

# North Island Snowdrifters: A Cut Above

by Don Violette

In 1977, a dozen civilian employees of the *North Island Naval Air Station*, San Diego formed a company ski club to take advantage of group discounts and foster camaraderie in the work place. From its humble beginnings almost 30 years ago, their organization has grown to be recognized as one of the top ski clubs in the country. *North Island Snowdrifters* serve on boards of the *San Diego Council of Ski Clubs*, the *Far West Ski Association*, and the *National Ski Council Federation* to do their part in strengthening organized skiing.

With more than 370 members, including skiers, boarders and friends, we are the largest ski club in the *San Diego Council of Ski Clubs*. Our membership is a true cross-section of society. We have men and women, young and old, accomplished racers and rookies, singles and families. This year we welcomed our first disabled skier as a member, a feat made possible by the use of specially adapted buses for our Mammoth trips.

We are aggressively going after the younger snow rider by offering affordable two-day trips with flexible low-cost motel lodging to accommodate young folks who don't care where they sleep, so long as they can ride, and young families who want their children in the rooms. Both scheduled trips this year went full, with families bringing children as young as four years old and included many teenagers and twenty-something's enjoying the fine sport of snow riding, often as a first experience.

## **Non-Ski Activities**

Our organization's primary mission is to provide our members fun, affordable ski trips but we like to think of ourselves as a "Club for all Seasons," offering a variety of attractive off-the-mountain activities all year 'round.

Our annual social activities include such fun and well-attended events as a *Day at the Del Mar Racetrack*, a *Casino Night* fundraiser, a *Halloween Costume Party*, a *Holiday Boat Parade of Lights* on the Beach, a traditional *Holiday Decorated Biking Pub Crawl*, participation in San Diego's *St. Patrick's Day Parade*, an après ski season member appreciation party with zany themes (such as "Topsy Turvy, a half-formal event mixing Tuxes, top hats and beach attire), and a *New Year's Eve Party* extravaganza. We actively participate in the *San Diego Council of Ski Club's Family Picnic*, *Happy Hours*, and the *Man and Woman of the Year* awards dinner, and never miss the *San Diego Alpine League Race Awards*.

We also have informal and sometimes spontaneous events such as concerts in the park, wine tasting tours, day trips to Puerto Nuevo, Mexico for lobster dining, San Diego Padres baseball games, card games, house boating, dining out groups, camping, and friendly backyard BBQs.

## **Sports Awareness/Promotion Activities**

Our members are active sports fans, not only attending local Padres and Charger events but playing on local Softball teams and the San Diego *Over The Line (OTL)* tournaments. Our summer meetings feature volleyball tournaments, water sports and team games. Our summer activities include water skiing, jet-skis, wake boarding, boating, Colorado River tubing, river-rafting, golf, racquetball, tennis, in-line skating,

mountain biking, hiking, biking, running, and pool. We pay our ski racer start fees to encourage participation in organized racing.

The club donates time and donations to the *United States Adaptive Recreation Center* (USARC) through the Bear Mountain adaptive ski school program, which offers full and half-day lessons with private instruction, lift tickets and special equipment. Some of our members serve as mountain hosts and ski instructors at Bear Mountain.

Last year, the *North Island Snowdrifters* coordinated with the *San Diego Community and Youth Services* (SDCYS) to restructure the *San Diego Council of Ski Club's* annual Ski Swap, held in conjunction with a local ski retailer. SDCYS takes underprivileged youth on ski-bus trips to Bear Mountain and Mammoth Mountain. Many of these young people have never seen snow before, and we think it is an excellent way to promote organized skiing. SDCYS agreed to let the young people earn the privilege of going on a Mammoth ski trip by accepting, pricing and selling clothing and equipment donations from San Diego skiers at the ski swap, providing tax-deductible receipts for each donation. SDCYS was offered first choice of all donated items and the remainder were sold. Items not sold were donated to SDCYS. This event raised \$600 for SDCYS.

