

Entry for The Unrecables
FWSA Tollaksen Outstanding Club of the Year, 2006

The Unrecables (Unlimited Recreational Ability) is a non-profit sports organization for people with disabilities. We are the Los Angeles Chapter of "Disabled Sports, USA" (a 501(c)(3) organization) and have just over 100 members. We provide a safe environment where people with disabilities are encouraged to grow and improve their skills. Through skiing, people with disabilities are motivated to overcome physical and mental barriers by accepting the challenge of the sport itself. As their confidence and skiing improves, the instructor presents new challenges to overcome. This confidence, physical skill and endurance spill over into their daily lives, improving day-to-day motor skills as well as adding to the overall quality of life for the disabled athlete.

This past year has been a very active year for our group. In October we had some members carpool and attend a Los Angeles Council of Ski Clubs (LAC) event at a ski store for their "Shop Til You Drop" event. The overall turnout at the event was not great but *The Unrecables* were well represented.

In November we attended the LAC "Snow Gala" where we had our well-deserving club winners for "Man of the Year" and "Woman of the Year" represent us for the LAC Man and Woman of the Year competition. We had a large turnout at the event and occupied two of the approximately twenty tables at the function (about 10% of the total attendees!). During the previous year's Gala we had only one table but this year with more of our members volunteering to give our non-driving members rides to the function we were able to overcome the transportation hurdle that most groups do not experience. A fantastic time was had by all and the speeches given by our Man and Woman of the Year were moving to everyone present.

This year we continued our fundraising efforts. We had many members sell Entertainment Books and those efforts raised nearly \$800. In addition, we benefitted from the program offered via Ralph's grocery store where a small percentage of the total grocery dollars spent by shoppers registered with our group are forwarded to us. We continued to actively seek new individuals to register as "our shoppers" and the efforts paid off. We received checks for \$400 to \$600 each quarter this past year!

The Unrecables primary focus is downhill skiing during the winter. *The Unrecables* began with a handful of volunteers and a few disabled students in 1980. This year during the winter program of 2005-2006, we provided over 200 hours of student skiing with over 1000 hours of volunteer instructor time. The club offers adaptive skiing and instruction for people with all types of disabilities, i.e., visually impaired, deaf, amputees, brain injured, paraplegic, quadraplegic, and cerebral palsy. We arrange weekend trips to the Mammoth Ski Resort once a month from November to May.

The November trips are always reserved for our instructors and instructor-candidates only. This allows our Ski School Director, Scott Nakada, and our Assistant Ski School Director, John Melville, to provide hands-on training to these volunteers. All of our board members, instructors and candidates are volunteers. They not only don't get paid for the work they do, they actually pay their own transportation, lodging and food on the ski trips and activities with the club. In addition, it requires several years of intense training before a candidate can move up to instructor level. The Professional Ski Instructor Association (PSIA) has special training for adaptive instructors and we use that certification to officially designate an instructor in our group. Some of our instructors and candidates are also disabled!

In December we had only one student and therefore used the opportunity to conduct the same instructor training we did in November. As a result, we were able to provide this detailed instruction to approximately 16 instructors and candidates, whereas in the November trips we usually only have 6-10 attendees. This year *The Unrecables* were very fortunate to be the recipient of the donations of a brand new mono-ski and bi-ski; these are both "sit down" ski devices which allow people with certain disabilities (e.g. paraplegic, quadraplegic, brain injury)] to ski. During these instructor trips Scott and John were able to provide detailed reviews of all equipment including the new donations, and provide other valuable instruction and information regarding adaptive instruction techniques. The instructors and candidates actually skied in the bi-skis and mono-skis, skied blindfolded, and skied with only one ski on to get a sense of what the student experiences and therefore improving their instruction skills. During the evenings "dry-land" clinics were held to review the information in more detail.

During each of our regular trips, the disabled skiers received ski instruction all day Saturday and a half-day on Sunday along with the use of our adaptive equipment. The Ski School Director, who is also PSIA certified, evaluated each student and decided what type of adaptive equipment was required and therefore matched each student with the appropriate instructor. The instructors are always careful to provide a safe and comfortable environment for the students and to make any adjustments necessary to assure appropriate equipment use and fit. We had several new students and candidates learn the rudiments of skiing and use of the equipment. Our instructors challenged the students' performance at their beginning skill level and increased the challenge as the students progressed. We had some more experienced students who were able to fine tune their skills with the aid of the instructors and candidates and therefore improved their skiing level.

The Unrecables has a sponsorship program to help financially challenged students attend our monthly trips. A few of our disabled members work full-time, but the majority only work part-time or simply rely on disability benefits. Our confidential sponsorship program provides funds to assist with the costs of transportation, lodging and meals. We had two students benefit from this program during past year and they were able to enjoy being active in our group and attend a primary event for our club.

On that note, each year the various ski clubs in the LAC graciously sponsor an *Unrecable* member (a disabled person) and a travel companion to attend the Annual Ski Week. This year the LAC sponsored our long-time member Kathy Paisley (a mono-skiier); Kathy's travel companion was member Gina Ariola. The fantastic coincidence during this trip was that adaptive skiing clinics were being held at Telluride and Kathy was able to participate in many mono-ski clinics throughout the week. At the end of the week as a result of the fortunate training and practice she received, Kathy conquered the last major challenge she had in skiing - being able to self-load on the ski lift! Congratulations to Kathy! We were all thrilled to hear this when she returned from the trip and gave her report at our general membership meeting in March.

The Unrecables are currently working with *REI*, the outdoor gear and clothing store, on developing a relationship where we can perhaps benefit from their resources and grants, and also obtain new instructors. Four employees of the *REI* stores attended our February trip and during that trip they were teamed up with some of our long-time members, our Ski School director and our President. On Saturday we were able to provide information to the employees on the many types of adaptive equipment. We even held a "visually impaired" clinic where the employees stood in the lift line, got on the chair lift, exited the chair lift, and skied down a run with their eyes closed the entire time. In addition, each employee was able to sit and ski in a bi-ski to understand the equipment more and to get a sense of what a student might experience when working with our group. They all had a great time and appreciated the information provided. Saturday night we had our usual "taco dinner" and an informative video about adaptive skiing was shown to our new friends. On Sunday they each were paired with a disabled skier, instructor, and instructor candidate. The entire weekend proved to be an enlightening experience for all of them. And we benefited by having 2 new members from that group join as instructor candidates!

On a sad note, this year we lost a long time friend of *The Unrecables*, Samuel Cardona, the father of our very long-time member and Board Member, Gordon Cardona. The Cardona family has been a vital part to *The Unrecables* for a very long time, hosting parties at their home, helping with trips, events, and so much more. The memorial service was attended by a large number of *The Unrecables* family, which speaks volumes for what type of people make up our club. It's not only a ski club – we are a family of individuals from all walks of life with all types of abilities.

We all come together for the same thing: to learn from each other, to enrich our lives, to be thankful for what we do have and can do, and to enjoy the sport of skiing, regardless of our financial status or physical ability. Being a part of such a group and having our student members trusting our instructors and candidates to improve their skiing ability really helps the students to gain the confidence to overcome physical and/or mental barriers. This spills over into their daily lives and has so many far-reaching implications. As our motto states, "If I can do this, I can do anything!"