time our endeavor would take. If we left our house by 8 a.m. we figured we could be done by 6 or 7 that evening. We packed our gear and set the alarm for Saturday morning.

We got out the door right at 8 a.m. and skied to the Tanana Valley Railroad and El Dorado signs with no problem. (Well, as the designated photographer, my hands got cold right away, but I had brought hand warmers just in case and I used them. Be prepared!)

Then we ticked off the signs according to Corrine's itinerary. We walked

PHOTO BY **ERIC TROYER**

Corrine Leistikow and Eric Troyer smile for a selfie with a Winter Trails Challenge sign as part of the challenge.

to three – Chena River Walk, Big Dipper Ice Arena, and Moose Creek Dam – and skied to the rest. (The walking ones were fairly challenging, because ski boots are definitely not made for walking.) We ended up skiing about 18 miles and driving about 170 miles. (We walked a mile or less.) The temperature stayed a consistent 10-13 degrees all day, no matter the elevation. (And it started dropping right after we finished.)

We grabbed the last sign (East Ramp, Birch Hill Recreation Area) at about 4:30 p.m., well ahead of our estimated finish time. (Thanks in large part to wonderfully groomed trails!) We changed clothes at the Birch Hill Warming Hut and headed out for a nice Thai dinner to celebrate.

We had a great time skiing all these trails. In fact, we often wished we could spend more time on some of the trails, but we stayed focused! Doing the challenge on skis made us realize how lucky we are in Fairbanks to have so many wonderful trails and trail systems that are groomed for winter use. Thank you to all the different groups and agencies that take care of trails in the borough!

The Winter Trails Challenge originally ended April 1, but the borough has extended it until winter trails deteriorate or May 1, whichever is earlier. Even after this winter challenge is over, you can start planning for the next one. Of course, you don't have to do them all in one day, but when the trails list is issued (usually in December or January), see how many are ski accessible. Then go out and have some fun!

Eric Troyer is the Fairbanks editor for the Alaska Nordic Skier

Fairbanks skiers overcome pandemic restrictions with 'Virtual' Sonot Kkaazoot

BY ERIC TROYER

Sometimes you gotta grab handfuls of snow and make iced lemonade from lemons. Sometimes you need to do that over and over.

When the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic threatened to derail the 2020 Denali State Bank Sonot Kkaazoot, the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks' season-culminating ski marathon, race organizers grabbed the pandemic-enraged bull by the horns and tamed it with adaptability.

As the pandemic unfolded and crowds of 50 or more and then 10 or more were discouraged, event after event was being shut down, including the Arctic Winter Games, the Oosik Classic, White Mountains 100, and World Cup events scheduled for North America.

Sonot Kkaazoot organizers saw the writing on the wall and realized the event, scheduled for the end of March, could not go on as planned. But they also understood that people needed to get outside, exercise and focus on something healthy and positive in the face of the grim pandemic news. Plus, the Sonot had never been canceled in the 32 years it had been held prior to 2020. A blizzard didn't stop it. Neither did the new Sonot Connector trail showing dirt or the Chena River, an iconic part of the race, oozing water. (The Chena has oozed out a few times forcing an "all-Birch Hill" race, except the year it melted out during the race!) So, the organizers quickly came up with the "Virtual" Sonot Kkaazoot.

While "virtual," this Sonot was no video game. Organizers wanted to make sure people were getting exercise and having fun. Race Director "Bad Bob" Baker groomed the Chena River well before the event started. The NSCF grooming crew made sure the Birch Hill trails were in great shape. And about 10 days before the scheduled event, organizers started encouraging people to ski one of the traditional routes of 20, 40 or 50 kilometers, and send in their times on an honor system. All efforts up through the day of the scheduled event would be recorded.

Several people responded and in just a couple of days at least one participant had finished each of the 20-, 40-, and 50-kilometer courses.

PHOTO COURTESY **OF MARK ROSS**

Sonot Race Director "Bad Bob" Baker and Sonot poster artist Mark Ross pose with one of the 2020 Sonot Kkaazoot posters. Mark says a stiff wind help provide a "virtual" 6 feet of distance between he and Bob during the photo.

Overflow, snowstorms, building closure

Then, only a few days after participants started using the river route, Mother Nature jumped into the chaos and added more! Warm temperatures and overflow made the Chena River un-groomable and un-skiable. Organizers were not deterred! They encouraged people to create their own courses at Birch Hill Recreation Area, where the middle portion of the 50- and 40-kilometer courses are traditionally held. Any result people sent it that adhered to the spirit of adaptability, fun, and respect for all would be recorded.

The Fairbanks ski community responded! People created a variety of routes on Birch Hill, overcoming adversity, including broken bindings, uncooperative GPS devices, and a series of late-winter snowstorms. People returned to the event to ski distances they hadn't yet skied.

PHOTO BY **DIANE O'BRIEN**

Phoebe, Matt, and Owen Wooller pose for a shot during their "Virtual" Sonot Kkaazoot 20-kilometer "race." All are from the same household, so they didn't need to stay 6 feet apart.

The last day of the "virtual" event (the day of the scheduled event) brought sunny skies, wonderful temperatures, and…the closing of the Warming Hut at Birch Hill! (Due to the most recent health mandate released by Gov. Mike Dunleavy.) Yikes! Put people seemed to take it in stride (whether classical or skating).

The response was gratifying! In the end the Denali State Bank "Virtual" Sonot Kkaazoot "race standings" showed nearly 90 entries: nine for the 50k, 12 for the 40k, 41 for the 20k, and 24 in the category of "Creative route, creative distance, creative team," which were all over the place (literally!). By press time, organizers had not yet tallied the number of skiers participating, as the entries include people who participated more than once and a few more submissions were expected. And while this might be cliché, it's worth repeating that anyone who participated is a winner!

If you haven't done so already, check out the:

- Sonot blog for reports and photos (scroll down): **sonotkkaazoot.org**
- Sonot "race standings": **tinyurl.com/rxr8p43**

Eric Troyer is the Fairbanks editor for the Alaska Nordic Skier

SPONSORED

Advanced Physical Therapy is thankful for the opportunity to share tips for injury prevention and improved performance throughout the 2019-2020 ski season! We are wishing you the best as you transition from ski boots to running and hiking shoes.

In this time of uncertainty and transition, we hope that you continue to find respite in your family and friends. We know that the Alaskan community will remain strong as it continues to support one another. We also believe that we will become a more resilient community as we work together to overcome the obstacles posed by COVID19. There is nothing that Alaskans cannot overcome.

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