



CITY OF LAKES

# Nordic Ski FOUNDATION

YOUTH . EVENTS . TRAILS

## "GEI-SNOW", RIDING SNOW...

By Ingrid Remak

Minnesotans pride themselves on not only their tolerance for cold – but for an actual fondness for winter. While Nordic skiing has its roots in the Scandinavian heritage of the state, today the Minneapolis community is made up of thousands of residents that are new to ice and cold. Experiencing winter and its sub-zero highs for the first time can be both an enchanting and brutal experience. But imagine if it is not just “winter” but the concept of winter that surprises you at your doorstep. How

*Gei-Snow continued on page 14,*



*Anwatin skiers Pada Thao and Kaozong Vang have created an expression for the snowy sport they love in Hmong; “riding snow” - photo: John Swain*

## CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE HISTORY AND UPDATE

By John Munger

The Theodore Wirth Park Citizen’s Advisory Committee (CAC) is nearing the end of its second phase of work. The CAC has put together plans for the Wirth Lake area and is now completing a master plan for the entire park. It has at times been a rocky process, but the end result will likely be a better park for everyone, with more diverse activities, particularly in the northern section of the park.

The CAC started work in April 2010, working on the Wirth Lake area, roughly between Glenwood Avenue on the south and Highway 55 on the north, and between Golden Valley on the west and Min-

*CAC continued on page 8,*

## WORLD PARALYMPICS ARE COMING TO WIRTH PARK

By Mike Bono, Paralympic Race Director

The 2012 Paralympics Nordic Skiing World Cup is coming to Minneapolis in February 2012! Wirth Park has been chosen as one of the four venues in the World Cup circuit to host the 2012 Paralympics. The U.S. Paralympics Committee is hosting this IPC Nordic Skiing World Cup in partnership with the City of Lakes Nordic Ski Foundation. The quest for the Paralympics World Cup began approximately 3 years ago when the Nordic Ski Foundation was approached by the International Paralympics Committee (IPC) as a potential venue for the World Cup events. According to John Munger, Director of the Nordic Ski Foundation, “the big

*Paralympics continued on page 5,*

## NOTES FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

By John Munger



The last six months have not lacked in struggles. But – if what you are struggling for is important and worthwhile – struggle is not always bad. In this case, the Foundation’s struggles will likely result in a lasting legacy of silent sports improvements and in a stronger and better Foundation.

Looking at the Foundation as a whole, there are four areas to cover: (1) programming – both youth and adult, (2) trails, which includes ski trails, bike trails and facilities like buildings and snowmaking, (3) events, and (4) the overall health of the organization, including finances, membership and long-

*Director Notes continued on page 6,*



Publication of the  
City of Lakes Nordic Ski Foundation -  
Distributed to Foundation members and friends

**OFFICE & TRAIL INFORMATION**

City of Lakes Nordic Ski Foundation  
John Munger, Executive Director  
612 604-5331 (direct)  
1301 Theodore Wirth Parkway  
Minneapolis, MN 55422  
Phone: 612 604-5330  
Fax: 612 604-5338  
Email: info@cityoflakesloppet.com  
Website: www.loppet.org

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS:**

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*John Schmitt was honored by Foundation Director John Munger at the John Schmitt Building dedication ceremony in October - photo: Ingrid Remak*

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Peg Galvin, Connie Baillie

**WEB TEAM**

Charlie Keller  
Ben Kremer  
Molly Hillstrom  
Mitch Vars  
Willy Lee

**DESIGNER**

Ben Kremer/Kremer Design  
ben@kremerdesign.com

*“The mission of the City of Lakes Nordic Ski Foundation is to promote and support cross country skiing in the Minneapolis area, especially among youth.”*

# NEW TIMING BUILDING DEDICATED: THE JOHN SCHMITT BUILDING

By Ingrid Remak

To the backdrop of a beautiful sunset, the City of Lakes Nordic Ski Foundation honored longtime race announcer John Schmitt just before the Foundation's Annual Meeting. Architect Bruce Cornwall began the evening by introducing the audience to the unique structure that he and his architectural team designed. For instance, he described the architectural challenge of designing a building that must be able to move around for different events; the building has special "skis" that it sits on.

Foundation Executive Director John Munger followed by describing John Schmitt's longtime commitment to cross country skiing in the Midwest. He then read a proclamation from Mayor R.T. Rybak, declaring October 11, 2011 as John Schmitt Day in the City of Minneapolis! Schmitt was ever humble in his acceptance of this honor, although he jokingly accused Mr. Munger of delivering a eulogy instead of a dedication. Upon receiving his Years-of-Service Appreciation Award, Schmitt said he would gladly continue to "help out the organization in any way he could, "hollering and screaming – or whatever [the Foundation] need[s]."

Despite Schmitt's enthusiasm, vigor, and clever ways over the microphone, all agreed that there has never been a gentler or kinder voice resonating over the finish line. Schmitt got the crowd chuckling as he commented on the quality of character of Nordic Skiers: "They are the best athletes in the world because they are not paid." Taking a champagne bottle to the skis the building sits on, and giant pruning sheers to the ribbon wrapping the timing building, the new Schmitt Building was christened in his name – a structure that will undoubtedly continue to improve the caliber of the Wirth cross country skiing venue for years to come.



## TRIPS FOR KIDS: THE APPEAL OF MOUNTAIN BIKING TO YOUTH

By Ingrid Remak

With childhood obesity and sedentary lifestyles a national health concern, it is increasingly important to make fun and healthy lifestyles accessible to lower income families who statistically suffer the most from this health disparity. The Nordic Ski Foundation houses the Minnesota chapter of Trips for Kids in an effort to bring mountain biking into the lives of the young people who live around Wirth Park. (Thanks to the Minneapolis Off-Road Cycling Advocates for building the trails.)

"Kids are born with an instinctual love for the trails," said program coach Allie Rykken, "and they are fearless too. They try anything: log jams, rock gardens, amazing bike balancing acts. They have definitely pushed me out of my comfort zone." If a group is interested in mountain biking, they contact Coach Allie and set up an excursion. Arguably one of the most beloved components of the Foundation's youth programs, over 500 young people from the Anwatin and Nellie Stone Ski Teams, Loppet Adventure Camps and various community groups have used the bikes. "So many kids these days get their thrills from video games, but mountain biking is better. It brings the video game to life. It puts the kid in the driver's seat – steering and living the game in the real world. It's thrilling for them," described Foundation Director John Munger. One young participant from Paso a Paso, a young group of Latino teens focusing on health and fitness concurred and summed up his experience enthusiastically, "This is way better than staying inside and playing video games!"

The appeal of mountain biking is that while most kids can already bike – few have experienced the technical challenges and unwavering focus required in mountain biking. "Wirth may just be a corner on the map – but it holds the key to so much," said Operations Director Mike Erickson, who maintains the fleet of mountain bikes which sustain more bumps and bruises than the kids. "I see these kids show up for races. They come in the morning and will spend the whole day with their helmets on. They won't take them off even when they are driving home."

Wirth's four miles of trails may be seeing more traffic soon. Next year Minnesota will begin a state-wide high school mountain bike league. As many biking enthusiasts would agree, empowering kids does more than send them zooming through the woods for a few hours. "Bicycles are your ticket to freedom in this world," commented Munger. "Most of these kids live a stone's throw from the park. We want to provide experiences that empower these kids to pursue their interests, tackle challenges, and let them know that anything is possible."

