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Volunteers needed for winter adaptive skiing program

By Sharon Sullivan
Free Press Staff Writer



Colorado Discover Ability volunteers help a child with disabilities learn to ski with adaptive equipment last winter at Powderhorn.

Uschi Hall did not allow a 1994 hang gliding accident that left her paraplegic, keep her from pursuing the outdoor life she has always enjoyed.

Hall learned to ski using adaptive equipment by taking lessons in Crested Butte and Breckenridge, and then at Powderhorn Ski Resort after she and her family moved to Grand Junction in 2002. Colorado Discover Ability, an adaptive sports program for people with disabilities enabled Hall to learn to ski independently with her husband, Bill, and their two children.

Hall now volunteers for CDA by teaching skiing, working in the office answering phones and scheduling classes, and organizing fundraising for the nonprofit organization.

Last winter 107 volunteers helped CDA clients ranging in ages, 4 to 75, learn how to ski, snowboard or snowshoe using adaptive equipment. Many volunteers, like Martin Wiesiolek, return year after year.

Wiesiolek began volunteering with CDA eight years ago after a friend and one of its founders, Tyler Jones, asked for Wiesiolek's assistance.

"I didn't know what I was getting into," Wiesiolek said.

He quickly learned it fit with his enjoyment of winter sports. He's also learned there is little difference between people with or without disabilities, he said.

Wiesiolek teaches skiing and coaches the CDA's Team Powderhorn Racing Team. During the summer Wiesiolek leads CDA clients on river trips.

One day while leading the race team, Wiesiolek said he took a step back and realized disabilities were not necessarily people's biggest issues. Some of the clients were overweight.

So last year Wiesiolek began running a fitness program for people with disabilities in Grand Junction at Chipeta Elementary School, 950 Chipeta Ave.

Delta teacher Trish Kendrick, Grand Junction Ultimate Fitness instructor Jess Cassinari, and a Grand Junction special education teacher, Miranda Young, help teach the classes Wednesdays at 6 p.m.

"What's good for them is good for us, the volunteers," Wiesiolek said. "We want to be fit, healthy, to lead by example."

"It's a cool program, one of those quiet things where a few people in the community came together."

Currently, CDA has 50 volunteers lined up for this year's winter program. The organization would like to add more.

Colorado Discover Ability is holding volunteer trainings next week for people who would like to become an adaptive ski or snowboard Instructor at CDA's Adaptive Snowsports School at Powderhorn Resort.

People who commit to the training can volunteer whenever it fits their schedule, Tuesday through Sunday when the school is open.

"We have (volunteers) who are retired who teach three times a week. Others volunteer five times a season," said CDA program director Jeremy Steinhauer.

New volunteers who want to teach sports must commit to two days of training at Powderhorn. Trainees also shadow lessons with experienced instructors. Some instructors have volunteered with the program for 20 years.

"We make sure instructors are prepared and qualified and comfortable before taking on lessons," Steinhauer said.

Steinhauer said the organization also needs volunteers to staff its snow sports school office by handing out passes, answering phones, scheduling lessons, and greeting participants.

"So even if you don't ski and want to volunteer in the office," that's available, Steinhauer said.

Steinhauer, 27, earned a degree in physical education with a concentration in adapted kinesiology from Mesa State College. He volunteered for two years with CDA before being hired as program director in September. For two winters Steinhauer taught adaptive skiing and snowboarding. In the summers he led raft trips, day camps, hiking and fishing trips.

Last winter 161 clients participated in winter sports with CDA.

Clients' disabilities range from cognitive to physical, and include spinal cord injuries, cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injuries, multiple sclerosis, and Down's syndrome.

There are two volunteer orientation meetings for those interested in working with CDA — Monday, Nov. 9, or Thursday, Nov. 12, 6-8 p.m. The trainings will be held at the Center for Independence gym (east door), 740 Gunnison Ave. For more information call 257-1222 or visit www.coloradodiscoverability.org.

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'Wine Among the Vines'

The eighth annual Colorado Discover Ability "Wine Among the Vines" fundraiser will be held at Two Rivers Winery, 2087 Broadway, Friday, Nov. 6, from 7-10 p.m. Tickets for the fall fundraiser are \$40. The event includes hors d'oeuvres from Tadz Taste Creations, a glass of wine, a silent auction and a cash bar. Tickets can be purchased by calling CDA at 257-1222, or online at www.coloradodiscoverability.org.

"It's a great social time," said Uschi Hall, a former CDA client and current volunteer. "It's a very casual get-together of community supporters to celebrate the organization."