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Blind Skiers See the Light

By Stephen Michael Kerr

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About three hours west of Denver lies Snow Mountain Ranch, one of the top cross-country ski centers in the United States. Known as the "YMCA of the Rockies", it boasts a large ski chalet and over 90 kilometers of packed and groomed trails.

From January 30 to February 6, 2005, the center will host the 30th annual Ski for Light International event, a week that brings blind and mobility-impaired adults together with sighted ski instructors for cross-country skiing and fun social activities. Participants come from the United States, Norway, and several other countries to either learn skiing for the first time, or improve on previously developed skills.

The first Ski for Light was held in Norway in 1964, and was so successful that a nonprofit all-volunteer organization was formed. Chapters began spreading to other parts of the world, and the program was first introduced to the United States in 1975. The idea is to provide the blind and mobility-impaired a chance to experience the freedom and benefits of physical activity through cross-country skiing.

At the beginning of the event, each skier is paired with an instructor/guide, according to experience level. Beginners are taught basic fundamentals of the sport, while more advanced skiers work on improving their techniques and endurance.

Skiers navigate the slopes in pre-set tracks or grooves in the snow, while their instructors ski on a parallel set of tracks. The guide advises when to change direction, speed up and slow down, and describes any changes in the level and direction of the tracks. Skiers with mobility impairments use sit-skis, while their guides give instructional tips and offer physical assistance if needed. In addition to cross-country skiing, mobility-impaired participants also have the chance to learn the sport of sled-hockey during the week.

The sighted instructors are volunteers from all over the United States who pay their own way to attend, just like the other participants. Duane Farrar, a blind skier and chairman of Ski for Light's Public

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Relations Committee, says their role is vital to the success of the program.

"They are there because they love cross-country skiing and wish to share that love with someone like myself who otherwise might not have the opportunity to experience the sport and the exhilarating sense of freedom that it brings," Farrar explains.

The highlight of the event is a 5-K rally and 10-K race, complete with national anthems and Olympic-style finish line. Skiers get the chance to showcase the skills they've learned during the week over a measured distance, but don't have to be competitive or athletic. The only thing asked of them is to give skiing a try, and have fun.

Mary Kozy, a blind clinical social worker from Chicago, was a bit apprehensive when she attended her first Ski for Light in 1978. But it didn't take her long to discover the joy of learning to ski, and meeting

other people with positive attitudes.

After attending Ski for Light, I caught the "if I can do this, I can do anything" attitude, and went on to love skiing," Kozy recalls. "It is a real high to go to SFL for a week and be around so many enthusiastic people."

While skiing is the big attraction, it is only part of the total experience. After a day on the slopes, skiers and guides return to their hotel for dinner, talent shows, music and dancing, or just lounging in a heated pool or hot-tub. Even poor snow conditions can't stop the event. In cases of extremely low temperatures or not enough snow, participants organize games, field trips, exercises, and other activities.

Many skiers believe the most rewarding aspect of Ski for Light is the memories and camaraderie they share with each other and their guides.

"The friendships I've made through SFL are deep, and those I will have all my life," Mary Kozy says. "People come through town and visit, and we are now like a big family."

Deborah Kendrick, a freelance writer and devoted participant, agrees. "I believe there is no other environment in which participants suspend, so completely, the sense of who is and who is not a person with a disability," she says. "People of all walks of life come together for that one week to share a love of skiing, the outdoors, learning, and loving life."

To find out more about Ski for Light, or the upcoming event in Granby, Colorado, visit:

Stephen Michael Kerr is a blind radio broadcaster, freelance writer, and publisher of Adaptive Sports And Recreation, a free ezine devoted to sports for people with disabilities. To subscribe, visit:

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Try An Aspen Ski Vacation

By Sarah Thomas

Aspen is one of the most popular ski destinations in the United States and perhaps one of the best well known in the entire world. Creating an Aspen ski vacation resort was the brainchild of Friedl Pfeifer, an accomplished skier from Austria who wound up in Aspen at the end of WW II.

With only a few dollars in his pocket he founded the first ski school in Aspen and partnered with Walter Paepcke to create to create what was then the world's longest chairlift.

The sleepy mining town of Aspen was suddenly transformed into one of the most popular recreational nooks in America. Now Aspen is home to many ski resorts, hotels, and bread and breakfast cottages to accommodate the thousands of people which take an Aspen ski vacation each year.

Are you considering an Aspen ski vacation? If so, it is a very popular choice, and you will be surely be glad you visited Aspen. Aspen is surrounded by 4 mountains and offers more than 4500 acres of fascinating terrain. Aspen receives plenty of snow each year that is just perfect for skiing and other snow related sports.

Ajax Mountain is a big draw for the more advanced skiers. It has over 700 acres for skiing and a vertical drop of more than 3200 feet. Next to Ajax is the Aspen Highlands which is perfectly suitable for beginning and intermediate skiers. You may even spot some Olympic medalists on the Aspen Highlands, as it is a favored skiing spot for skiers of all abilities who seek an Aspen ski vacation.

The Buttermilk is smaller mountain and more suited for beginning skiers. This also is home to the longest terrain park and host to the ESPN Winter X Games. The largest of the Aspen mountains is Snowmass and it has over 3000 acres of skiing terrain and has areas suitable for skiers of all abilities.

Snowmass is perhaps the most well known Aspen mountain and is popular for an Aspen ski vacation. It offers some spectacular panoramic views.

Aspen is situated around 215 miles to the southwest of Denver and about 75 miles to the southeast of Eagle. Aspen has its own airport, Sardy Field, which makes flying into the resort town for an Aspen ski vacation very easy to accomplish.

Sarah Thomas provides articles on

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the site

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