Top: Paso a Paso youth embark on a mountain biking adventure with Trips for Kids - photo: John Swain



# TRAILS - THE DIRTY WORK

By Ingrid Remak

# FOR THE LOVE OF SKIING

By Glory Duda

If there is one thing skiers are good at, it's shoveling. Over the course of the summer, skiers had the chance to show off their wintry skills by breaking ground with the Nordic Ski Foundation during one of three trails-related volunteer days. Participants rolled up their sleeves to plant trees, remove buckthorn, split wood, lay seed, spread erosion mats, and mulch – all in efforts to ensure the beauty, functionality and longevity of the Wirth Park trail system in the seasons to come. “Maintaining the trails is paramount to the success of skiing at Wirth,” said Chief of Course Craig Rudd. “They must be tended to throughout the year to make sure these well traveled thoroughfares continue to work in balance with Mother Nature. The great part about work days is that folks can come out and lend a hand at caring for the trails they love.”

The tornado that ripped through Theodore Wirth Park in late May shredded more than the canopy of trees from the park. Just north of the park, hundreds of North Minneapolis homes were hit by the storm. Windows, roofs, even walls were missing from residences. The Nordic Ski Foundation joined hundreds of other Minneapolis volunteers to help in post-tornado clean-up. “Most of our youth programs are based in the North Minneapolis community,” said Program Director Margaret Adelsman. “Families of those kids we see in the schools were impacted by the storm, and it's really important that we help families as best we can to return them to some semblance of normalcy.”

With offices in Theodore Wirth Park, the Nordic Ski Foundation encouraged everyone in its community to come out and join the relief effort. “It is a given that we would take part in helping the North Minneapolis Community,” commented John Munger, director of the Nordic Ski Foundation, an organization based out of Theodore Wirth Park. “It is our community.” When Loppet volunteer and Nice Ride executive director Bill Dossett suggested a joint tornado volunteer day the Foundation jumped at the chance. Surly Beer joined in as well and together the three organizations mobilized over 100 volunteers just three days after the tornado struck.

Volunteers were able to tackle tasks that would have been colossal for a single family, and spent time removing debris, liberating gardens, chain sawing trees and sometimes just lending an ear to individuals still in shock from the storm. When disaster strikes, one often finds him or herself at a loss to help. “You see the pictures on T.V. and you want to do something, but it is so big. Where do you even get started?” expressed former North side resident and skier Jim Porath, who volunteered with his wife Karen in the afternoon. “The e-mail notice came at the perfect time. We just said we've gotta go do this. We were so happy to have the opportunity to help.”

*Trail volunteers Mary Sellke, Mike Erickson, Garrott Teoh and Glory Duda helped plant 40 young trees in Wirth - photo: Ingrid Remak*

Anwatin Ski Team member Glory Duda shares her experience working with the Nordic Ski Foundation to plant trees in Theodore Wirth Park.

*I came out to plant trees at Theodore Wirth because I care very much about the environment and I know that it is suffering, and anything we can do as a community is very important. I also just love doing anything that helps me be closer to the earth. I thought it [tree planting with the Nordic Ski Foundation] was still a TON of fun even though it was raining really hard. I guess the rain just made me feel even closer to the earth with the planting of new life that I know skiers will be able to enjoy for years to come. Being covered in mud and dirt was no dampener either. I love skiing for the same reasons. You get to be outside and soaked in snow and you can sometimes just joke with your friends or beat them and have fun. And it's also kind of an escape from the real world on the trails with just the snow and trees and occasional house. I am definitely anticipating next ski season to see how the trees are doing, or even before then just walking along. Skiing is definitely going to stay with me forever and so will the memories of planting the trees.*

*Paralympics continued from front page,*

attractions to Wirth Park were the world class trails, snowmaking facilities, close proximity to a large metropolitan area, and access to an international airport.” The IPC was also impressed with the success of the Cross Country Skiing Junior Olympics held at Wirth Park in March 2011 and the numerous Junior Olympic Qualifier events hosted at Wirth Park in the past three years. The synergy with the Courage Center, a next door neighbor to Wirth Park, has also been instrumental in attracting the IPC World Cup to Minneapolis.

The 2012 Paralympics World Cup season begins in December 2011 with the first World Cup event in Sjusjoen, Norway for both Biathlon and Cross country skiing. Then in January, the USA will host the next World Cup event at the Telemark Ski Resort in Cable, Wisconsin, and it will be immediately followed by Cross country skiing at Wirth Park from January 31st – February 5th. The athletes will then travel to Vuokatti, Finland for the Finals which will take place the last week of March. “The United States hasn’t hosted a major international Nordic skiing event since 2005, and we’re excited to bring elite competition onto our home soil,” said John Farra, USOC director, High Performance, Paralympic Nordic Skiing. “This is an exceptional opportunity for many of our up-and-coming athletes to get some international experience two years out from the 2014 Paralympic Games in Sochi.”

Some of the world’s best Nordic skiing athletes from all over the world will be competing in this exciting series of races. The Paralympic Nordic Skiing competitors are divided into three main categories: sit-ski, standing, and visually impaired. Each category is divided into individual classes that separate the competitors according to functional ability. The sit-skier competitors sit using a sled - a specially designed chair that is attached to a pair of skis. Competitors propel themselves forward with two poles. Athletes in this category have lower extremity disabilities. Competitors are divided into different classes based on the degree of sitting balance. The paraplegic standing skiers have a limb disability, such as an amputation below or above the knee, or below or above the elbow. This category features individual classes based on the degree of upper or lower limb disability. The visually impaired athletes compete in all Nordic skiing events accompanied by a guide. The guide skis immediately ahead and directs the competitor on all course changes, including corners, inclines and declines, either vocally or by radio. This category features three individual classes based on visual acuity and visual field. U.S. Paralympics is expecting teams from more than 20 nations to compete, including teams from Russia, Ukraine, Norway, Germany, France, Canada, Japan and the United States. American Paralympics athletes come from across the country and include a significant number of veterans. Kelly Underkofler, a St. Paul, Minnesota, native, is a multi-year national champion and has ranked as high as third in the world. See <http://usparalympics.org/athletes/kelly-underkofler> for Kelly’s Paralympics Team profile. For more information on the United States Paralympics World Cup see <http://www.nordicworldcupusa.com>.

Interested in helping make this event happen? Please contact volunteer coordinator Kristin Klaustermeier at [krisklaustermeier@gmail.com](mailto:krisklaustermeier@gmail.com).



Jon Miller - Photo: [skinnyski.com](http://skinnyski.com)

## THE ALTRUISTIC ATHLETE

By Sarah Gutknecht

I had the pleasure of volunteering as a course marshal at the recent Surly Trail-Loppet. I believe the key to successful community races is volunteers, so I volunteer to complement every race in which I participate.

I was assigned the northern apex of the half marathon trail run. It was a precarious section, with a very steep descent that coiled underneath a bridge. I was impressed not only with the skill of the runners scrambling down the trail, but also with the patience and respect they demonstrated to their fellow athletes.

Although no one was injured on the hill, very early into the race one of the frontrunners announced an athlete was down. I searched my way down the trail and discovered the injured runner. He accidentally hyper-extended his knee, and was in severe pain. However, he was not alone. Another athlete had stopped to provide aid. While many runners continued in their endeavor to complete the race, this “Good Samaritan” stopped and took the time out to help a fellow competitor. The three of us navigated a steep and weedy incline to reach the ambulance waiting above. Once our injured athlete’s care was transferred to the paramedics, this altruistic athlete resumed his trail run. This pause added many minutes to his finish time. I had the pleasure to speak with him following the awards ceremony. He was quite humble and took it all in stride. The best I could do to offer my thanks was to give him my Surly beer token.

