



# DURANGO NORDIC



*Photo provided by Helen Low*

## ANNUAL REPORT

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**2019-2020**

## WHO WE ARE

We are winter endurance athletes and outdoor enthusiasts. We are Nordic skiers and snowshoers alike. We are a community. We celebrate the solitude and stark beauty of a winter's day. We embrace the pursuit of fitness. We traverse our backyard wilderness under our own power. We are thrilled if it's a blue wax day. We thrive on type II fun. We enjoy some of the finest scenery in the state of Colorado from our trails and some say, we have the nerve to wear silly clothes.

We are Durango Nordic.

# LETTER FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

While the global pandemic put an abrupt end to our season and has had a lasting and over-shadowing impact on almost everything, Durango Nordic's 2019-2020 ski season was largely another successful year with many outcomes to be proud of and grateful for. The Nordic Center built numerous trail additions that provided more connectivity and improved existing trails, allowing us to groom with less snow and open earlier. We initiated a membership program providing more benefits to season pass holders and sustainable revenue for club operations. By far, the most exciting accomplishment of last season was realizing the long-term goal of purchasing our new grooming machine, a 2019 Prinoth Husky. All of these highlights and more are provided in this Annual Report.

One of our most important ongoing goals is fostering community for the diversity of people who enjoy our trails and programs. We hosted nearly 20 events serving a broad cross-section of people. We partnered with Durango Nature Studies to offer a naturalist-led activity at the Alpine Bank Full Moon Howler. We held our first Coke Race at the top of Purgatory Resort; the chairlift ride up and down, high-altitude venue, and onlooking, cheering alpine skiers made for a fun and memorable experience. The Pine Needle Langlauf was once again a highlight of the season with races for all levels of skiers, a party on the deck with live bluegrass music, food, prizes, and the culmination of the Rossignol Southwest Series. Tad Elliott, the Head Coach and Program Director, expanded our programs and participation. The Winter Athletic Conditioning Outside (WACO) program attracted older athletes that had left the club and new athletes for off-season training. We held "DEVO Nights" with a large number of athletes using the Center's rental fleet to learn how to Nordic ski. Camryn Sippy and Tad Elliott built a successful partnership with Fort Lewis College where eight students joined the school's Nordic Skiing Club. We also continued to grow the number and diversity of adult athletes in our Masters Program with beginner to elite athletes participating.

As we enter the 2020-2021 season, we remain committed to delivering a safe and quality experience for our trail users, offering diverse programs and events for our community and pursuing key strategic initiatives for the Club's ongoing growth and sustainability. Highlights are on the next page.





### **COVID-19 RISK MANAGEMENT**

The Club has adopted COVID-19 risk management protocols for the Center and its operations. Protocols follow local health department rules and regulations and best practices used by other Colorado Nordic centers to minimize risk to staff and skiers.

### **VIBRANT OUTDOOR PROGRAMS**

With limitations on indoor activities related to COVID-19, we anticipate growth in our programs, clinics, lessons, and pass sales. The board of directors, staff, and volunteers are preparing to effectively manage this growth and risks related to COVID-19, including expanding online registration for passes, ski rentals, and clinics.

### **STRATEGIC PLAN AND BYLAWS UPDATES**

The board of directors will update the strategic plan, including a five-year vision for the Club. The Club's bylaws have not been updated since the 1980s and need some minor changes to reflect current processes and procedures.

### **CONTINUED TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS**

With the relocation of the proposed wastewater treatment plant, improvements will be done on Aspen and Bench Loops this season.

Durango Nordic is grateful for the generosity, enthusiasm, and support we receive from our partners, volunteers, members, and trail users to make the Durango Nordic Center a community asset to be enjoyed for generations to come. We could not do this without you!

