

The Sault Star
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 1998

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All downhill from here

Volunteers have kept Mount Wawa operating since township bowed out

By JOAN BROOKS
Special to The Star

WAWA

In 1997, the Mount Wawa Ski and Snowboarding Club assumed responsibility for providing skiing and snowboarding opportunities for the residents of Wawa during the 1997/98 season. Those volunteers had a great first season, and now a new group of volunteers have taken charge and are ready for snow.

The Township of Michipicoten had operated the ski hill since 1985, but discontinued its operation in the spring of 1997. However, a group of local ski enthusiasts refused to let this great community asset die.

Bill and Nina Picco, Barb DiCarlo and Rosalie Sauve, who all now reside in Sault Ste Marie due to the Algoma One Division closure, spearheaded the drive to keep the hill operational.

They called a town hall meeting at which 54 persons showed up, many of them young people. From there, they prepared their plan and presented it to municipal council. Council liked the proposal and passed a bylaw in October, 1997, recognizing and supporting the Mount Wawa Ski Club.

The club operates the hill and the municipality maintains the equipment and facility. The municipality also trains the volunteers on the operation of the equipment and on equipment rentals.

In return for the use of the ski hill, the club reimburses the municipality for all operating costs associated with the general operation of the hill and chalet. Their revenues are generated from the sale of ski passes, ski rentals, canteen sales and fund-raising effort.

In May, following their first winter of operation, and despite only 18 days of operation due to poor snow conditions, they were able to return \$6,000 to the municipality.

"The partnership was very successful last season," said Lori Johnson, Director of Leisure Services and Tourism. "There is every indication that it will continue."

"We did very well last year," said Team Leader Lynne Zulliani. "The snow conditions were a problem. We opened for six weekends, plus one day, and the five days of the March break. We had to be very careful with the snow last year, so when it got warm, we closed down for a period of time so that we could use it for the March break."

In that first year, this fledgling club had 141 volunteers who put in 1,642 hours of volunteer time, exceeding the time put in by the club executive. Fifty one people showed up for their Basic Fundamentals and Safe Operation training session for using the ski lift.

Forty to 50 skiers and snowboarders were on the slopes every operating day with a high of 95 persons on their second day of operation.

"It's a great facility for a small town," says Team Leader Lynne Zulliani.

"The 1998/99 season appears to be off to just as great a start. We're planning to have a ski instructor come up from the Sault for a couple of weekends this year."

They've held their annual Ski Swap in cooperation with the Old Ski House from Sault Ste Marie, who brought up new and used equipment. And this year Chisholm's added to the mix with their outdoor wear. "As well as a fundraiser, we do this as a service to our members," said Zulliani. "We plan to have an on going ski swap this year in

one corner of the chalet."

Recruiting volunteers for the various activities including lift operators, canteen personnel and ticket sales and rentals, along with cleanups has been done. "We've recruited quite a few new volunteers," continued Zulliani. "This year we put posters up at the arena, advertised on the radio and in the paper, and asked those who were involved last year. We've contacted everybody, and now we're just in the process of making up schedules and will be ready to start when the season starts."

Our plan is to have everybody work every third weekend for half a day. That takes 72 people to do that, 24 for each activity over the three weeks. It was great last year, everybody followed through on their commitments," Zulliani credits those who made it all happen last year with making it easier to organize this year. "We're just building on what was set last year."

Mount Wawa consists of a bunny hill with a rope tow, and two runs, a main run with the lift, and one called a suicide run.

"The fun of Mount Wawa is there's lots of bush along the sides of the hill and the kids can make extra trails out and around the bushes," added Zulliani. "When you go out to a big hill you can't do that, so they make little cut-throughs and jumps."

Sixteen-year-old Corey Gauthier is a skier cum snowboarder, who also volunteers whenever needed. "It's an opportunity to get out and snowboard, to just do it. You get to meet friends out there and get away from the every day stuff."

"We're responsible for the maintenance, and we'll be involved with equipment training, along with Ken Brezinski," said Mike Gauthier, a facilities supervisor for the township, and also a volunteer with the ski club.

"We've done some minor renovations work at the hill, and we're doing some maintenance work today. Over the next few days we've got to replace the small building that holds the safety circuit."

The Wawa Sno-Riders groom the hill, in return for use of the facility for meetings and a starting point for their events, including poker runs.

Volunteers on the organizing committee include Ann Chantway — treasurer, Alan Chantway — volunteer coordinator, Bob Elliot — rental equipment, Rosalie Sauve and Sue Switzer — publicity, Danielle Egan — youth representative and Suzette Gauthier and Deanna Moniz are looking after the canteen again this year.

Ken Brezinski, who receives an honorarium, is the hill supervisor responsible for operation of the equipment and volunteers.

Rates for this coming winter are the same as last year with one change.

Student rates have increased marginally to \$7 for a half day pass, \$12 for a full day, \$19 for a weekend and a season's pass is \$121. All other prices remain the same including seasons passes — a child is \$81, adult at \$140 and a family pass is \$364. Wouldn't these make great Christmas gifts?

Anyone wishing to volunteer and require further information can contact Lynne Zulliani at 856-2416 or Alan



A SNOWBOARDER FLIES HIGH underneath the ski lift



SKIERS SOARS THROUGH THE AIR on Mount Wawa's ski hill



BRIAN PICCO AND ROSALIE SAUVE at volunteer wrap-up party last spring



THE CHALET as viewed from up the hill at Mount Wawa's volunteer-operated skiing facility