It is always exciting to observe athletes challenging themselves. However, it is inspirational to experience such a selfless act of human kindness. This renewed my sense of community and restored my faith in the common man. Yes, it is cliché, perhaps, but reflects how the actual pleasure is in the journey itself, and not necessarily the destination. Consider volunteering for a future Loppet event. You might be inspired yourself.

*Editor’s Note: The Good Samaritan was longtime Loppet event participant and now coach Jonathan Miller. Miller competed on the Gustavus Adolphus cross country ski team and is a former Hoigaard’s Classic race champion. He forgave a top ten finish in the Trail Loppet to help the fallen athlete, but never hesitated at his decision. He is currently coaching the Nellie Stone Johnson middle school ski team, and the Nellie Stone Johnson and Urban League Elementary Minne-Loppet ski programs in addition to the Thursday evening Loppet Classical Group.*

*Director Notes continued from front page,*

term stability. Programming, events and overall health are all stable and heading in the right direction. The Trails category, on the other hand, has been unstable – with some good and some bad – but we are hopefully now on a path toward achieving our long-term vision for Wirth Park: a year-round silent sports center with a stadium area and a welcome center. If we achieve all of that, the trail category will move from the most uncertain and sometimes unpleasant, to the most important and most celebrated!

## PROGRAMMING

There are a number of articles throughout this publication that touch upon some of the powerful programs that the Foundation now runs. The Foundation runs six elementary school programs, four weeks of Loppet Adventure Camp, two weeks of Loppet Ski Camp, months of Trips for Kids, two year-round middle school programs and another park-based middle school ski program. The Foundation easily touches 1,000 youth per year now – inspiring passion for outdoor activities throughout the year. On the adult side, the Foundation runs the Loppet Tri Club, the Loppet Run Club, and four sessions of Loppet Ski Club. Well over 200 adults learn the basics of skiing, trail running, paddling and mountain biking through the Foundation each year.

Broadly, these Foundation activities make up the Loppet Adventure Program. The point of the Adventure Program is to introduce outdoor activities like biking and skiing, and then to change the trajectory of lives by creating passion for a lifetime of outdoor activity. The Program has two parts: first expose youth to outdoor activity and then engage them year-round in order to change the trajectory of their lives. Introductory elements include the elementary programs, Trips for Kids mountain biking and Adventure and Ski Camps. These programs are important because they hopefully spark an interest and because studies show that adults tend to do activities that they did as children. If all people do as children is play video games we are going to have a very unhealthy society in the future...

The second step is much harder. How do you change the life trajectory of a child without taking on a parental or mentoring role? Our answer is that the parental or mentoring role is critical, which is why the Foundation limits the number of children in its middle school programs – better to truly inspire fewer children than have a mediocre experience with many... The long-term goal for

the Foundation is to have a number of middle school teams in North Minneapolis that can compete against each other. The hope is that by running a number of teams, the Foundation can raise the profile of activities like mountain biking and skiing, so that kids who follow their passion into these sports are recognized for their achievements in their communities.

A number of philanthropic and health-based organizations now recognize the value of the Foundation's work in the community. The Pohlad Foundation and UCare sponsor the Foundation's elementary programs. Various sponsors contribute ski equipment and other necessary items. Hoigaard's, Penn Cycle and QBP all help with the Trips for Kids program. The Medica Foundation stepped up this year with a three-year grant for the Anwatin Team and another small family foundation has decided to sponsor the Nellie Stone Johnson Ski Team. Add this to the existing Farview Park Team and the Foundation is on the road toward its long-term goals.

## TRAILS

The past six months have been a bit of a rollercoaster for the organization. Around the time that the last edition of this Newsletter went to press – in late May – the Foundation was on top of the world. The 2011 Loppet was the best ever, with 10,000 registered participants and an estimated 40,000-50,000 in total attendance. Youth programs were at a new high point, with a diverse group of Anwatin Ski Team participants leading the way. The Foundation had presented its Vision for Wirth to the Citizen's Advisory Committee for Wirth Park and, at that point, there was no significant opposition. (See "Citizen Advisory Committee History and Update," beginning on page 1.)

But then the Foundation suffered through a storm or two. On May 22 a tornado hit Theodore Wirth Park and North Minneapolis. The storm toppled literally hundreds of trees. Following the storm the media focused newfound attention on Wirth Park. On June 8, the Star Tribune endorsed the Foundation's silent sports center vision and openly called for the closing of the Par-3 golf course.

At first this editorial seemed like a good thing: a major media player coming out in favor of radical change. But within a few days it became apparent that the endorsement would not necessarily work in the project's favor. The editorial galvanized the opposition. For the first time the golf community recognized that there was a real threat to their monopoly on these public lands. They lashed out at the Nordic Ski Foundation, as the purveyor of the idea. Their attacks were not confined to the substantive issues, but strayed into assaults on the Foundation itself:



*The Anwatin Mountain Bike team after dousing themselves with water and celebrating in the sun after the Buck Hill Birch Pump Race.*

- Par-3 golfer Ron Edwards accused the Foundation of being racist for suggesting that silent sports activities replace the Par-3 golf course.
- With the Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) process seemingly ground to a halt, the Foundation called for an informal meeting – but was met with cries of impropriety.
- The golf community raised questions about the Foundation's use of the old manager's apartment for office space.
- Those folks who have never wanted ski trails in the park saw a new opportunity and jumped on the anti-Foundation bandwagon...

Within weeks the Foundation found itself in the middle of its own personal tornado – with accusations of racism, impropriety, nepotism and reckless stewardship of the park swirling around the organization.

But out of adversity can come strength. It turns out that there are a lot of people who believe in the Foundation's vision for Wirth Park and, indeed, in the Foundation's broader vision for spreading passion for outdoor activities. Foundation members and friends called and met with Park Board commissioners. They arrived in force at the July CAC meeting, speaking articulately and passionately about the Foundation's shared vision. The Foundation itself provided the Park Board commissioners with a complete rundown of all the Foundation's contributions to the park and the community over time. More than that, the Foundation re-doubled its efforts to communicate its story effectively. In that regard, the Foundation is fortunate to have Ingrid Remak writing articles and just generally radiating her positive energies. (If you have not followed loppet.org over the past few months, take a look now).

So while a segment of the golf community is still unhappy with the Nordic Ski Foundation, the Foundation, through its friends and members, has begun to turn the tide. The Park Board agreed to a new five-year lease for the old apartment office space, with nearly all of the commissioners chiming in with accolades for the Foundation. The CAC process, while not complete as of the publication date for this newsletter, appears to be headed in the right direction. Only the accusations of poor stewardship seem to be sticking. This is a (buck)thorny issue for the Foundation. (See separate article: "Trails, Trees and Buckthorn: Park Board Management and the Foundation"). But hopefully with a little work and more communication the accusations will fade and, in a few months, the CAC process will result in a master plan with a stadium, a new building, bridges, new lights, and year-round trails.