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Tom Holcomb  
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*Vice President*

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*Treasurer*

Moira Montrose Compton  
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Jen Garvey  
*Website*

Daniel Murray  
*Masters Program*

Benjamin Mitchell  
*Youth Programs*

## **STAFF:**

Helen Low  
*Nordic Center Manager*

Tad Elliott  
*Head Coach & Program Director*

Jesse Guglielmo  
*Lead Trail Groomer*

# OUR IMPACT

SEASON PASSES SOLD

274

DAY PASSES SOLD

2,000

69

SKATE CLINIC PARTICIPANTS

190

CLASSIC LESSONS

RENTAL SETS

875

SNOWBURNERS

44

53

YOUTH TEAM PARTICIPANTS

90

YOUTH TEAM PRACTICES

JNQ RACE PARTICIPANTS

60

MILES TRAVELED TO JNQ RACES

2,460

10

MASTERS PARTICIPANTS

450

GROOMING HOURS

KILOMETERS GROOMED

2,520

VOLUNTEER HOURS

1,800



# FINANCIALS

Our fiscal year runs from September 1 to August 31. Our revenue has varied over the past several years, with our most recent year being the strongest revenue year in recent past. Durango Nordic had a strong fundraising push to purchase a new snowcat. Our goal was realized thanks to our generous donors. Unfortunately, we don't think that this past year is indicative of our "normal" year. We continue to work to develop programs to attract new skiers and keep our current skiers coming back for more by offering options for passes, memberships, and programs for all ages.

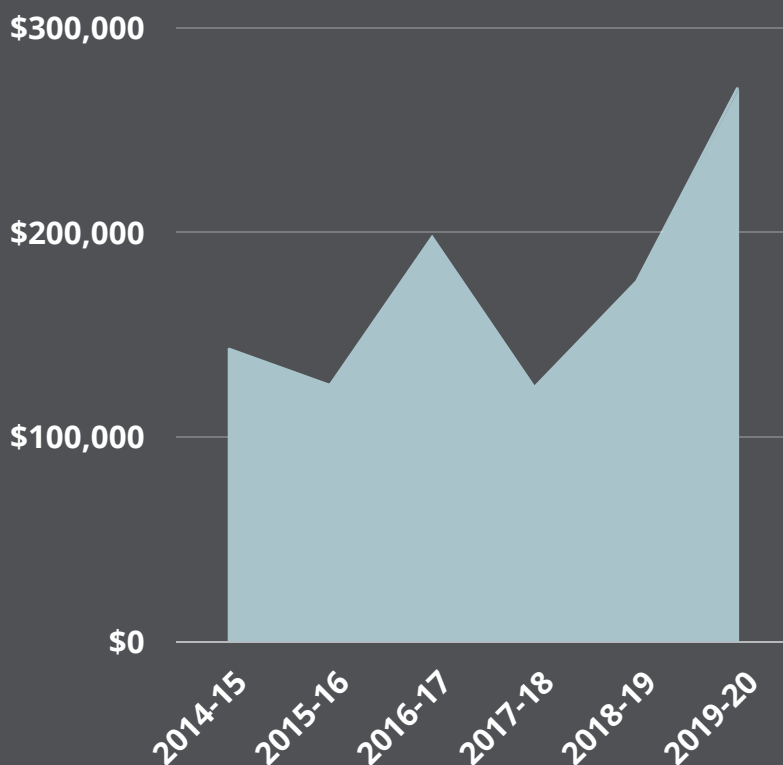
COVID-19 did shut us down early this spring. We are making plans for the coming season to be open to serve our skiers throughout the season while being safe and minimizing exposure.

Durango Nordic budgets for a balanced budget, being conservative with our expenses and fundraising to meet our needs beyond basic operations. We build cash reserves for specific projects prior to initiating them to ensure the long term financial health of the Club. We are proud to say that we are continuing to serve the Nordic community with a variety of events and programs and have a solid financial base from which we operate.