### **Community Service**

The North Island Snowdrifters are social, community-conscious individuals who are generous in providing time, talent, energy and financial contributions through various events throughout the year.

Many of our members volunteer time with handicapped sports such as kayaking, hang-gliding, and blind skiers. Recently, and for most of the last decade, we participated in the American Cancer Society *Relay for Life* event, winning the spirited award for most creative campsite every year we entered. Campsite themes include Pirates for the Cure, Patriotic Cure for America, and Surfin' for the Cure. Our members volunteered to help at the Special Olympics, serving as greeters and providing security. During the holidays, we adopt a family, hold a food drive for local military families, and present U.S. Marine Corp representatives with unwrapped *Toys for Tots* at our December meeting. Two years ago, our 370 members raised \$1400 for the Tsunami disaster, which was matched by a member's company. Last year, we held a bottle auction to raise more than \$1600 for Katrina Relief, again having it matched by a member's company. When fires threatened homes in San Diego county two years ago, our members were there to fight back, even commandeering equipment to clear brush at the fire's edge. Afterward, we were there with emergency supplies, clothing, toiletries and personal needs for those who lost their homes.

### **Sports Development Activities**

We feel an obligation to keep our members informed and safe, both on and off the mountain. To that end, we try to keep safety and health issues in the forefront of our continuing education.

We carry a monthly newsletter column dealing with the latest advances in ski safety and, during the off-season, health and fitness. Issues such as helmets, skiing in control, ski clothing, and courtesy on the slopes are addressed each month. Timely articles on equipment trends are also covered.

### **Sports Activities**

## Racing

It's hard to stay humble when you've won the very competitive Alpine Racing League six - count 'em, six - straight years. Our success is a tribute not only to our Race Director and his assistants, but to the entire membership. We encourage new members to join our race team, emphasizing to them that it's not about speed, but it is about fun and participation. As an incentive, the club pays all racer starts through regular fund-raising events for the benefit of the racing club.

## Non-Ski Competitive Events

Our members are active in a wide variety of recreational sports, including golf, Over-the-Line (beach softball), biking, white water rafting, volleyball, hiking, racquetball, tennis, in-line skating, Colorado River tubing, water skiing, and wake boarding, mountain biking, softball, surfing, running, and pool.

## Ski Trips

The heart of a successful ski club is, of course, offering exciting, affordable trips to the winter wonderland. We throw the best parties and sponsor the most fun-filled events in the West, but our membership numbers would drop like a stone in water if we didn't also put together the best ski trips.

We annually offer six or seven bus trips to Mammoth Mountain. We mix up the trips' length of stay, days of departure, and other aspects in an attempt to make each trip fun and attractive. This past season we experienced near sellouts on every trip. Thanks to our hard-working Travel Director, we continue to offer the best value on ski packages to Mammoth Mountain.

Most of the bus trips are organized with party themes. Members are encouraged, but not required, to support the themes. Trip leaders are responsible for selecting their own unique theme. In the past, we have had party trips entitled Leather and Lace Toga, the Love Trip, Warren Miller Movie Mania, Come as You Were, the Last Lei, and Super Heroes. *We realize there is nothing wrong with being "terminally twelve!"*

We have also offered one-day, family-oriented bus trips to Bear Mountain.

In addition to the bus trips, Snowdrifters can participate to two or three club-sponsored flyaways each winter. Recent winters have found us in Canada (Whistler / Blackcomb, Banff, Big White, Sun Peaks, Red Mountain), the Rockies (Steamboat Springs, Winter Park, Aspen, Sun Valley, Park City, Taos, Telluride, Vail / Beaver Creek), and Europe (Innsbruck). Most have proven to be successful adventures enjoyed by all participants.

Even with all the trips the club sponsors, dozens of North Island Snowdrifters participate in the FWSA ski week each year, and our members lead and participate in the San Diego Council of Ski Club's flyaway trip in December.