*Working hard after office hours, the Foundation's volunteer painting team shed some new color on the office space with a fresh coat of Loppet Blue.*

*Photo: Denise Remak*

## EVENTS

Prepare to knock on wood... The past four years have seen better and better winters. Last year's Loppet saw 10,000 participants and total attendance of 40,000 to 50,000 people. The Junior Olympics was a great success, despite the tornado the Tri-Loppet held its ground and the Trail Loppet, thanks in part to Surly's sponsorship, grew to over 700 participants. This year, for its tenth anniversary, the Loppet moves back to the streets of Uptown, with a grand finish on Hennepin Avenue. Sponsorship has also been strong, with Park Nicollet, Mall of America, Wheaties, and Cook County joining past sponsors like Subaru, Hoigaard's, Chuck & Don's and REI Co-Op, Penn Cycle, and Dorsey and Whitney, among others.

But as far as events go the Foundation is only as strong as the next winter. Pray for snow. Do a dance. Seed some clouds. Whatever it takes... If the winter is "good" the Loppet promises to be the new best ever...

## OVERALL HEALTH

The Foundation's various pieces are all interconnected. Better trails allow for more and better programming and better events. Better events means more and better programming and more resources to devote to trails. Better programming means more people skiing and participating in events and being active in the Foundation.

What ties all these pieces together? The people of the Foundation. Volunteers, staff, members, participants and donors. While the Foundation is doing well in all categories right now, the people metric is still the strongest. Many organizations claim to have great people, but as the lucky person at the center of the Foundation's wheel, I believe that the Nordic Ski Foundation has a better claim than most. Dedicated volunteers, hard-working and talented staff with a great passion for what we do, adventurous participants and repeat donors – the Nordic Ski Foundation must be doing something right...

And after four good snow years the Foundation is financially stable as well. But to keep doing the work we are doing and to grow and expand the Adventure Program, we need the continued support of the community. With all the growth that we have seen, we recently metamorphosed from a tiny non-profit with low overhead into a growing organization with growing costs. Where to store our bikes? How to pay for office space, storage, copy machines and, most important, all the coaches and mentors that make such a difference in the community? Thank you members and friends for your past support. We hope we can count on you now and in the future as we continue on the journey toward a year-round silent sports paradise and as we continue to evangelize more and more youth to a passion for outdoor activity.

*CAC continued from  
front page,*

neapolis proper on the east. The initial proposals for that area were not exactly in line with a cross country skier ethos. The “highlight” of the initial proposal was a “wakeboard park” in/on Wirth Lake. The basic idea was a motorized contraption that would whip participants around and around the lake – not so much celebrating the natural feel of the area as exploiting Wirth Lake and, in our eyes, cheapening the park in general.

CAC members bristled at this idea and spent most of the CAC process fighting Park Board Planning Department ideas for paving and developing the area. (Note that the leadership of the Park Board Planning staff has changed since then – with Bruce Chamberlain now the Assistant Superintendent for Planning.) Staff had identified funds that “need[ed] to be spent” and focused the CAC process on finding projects to spend the money on. The Foundation was particularly troubled by this

be carved out of the 18-hole golf course through a re-locating of the 17th and 18th fairways and, possibly, through the closing of the Par-3 golf course.

Park Board Planning Staff convened Study Groups to examine particular areas of the park. The North Wirth Study Group included representatives from the Nordic Ski Foundation, the Minneapolis Off-Road Cycling Advocates (MOCA), Bicycle Advocate Gary Sjoquist, and Park Board staff including Golf Division Manager Tim Kuebbelbeck, Paul Jaeger from Recreation, Jamie McBride from Environmental and Maintenance Foreman Lisa Beck. Among other things, the Study Group recommended closing the Par-3 golf course in order to make way for a silent sports center. The CAC requested that the Park Board conduct a survey to make sure that there was widespread support for closing the Par-3. More than 2,000 people took the survey – more respondents than any other Park Board survey with the exception of the comprehensive plan survey that was mailed to every household in Minneapolis. The results were impressive – more than 70% of participants favored closing the Par-3 and there was overwhelming support for trails of all kinds. Even the Star Tribune endorsed the plan, explicitly calling for the closing of the Par-3 in a June editorial.

And then all hell broke loose. A group of Par-3 regulars had become aware of the plans for the Par-3 and, when the Star Tribune editorial came out, realized that this was serious. They were not happy. They formed the Friends of the Par-3 group, started a petition process and called the legislators in the area along with the Park Board commissioners. The process became very politicized very quickly. In retrospect the Foundation probably should have handled the whole matter differently. More golfers should have been engaged from the beginning. But once the golfers were angry – and they were really angry this summer – there was not much to be done.

Fortunately, around this time Bruce Chamberlain started as the Park Board’s new Assistant Superintendent for Planning. Mr. Chamberlain assessed the situation and quickly changed course – suggesting a design charette, at least in part to avoid a showdown within the CAC. The charette process took place in early-November, with a design team of professional consultants creating a plan for the CAC to react to. As of the publishing of this Newsletter, the CAC has begun working its way through the design team recommendations, but has not completed the process.

Notable preliminary decisions include moving the 17th and 18th fairways of the 18-hole course, not closing the Par-3 golf course, moving the tubing hill into the area of the old 18th fairway, demolishing the Par-3 clubhouse and replacing it with a new multiple use



*Theodore Wirth’s Vision  
in creating Wirth Park  
was based in the belief  
that parks should be  
an accessible resource  
to people in the com-  
munity*

*Photo: Bruce Remak*

approach; it seemed backwards... First, find a worthy project and then find funding. Worse, from the Foundation’s perspective there were a number of projects in the park that needed doing but because the CAC’s role was confined to the Wirth Lake area the worthy projects were not up for consideration.

Apparently some Park Board commissioners agreed, because the CAC was reconstituted in December of 2010, this time to look at the whole park. Spooked by the lack of vision from the Park Board staff the first time around, the Foundation decided to get out in front of the matter from the start this time. Thus came the Foundation’s “A Vision for Wirth” document. This document argued that in general the park did not need new and expensive design elements, but instead required only a dose of “undilapidating.” It also laid out a vision for a year-round silent sports center, that would



Welcome Center, adding a cross country staging area, adding multiple-use event trails in the 17th and 18th fairway area, adding a bridge over Wirth Parkway to the north of the Quaking Bog parking lot, and allowing MOCA to build parallel one-way trails through Southwest Wirth (what the ski community thinks of as the Quaking Bog area).

There are two remaining issues. The first is whether to close the snowboard concession in order to allow for a permanent stadium area for cross country skiing. The second is whether to place a driving range on the 17th fairway in the summer, thus precluding a staging area for non-winter events like cross country running, mountain biking and cyclocross. The driving range would ostensibly be used for the First Tee program, which is designed to teach children about golf and values. This is a worthy use, but the Foundation obviously feels that a driving range is still not the best use for the area. First Tee has other locations in the city and there are three other driving ranges in the Minneapolis Park Board system and another at nearby Brookview Golf Course. On the other hand, these would be the only off-road biking event trails for miles around, and really the only silent sports center in the state. It is important to avoid pigeon-holing the staging area as for events only. It would provide a place for camp groups to gather, for Trips for Kids programs to begin and end, it would include a learning area and, perhaps most important, it would act as a visible “Welcome” sign for non-golfers wanting to use the park in the summer months.

As of the publishing of this newsletter, a date for a (hopefully) final CAC meeting has not been set, but it is likely to take place in January or February. The Foundation is optimistic that the process will result in a great plan. As noted, there are already many exciting elements, not least of which is a building designed, at least in part, with skiing in mind. Once the CAC completes its process the plan will go to the Park Board commissioners for final approval. Once approved, Theodore Wirth Park will have its first new Master Plan since 1980.