Photo provided by Chad MacCluskey

## REVENUE BY YEAR

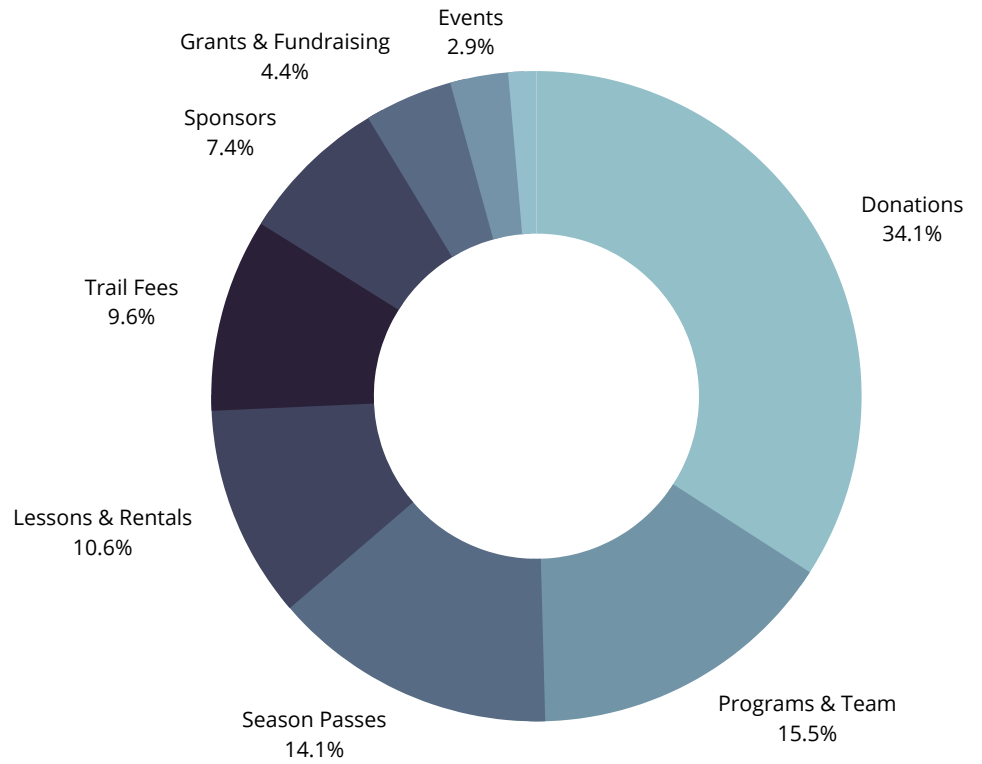




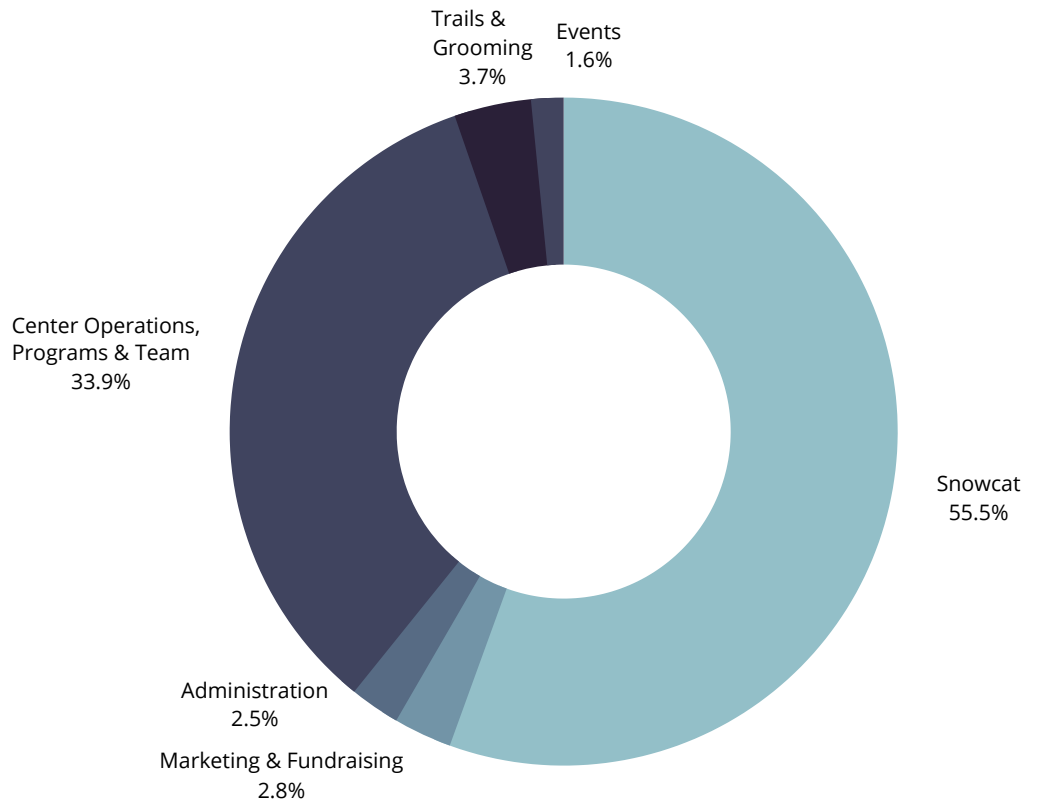
Photos provided by Chad MacCluskey



# INCOME



# EXPENSES & INVESTMENTS





# PROJECTS UPDATE

## TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS AND ADDITIONS

The season started before the snow arrived with significant trailwork to add, reroute, regrade, and improve our network of trails. After years of neglect and degradation from the horseback riding operations, many of the trails were deeply rutted or eroded. Through Helen and Chip's leadership and collaboration with AJ Construction, the following improvements were completed: ruts and rocks were removed, top soil was added, and trails were re-seeded to prevent erosion. Additionally, trail reroutes, extensions, and connections were added. After a couple of moderate-sized early December storms, the Center was able to open by successfully grooming the recently improved trails that would have previously prohibited skiing in the early season. Skiers were delighted to be able to enjoy the Center with moderate early season snowfall and overjoyed with the addition of trails such as Jane's World and the connector for Boyce Lake Overlook and the North Loop.



Photo provided by Helen Low



Photo provided by Chad MacCluskey

## MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Also leading into the 2019-2020 season, the Club initiated the first annual Durango Nordic Snowdance, a fundraising event for the Durango Nordic Ski Club and membership drive to foster community and enhance sustainable revenue. Held at Carver Brewing in October, the community enjoyed food and drinks together while learning more about our programs and contributing to the vision for the Nordic Center's future. Membership contributions provide incremental sustainable revenue toward our financial needs, and we've