*Top Left: Loppet Program Coach Allie Rykken double poling with a smile in the Hoigaard's Classic  
- photo: Ann Schley*



## MEET ALLIE RYKKEN - NEW LOPPET PROGRAM COACH

*By Ingrid Remak*

Allie Rykken recently joined the office ranks as the official Program Coach of the Nordic Ski Foundation. She will be coaching the Anwatin Ski Team, facilitating several other elementary school youth programs, leading the Trips for Kids mountain bike excursions and growing a number of other initiatives focused on putting young people on skis – guiding them along on a path to a passion for lifelong health and recreation.

Allie's own passion for skiing follows her matriarchal lineage. Allie's mother was instrumental in establishing the Minnesota Youth Ski League and her grandmother is known for coaching the University of Minnesota Ski Team to two National Championships in the 1970's. But Allie is excited to make her own mark on the sport she loves.

On her first day of Anwatin Ski Team practice, when she was introduced to the team as their coach, the entire squad cheered. Allie was tickled by their response, but insisted it was probably “the program they were cheering for and not me.” Needless to say, in just a few short weeks Allie has managed the burgeoning program and thoroughly embedded herself in the work of the Foundation.

Growing up in the Twin Cities skiing community, Allie competed in high school with Minnehaha Academy, trained with the St. Paul cross country ski club Sauko in the summer, and was an active member of the University of Minnesota Ski Club during her time as a Gopher. Majoring in art, Allie will bring her own creative stroke to the Loppet Youth programs and the Foundation generally.

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## LOPPET SKI CLUBS- JOIN US!

Ingrid Remak

The Loppet Ski Club is well poised to enjoy another stellar snow season. With thirty plus participants joining the Loppet Dryland Club in September, members have been meeting in Wirth Park for evening practices that include roller skiing, pole hiking, hill bounding and conditioning. Undaunted by the darkness, the bobbing swarm of headlamps that climb and descend the slopes look like a determined band of pilgrims in the night.

With the advent of snow, the Loppet Ski Club will unfold into three adult groups ranging in technique, goals and ability. Expert coaches lead the Recreational Group, the intermediate/advanced Freestyle Group, and the intermediate/advanced Classical Group with optional, member led, over distance workouts on the weekends. While some members are new to snow- others are training for top 50 finishes at the Loppet.

"The Loppet ski club is an opportunity to improve your skills, strength and technique, as much as it is a chance to build friendships with people who share the same passions," said social coordinator Cynthia Osterling who has participated in the club for 3 years. "We all come from diverse backgrounds, phases of life and professions, but we all love skiing, staying fit, and being outdoors." Osterling has been instrumental in pulling the group together arranging everything from 3 three hour

weekend roller skis to visiting the art studio of Ski Club member Paul Kellett, whose magnificent oil paintings depict Wirth Park throughout the seasons. "And you should see the potlucks this group can pull off. Skiers know how to cook!"

When you sign up for one of the Loppet Ski Clubs, you become a member of the Minneapolis Skiing Community and join the Nordic Ski Foundation in its mission to bring more and improved skiing opportunities to the Minneapolis area. Ski Club members are invited to join in on trail work, volunteer for Loppet events, and help coach the Loppet youth programs and truly act as ambassador of skiing in Minnesota.

Top: Loppet Ski Club members out training together

Photo: Cynthia Osterling

## FOUNDATION MEMBERSHIPS

Membership runs from June 1 to May 31. To avoid a lapse in membership, please renew your membership now. Note that all contributions to the City of Lakes Nordic Ski Foundation are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowable by law.

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The City of Lakes Nordic Ski Foundation is a 501(c)3 non-profit. Join the Foundation in order to support youth programming and trail development in Minneapolis.

**Basic Level** - Member entitled to newsletters, attend and vote at Annual Meeting, free high-resolution photo file, 5% discount at Finn Sisu and 10% discount on clothing at Gear West.

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Basic Individual	\$30	\$ _____
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Youth Programming	\$ _____
Snowmaking/Trail Development	\$ _____
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<b>Total Amount of Payment:</b>	<b>\$ _____</b>

(make checks payable to COLNSF)

#### Please return this form to:

City of Lakes Nordic Ski Foundation  
1301 Theodore Wirth Parkway  
Minneapolis, MN 55422

Call 612 604-5330 or email  
info@cityoflakesloppet.com for more information or to volunteer.



## ANWATIN SKI TEAM- SUMMER TRAINING

By Ingrid Remak

*Saysetha  
Philaphandeth and  
Muaj Xiong get their  
hands dirty fixing  
their mountain bikes-  
Photo: Ingrid Remak*

This year the snow melt did not stop the momentum the Anwatin Ski Team had gained during the ski season. After getting every last glide out of March's late snow fall, the Anwatin Ski team jumped seamlessly into a year round training program that included mountain biking running and roller skiing. In addition to training, participants attended Loppet Adventure Camps, Minnesota Mountain Bike Series races, competed in the City of Lakes Tri-Loppet and Trail Loppet, and topped off the summer with a self contained overnight bicycle tour. Their efforts were rewarded by earning their mountain bikes to keep at the end of the season.

### MOUNTAIN BIKING:

The Anwatin Ski Team's mountain bike season kicked off as soon as the snow disappeared, and they took to the new sport immediately. Over the course of the summer they traveled to Buck Hill, Elk River and River Falls, experiencing all aspects of mountain bike racing: pre-race butterflies, muddy mass starts, and the inevitable course wreckage. New to mountain biking this season, the Anwatin racers often found themselves going head to head with other young athletes that had grown up spending time on the trails. Despite their rookie status, the Anwatin bikers threw themselves at their competition and got used to leaving races decked in hardware. Raequan Wilson finished first in the Birch Bump, after prevailing in a neck-and-neck finish. In the same race, Kaozong Vang won the girls 11 – 12 age group, finishing more than 5 minutes ahead of the rest of the pack. Fearing neither bumps nor bruises, everyone on the team trained hard and improved throughout the season and everyone was attaining personal bests by the end of the summer.

### SELF CONTAINED BICYCLE CAMPING TRIP:

Taking the concept of biking one step further, the Anwatin Ski Team dove into uncharted waters, embarking on a self contained, bicycle powered, unsupported overnight camping trip. The Team members gathered in Wirth to launch on a 25 mile journey to Carver Park. For all participants, this was their first bike camping trip, and four of the six participants had never slept in a tent before. A donation of bike racks from REI allowed the team to transform their mountain bikes into fine touring machines. Each kid was responsible for their personal gear and for carrying a portion of the team's food.

With maps posted along the route, the group measured their progress before finally reaching camp in the late-afternoon. But there was no rest for the weary. The team jumped right into ski training mode and hit the lake for water exercises that left even the coaches panting. After a dinner of campfire pizzas, the group sought out the best s'more roasting spots while their coach led them in a brief meditation and goal setting session, impressing upon the athletes the importance of goals that do not depend upon the success or failure of other athletes, but ones they could pursue and achieve independently.

### ANWATIN TEAM EARNS BIKES:

The last day of practice was the most anticipated for the Anwatin Team. By attending at least 18 practices and 3 races over the course of the summer, athletes had the opportunity to earn their mountain bikes and ride them home, for good. The ten Anwatin Skiers who accomplished that goal were required to attend a bicycle maintenance workshop at Wirth and got their hands dirty learning how to pump up their tires, raise their seats, lube a chain, and fix a flat. Thanks to Foundation member and bike mechanic extraordinaire Paul Krawczyk for leading this effort.

The kids worked through the entire clinic in their helmets, eagerly planning their bicycle caravans to school, "I'll pick you up," said Muaj to his friend. The hope is that the experiences the Anwatin Ski team had over the course of the summer will motivate them to pursue mountain biking independently of organized practices. "The Nordic Ski Foundation's mission is to foster a lifelong passion for outdoor activities," said Foundation Director John Munger. "Providing these kids with bicycles that they will use to access the trails on their own is a huge step into empowering them as lifetime athletes." Watch for the Anwatin Ski team throughout the seasons. Unless you have your own summer training program lined up, they may be you biggest competition on the trails in years to come...

*Editor's Note: Anwatin Ski Team members were spotted riding their bikes to school this fall...*



## MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAMMING 2011-2012

*By Allie Rykken*

If you've ever gone rollerskiing somewhere in at least the semi-public, you've more than likely encountered a witty observer that hollers in your direction, "IT'S NOT SKI SEASON YET!" or "WHERE'S THE SNOW?" Little do they know, it's always ski training season, even when there is no snow. And the snow will be here sooner than you think. I've been trying hard to instill that mentality into the Anwatin Ski Team members, as some of them are brand-new to the sport and do not always appreciate the benefits of hill bounding. Fortunately, a large number of returning members lead the way. They have been training all year-round and I am looking forward to seeing them on snow. This year, forty-one middle schoolers signed up for the program and by Thanksgiving, the coaches will have chosen a race team of 20 of the most dedicated skiers.

The Anwatin Team is made possible by the generous support of the Medica Foundation. And this year the Nordic Ski Foundation was fortunate to have a small family foundation step up to sponsor a second middle school program. Nellie Stone Johnson was a perfect fit. Nellie Stone is a K-8 school and, thanks to the generosity of the Pohlad Foundation, the Nordic Ski Foundation has been able to run an elementary program there for the past few years. The new middle school program is coached by Jon Miller and Andrew Magill. They practice at school, at nearby Farview Park and at Wirth, and they have already jumped into mountain biking and rollerskiing. Both teams will compete in various races over the season, including the Mayor's Challenge, Rossignol Junior Loppet, the Midwest Junior Championships, and in dual meets against other middle school teams. Give



them a cheer if you see them out there!

Last year Maplelag Resort hosted an early-season ski camp for the Anwatin Team. This year, Rainbow Resort will be hosting Anwatin and Maplelag will host the new Nellie Stone Johnson team.

Another unique feature of the winter season will be the Loppet Ski Camps, happening two different weeks this year! Filling up last year at 60 kids, we will have our first camp from December 27-30 and our second camp from January 2-6. No experience or equipment necessary. The camps are split up into ability levels and include a variety of activities, such as SkiBall, Ski-ter Totter, a ski race, ski orienteering, downhill slalom, skijoring, adventure skiing and a bonfire! We had a wonderful and diverse group of kids last year and have high hopes for this year as well.

The middle school programs will wrap up around mid-March or whenever the snow melts, and shortly after, we'll break out the bikes! The kids are huge mountain bike enthusiasts, but until the trails are dry and ready to go, we can run and bike on the paved paths and even rollerski. They train for both the UCare City of Lakes Tri-Loppet in June and the Surly Trail Loppet in September.

*Top Left: Loppet Adventure Camp kept kids on their toes all summer long - Photo: John Swain*

*Top Right: Farview Ski Team members Wauneen Nieves and Tauseyana Coleman summer training at Loppet Adventure Camp - Photo: John Swain*

*Gei-Snow*  
*continued from page 1,*

do you describe that? Such has been the conundrum faced by many Hmong families and their youth as they tried to get to know winter, snowy sports and numerous new ideas that are part of a Minnesotan way of life, but have no direct translation into Hmong.

The Hmong people come from the dense tropical rainforests of Southeast Asia. The historically isolated and traditional people were far removed from any snow capped peaks, and it was not until families resettled as refugees in Minnesota that they encountered winter, in all its glory, for the very first time. “My mom says, ‘it’s too cold,’” laughed Anwatin Ski Team member Kao Zong Vang when she tried to describe her mother’s reaction to the sport. Kao Zong is one of four Hmong youth on the Anwatin Ski Team that have been paving the way for their families to embrace this winter wonderland.

*Kao Zong Vang  
changes a flat tire  
at the Anwatin Ski  
Team bicycle main-  
tenance workshop-  
Photo: Ingrid Remak*



It is not uncommon for the kids of immigrant families to become the ambassadors, translators and interpreters of the new host culture and language – however many Hmong youth have found that the Minnesota Hmong translation is not that easy. “There are simply no words for many ideas and concepts you have here,” remarked Kayeng Vang who works at Head Start and aids Hmong families in cross-cultural communication. “Words like computer, counselor, and permission slip – they don’t exist in Hmong. Therefore translation often becomes an explanation. This takes much longer because we need many words in Hmong to get across a single American idea.”

That has left the Hmong youth on the Anwatin Ski Team facing two challenges: how to explain why they liked this strange self-propelled gliding sport with planks and poles so much, and secondly – what to call it? What has organically evolved to describe the activity they have grown to love is “gei-snow”, which translates into “riding snow” a hybrid term using Hmong and English to bridge their multicultural worlds. “Sometimes we say, ‘gei-naking’ said Mike Xiong who participated on the team as a seventh and eighth grader. “That means ‘riding-ice.’” “Ba!” Kao Zong shouted from across the group as she lifted her pole into the air, “stick!”

This past year there were four Hmong youth who participated on the team year round. All competed in the City of Lakes Loppet and the Midwest Junior Championships. They continued their ski training into the summer, competing in anywhere from three to six mountain bike or running races with great success.

Currently there are not many Hmong athletes participating on high school cross-county ski teams, but that may all change soon. Many Hmong children are now being exposed to Loppet youth programming in their elementary schools, as well as through one of the Foundation’s two middle school programs. “These kids are not only enthusiastic, they are good!” remarked program coach Allie Rykken who already projects a changing guard on the Nordic front. “They are being exposed to skiing before most people who learn in high school. Given their technical and physical bases, they are going to enter these teams with a leg up on other students. We may see a Hmong state champ before we know it.”



*Left: Nellie Stone Johnson skiers with Coach Keith Jones  
Right: Bryn Mawr skiers pole hiking  
Photos: Margaret Adelsman*



## MINNE-LOPPET PROGRAMS

*By Margaret Adelsman*

My living room is telling me it is once again time to embark on the elementary school Minne-Loppet ski season. A plethora of snowpants, hats, gloves, and coats have been washed, sorted into piles, and await distribution to each of our six Minneapolis elementary ski programs. This process reminds me that one of our less obvious tasks in teaching Nordic ski programs in the schools is that of overcoming barriers. And while it looks like a vast amount of stuff sitting in my living room, I realize these items will still only provide assistance to a fraction of our ski students.

The City of Lakes Nordic Ski Foundation has long been about removing or reducing barriers to skiing. For youth programs, we start by bringing the programs directly to our audience, even grooming a trail at each school. Coaches are dedicated to each school for the season. Ski and boot carts are brought out of storage and rolled into gyms and school hallways. Equipment is inventoried, single poles are re-assigned to new partners, and coaches begin studying their health and nutrition curriculum packets. We refresh our memories on how to explain the fundamentals of skiing while foundation groomers tune up the snowmobile and mentally lay out ski trails on school athletic fields or neighboring park spaces.

Armed with our knowledge and enthusiasm, we coaches march into classrooms to greet the new student skiers. In spite of having all of the needed equipment right at school, and trails waiting just outside the door, we are quickly reminded that getting outside to enjoy winter can remain challenging without all of the handy protective gear that makes playing in the snow so much fun. Personally, I take it for granted that I have what is needed to meet pretty much anything the weather has to throw at me. For others, Min-

nesota winters can be somewhat more forbidding. Thin pants do little to cut the wind, and knit gloves, while handy for getting to and from the bus stop, offer poor protection for a budding skier who will spend a fair amount of time falling down and getting back up again. Fortunately, our wonderful coaching staff, twelve in all, have tackled this additional barrier to winter enjoyment by topping our equipment carts off with a colorful array of warm outerwear. While we are not able to address the needs of all of our ski students, we are attempting to remove the barriers for some who may come less prepared on ski days for a variety of reasons.

Preparing for the upcoming 2012 World Cup Paralympics at Wirth has also raised awareness of athletes who have overcome obstacles and unique barriers to enjoy and even excel at Nordic skiing. As part of the Minne-Loppet program, we will be able to share with students the challenges that adaptive athletes face and encourage them to visit the race venue in early February. We may even have the opportunity to work directly with physically challenged students within our own Minne-Loppet programs, through collaboration with the Courage Center. It is perhaps harder to hesitate at going out in the cold when faced with someone who is willing to do so without full use of their limbs or perfect eyesight. Working with our Minneapolis students through the Minne-Loppet ski programs is an experience that continues to challenge, enlighten, and reward. As we strive to excite kids about skiing, we will continue to work toward removing the barriers that may stand in the way of that experience.

*Editor's Note: The Nordic Ski Foundation's elementary programs are sponsored by the Pohlad Foundation and UCare.*



## TRAILS, TREES AND BUCKTHORN: PARK MANAGEMENT AND THE FOUNDATION

By John Munger

*Participants trying out for the Anwatin Ski Team were performing hill bounding exercises during practice.  
Photo: Allie Rykken*

Most of us who are involved in the Nordic Ski Foundation see the Foundation as a force for good in Theodore Wirth Park. We have added trails to the park, brought snowmaking to the park, brought the Junior Olympics and the Paralympics to Minneapolis, built a “stadium” area, and added lights. Because of our efforts thousands of people, including many disadvantaged children, enjoy the park on a regular basis and think of it as one of the most important parts about living in the Minneapolis area. But not everyone shares this perception. In particular, some members of the mountain bike community and some immediate neighbors perceive the Foundation in a much different way.

This article suggests that there are two basic causes for this image problem. First, neighbors sometimes confuse Park Board forestry and buckthorn removal policies for Nordic Ski Foundation initiatives. Second, the mountain bike community, particularly those versed in International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) trail standards, tends to apply mountain bike trail analysis to ski trails, resulting in a perception that the ski trails are not “sustainable.” There tends to be three primary allegations among those who perceive the Foundation differently: 1) that the trails are too wide and skate-skiing should be abolished, 2) that too many trees were cut down, and 3) that the trails were not “sustainably” de-

signed and have erosion issues.

On trail width, to some extent the trails just have to be wide enough to accommodate skiing. But in the Foundation’s eyes, it is not generally the actual trail width that bothers the neighbors, even if the neighbors insist otherwise. Instead, the problem is rooted in the treatment of buckthorn and, to some extent, the Park Board’s Forestry Department’s practice of removing dead trees in whole rather than in parts.

The Park Board points out that most of the forest in the area was at one time oak savannah. With this history in mind, the Park Board has been enlisting special Conservation Corps crews to cut and mow buckthorn throughout the Eloise Butler and Quaking Bog quadrants of the park. The result is a very open feel to the park, with mature trees surrounded by grass or, more likely, stubby post-mowing buckthorn shoots. Unfortunately, the Park Board started this program at around the same time that the Foundation first began to work with the Park Board on new trails.

In the minds of neighbors the trails went in and then, all-of-a-sudden, the park became this open area with no young trees – just a buckthorn-shoot forest between the mature oaks. With neighbors who had slowly, over decades, become used to the closed-in buckthorn-feel of the forests, this has been a radical change. Because the



buckthorn work has been co-extensive with the trails coming in, the perception has been that the wide-open feel is the fault of the ski trails. For many neighbors it is difficult to distinguish between the actual ski trail and the post-buckthorn-removal area around the trails – it just seems like one big wide open scar on the land.

Similarly, neighbors are convinced that all the trees went away “because of the Loppet.” There are years in which the Foundation does no work at all in a particular section of trail, but buckthorn removal will cause neighbors to accuse the Loppet of more destruction. This problem is exacerbated when Forestry removes dead or dying trees. Typically, Forestry drives a skid loader up the ski trail, cuts a wide swath from the trail to the dead tree (another new trail in the minds of neighbors?), and then pulls the trunk out whole, for sale to another vendor. By the time the Forestry Crew is done dragging trees from the woods, the forest and the ski trail can look like a war zone, particularly if it is wet when the work is done. For those who walk out in the woods on a weekend following the work, what they see is destruction in and around the ski trails and what they think is: “the Loppet has done it again!”

The reality is that the neighbors are not completely wrong – trees have been cut, just not by the Foundation. Forestry removes dead or dying trees. And right or wrong, the Park Board’s anti-buckthorn strategy includes the destruction of much of the understory. The problem is that with hundreds of acres of buckthorn to battle, the buckthorn brigade cuts everything because it is too difficult to distinguish the buckthorn from the non-buckthorn.

The perception of erosion issues is tied to two factors. First, the Minneapolis Off-Road Cycling Advocates (MOCA) seems to have a difficult time seeing ski trails as anything but a disaster. The MOCA group, like any good off-road cycling trail builders, follows IMBA standards. According to IMBA standards, a trail should never run straight up or down a hill, but instead should follow the contour lines with a bench-cut (cutting into the hill a little bit but allowing the water to run over the trail without pooling).

This is not how ski trails are built. First, unlike biking, skiing is conducted when the ground is frozen and there is an intermediary substance (snow) between the skier and the ground. Because of this, skiing typically leaves no ruts in the soil to create pools of water and, subsequently, erosion. More important, bench-cuts work much better for trails that are less than 18 inches wide than they do for trails that are a minimum of 15’ wide. Bench cutting a 15’ wide ski trail into the side of a hill requires significant cutting and filling on the hillside, which can mean lots of loose soil to erode away and, because of the severing of roots that happens with the cutting, significant impacts on trees on the sides of the trails. Thus, while going straight up or down a hill may seem to violate IMBA standards and offend an off-road cycling trail builder’s sensibilities, it is actually a much better way to build ski trails from a “sustainability” perspective.

But the naysayers are not without a point. There are frequently problems with the Park Board’s ski trails. They often lack grass, which helps hold the soils and prevents erosion. And the trails do occasionally have some erosion issues. Why is this? Primarily because of Park Board management issues. The trails are not mowed regularly through the summer, meaning that one “deer” trail typically develops where there is no grass. These deer trails often become the source of erosion. Worse, with no signage or hierarchy of trails, Park Board staff drive their maintenance vehicles on virtually any trail that is wide enough to accommodate them, and often drive in wet condi-

tions, killing vegetation and causing automobile ruts, which can quickly lead to erosion.

The Foundation shares some fault here. We have probably not been proactive enough in working with the Park Board on these management issues. Maybe wholesale buckthorn removal throughout the park is not realistic or wise. Maybe the reality of some buckthorn should be accepted. Maybe a buckthorn hedge on the edge of the trails will help the neighbors feel better about their trail experiences? How can we help the Park Board establish better management practices for mowing and for trail use? How can we involve concerned neighbors in these processes so that they feel a sense of ownership of the plans? Can the Foundation adopt a section of the forest – maybe removing buckthorn by hand and planting young trees in order to promote a healthy forest? While the Founda-



*Nordic Ski Foundation volunteers meet North Minneapolis residents and help neighbors clear their lawns of debris - Photo: Ingrid Remak*

tion has begun to plant trees along the trails, a more comprehensive plan may be necessary, if, for nothing else, so that the concerned neighbors do not blame the Loppet every time a tree falls in the forest...

Those interested in joining a committee to work on these issues should call or email John Munger at 612 604-5331 or [director@cityoflakesloppet.com](mailto:director@cityoflakesloppet.com).



Over 700 runners hit the trails for the 5th annual Trail Loppet

Photo: Steve Kotvis (f/go)

run and mountain bike course to soak up every ounce of water and trail way between Lake Calhoun and the northern reaches of Theodore Wirth Park. Despite fighting inclement weather in past years, mother nature shed a clam tone on Tri-Loppet day. This year, the start of the canoe race was at the North Beach of Lake Calhoun, which alleviated a large amount of canoe transport experienced in years past. The tornado that struck Wirth in late May threw a net of over 300 trunks criss-crossing the course, but race officials were able to work with the Civilian Conservation Corps to clear the trail days before the race. Under a hazy skies and light mist, racers embarked on calm waters, winding trails and a bulging and uprooted asphalt path leading them through the shaggy remnants of forest.

Despite its unique features, the Tri-Loppet has reached a participant plateau. Race entries have been hovering around 600 for the past few years. Whether it is the gear dependent nature of this triathlon, conflicting summer schedules, or simple the “hassle factor” that keeps the event from growing, race officials are pondering various opportunities for growth. Also lacking in the event is a consistent tier of elite level competition. While Minnesota is home to many skilled paddlers, bikers and runners, the Tri-Loppet is perceived as a “fun race” and not taken as seriously as single sport competitions. Really good bikers bike, runners run and paddlers stick to paddling. “If they would just try it, I know they would have a blast,” said Operations Director Mike Erikson who juggles the canoe and biking logistics of the event. “It is definitely the most fun of all Loppet events.”

The Trail Loppet grew by about 100 runners in 2011 and topped out with over 700 participants. Trail running is beginning to draw it’s own following: it’s better for the knees, more fun to look around, and the hill work brings an elevated level of fitness to the workout. The Trail-Loppet fell on a glowing autumn day whose 87 degree high made it feel more like summer than fall. The dipping and meandering paths

## TRI AND TRAIL LOPPET – HOW DO WE GROW?

By Ingrid Remak

The Trail and Tri-Loppet events are kind of like the Loppet’s California cousins. They come around once a year for the family reunion, when the Minnesota weather is warm, the days are long, and the never failing lake and ice cream tonic fuels the endless bicycle crawl through the city. You kick back with them on their last night and enjoy a last BBQ and beer. They tell you Minneapolis the best (we know) and then the next day they are off to the airport and flying home- the annual whirlwind family weekend closes, and you get back to your daily routine.

Such has been the experience of the City of Lakes Trail and Tri Loppet. Often referred to as the “most fun” of Loppet events, they have nestled themselves into our busy summer schedules, but they are smaller, more intimate, events and pale in the size compared with the glamorous winter Loppet event. The challenge facing race officials is how to grow these events and continue to appeal to both the seasoned and novice athletes.

In the City of Lakes Tri-Loppet, race directors have cleverly combined a canoe, trail

through Eloise Butler and The Bog took athletes through blooming swaths of gold-enrod and aster wildflowers and over nearly 2,000 ft of elevation gain- the equivalent of climbing two Empire State buildings. There were some muddy spots as well. Signage denoted “Ick” aptly warned runners of the sinking sludge pool settled in the middle of the trail. “This trail run is a lot more trail-y than most,” remarked Loppet run club member and race participant Jeff Van Wychen. Surly’s presence at the finish line could not be ignored and participants refueled with one of 4 brews on tap that afternoon, including the coveted “Surlyfest” usually reserved exclusively for Surly’s fall festival.

While these events originated as gatherings for cross country skiers marooned in summertime, they have grown to encompass a greater segment of the recreational community. The Loppet strives to draw more people from the community out to experience the great park and trail network Minneapolis has to offer by getting folks on bikes, in boats and on trails, and introduce recreational experiences that are attainable every day, in your own back yard.



## WINNING THE LOPPET TRIFECTA- HOIGAARD’S CHALLENGE VICTOR CRAIG CARDINAL REFLECTS ON HIS RACES

*-Craig Cardinal*

The Hoigaards Challenge is a series of 3 races: the City of Lakes Loppet ski race, the Tri-Loppet canoe/run/bike triathlon, and the Trail Loppet half marathon. Each race is a great event, and tying them together into a series is a great way to enjoy Theodore Wirth Park all year.

I heard about this series at its first running in 2008 and have done all three since then. Until this year I had been 3rd place in the series two years in a row I was hoping to move up a place or two.

The City of Lakes Loppet has become a huge event with very good competition. I even went so far as to put some pure flouros on my race skis this year, a tactic I usually reserve for the Birkie. It didn’t matter though, Matt Liebsch and Evan Pengelley, the two previous challenge winners, won their race while I finished just inside the top 20.

The Tri-loppet is always an adventure. I’ve had a different paddling partner every year, and paddling isn’t my strong suit, so I had ground to make up after the first leg. My strong running leg helped make up some time, and I held my own on the bike. I ended up in the top 10 for the race, and 5th in the challenge after the second race.

The Trail Loppet half marathon is my strongest event in the series. A group of about 5 of us broke away early, and it stayed that way for a while. I took the lead at about mile 7 and got a gap on at about mile 10 that I held to the finish. Of the 4 guys ahead of me going into the challenge 2 didn’t race the trail race, Evan turned his ankle and didn’t finish, and I was far enough ahead of Andrew Tillman to overtake him for the win overall.

*Top Left: Hoigaard’s Challenge Champion  
Craig Cardinal flies through the forest  
Photo: skinnyyski.com*



CITY OF LAKES **Nordic Ski** FOUNDATION  
 YOUTH · EVENTS · TRAILS

City of Lakes Nordic Ski Foundation  
 1301 Theodore Wirth Parkway  
 Minneapolis, MN 55422  
 612 604-5330  
 612 604-5338 (fax)  
[www.loppet.org](http://www.loppet.org)  
[info@cityoflakesloppet.com](mailto:info@cityoflakesloppet.com)

# CITY OF LAKES NORDIC SKI FOUNDATION CALENDAR

- January 7, 2012 - Peace Coffee Pre-Loppet
- January 21-22, 2012 - Mayor's Challenge
- February 1-2, 2012 - IPC Paralympics World Cup
- February 4-5, 2012 - City of Lakes Loppet Festival Weekend
- March 10-11, 2012 - Midwest Junior Championships
- June 23, 2012 - UCare Tri-Loppet
- September 22, 2012 - Surly Brewing Trail Loppet

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Have an idea for an article? Want to place an advertisement in this publication?  
 Contact Ingrid Remak (612 604-5334 or [remak@cityoflakesloppet.com](mailto:remak@cityoflakesloppet.com)).

*The Fall Dryland Group meeting on the weekend for an over distance roller ski workout on the Greenway*



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