continued this important program into the 2020-2021 season. Our membership options are structured into three tiers - Loppet, Marathon, and Champion - to provide the most value to you, your family, or your business. Benefits include a season pass to the Nordic Center, day passes and group lessons to share with friends, free entry to Coke Races, discounts to a variety of local businesses and Club partners, and recognition on our website. Visit our website to learn more!

## NEW SNOWCAT

Durango Nordic was thrilled to announce the purchase of our new grooming machine, a 2019 Prinoth Husky, during the holiday season. After four years of fundraising, the goal of acquiring this grooming machine became a reality in large part because of contributions from the Katz Family, Ineke and Brad Boyce, Katie and John Ogier, LPEA, and our Sustaining Sponsors: Alpine Bank, CocaCola of Durango and Farmington, the Community Foundation of Southwest Colorado, Fort Lewis College, 4Corners Riversports, Pine Needle Mountaineering, and McDonald's. The Nordic community's energy was palpable with frequent comments about the "world-class conditions", "best skiing ever", and "superior grooming" at the Center. According to Durango Nordic's lead groomer, Jesse Guglielmo, "It's like we had a 1991 Ford F150 and now we just got a 2020 Porsche. The difference it's made is amazing." Check out our Groomer Q&A with Guglielmo below to learn more about what goes into providing top-notch grooming.



Photo provided by Helen Low



# GROOMER Q & A

## A CONVERSATION WITH LEAD GROOMER, JESSE GUGLIELMO

### HOW DOES THE GROOMING SEASON START?

I start by clearing the trails in the fall. I've got to go to every kilometer of trail and remove fallen trees, standing dead pine, and any other obstacles. Then I rent a tool called a brush hog to brush out all the trails. That's important to getting the ski area open. The smoother the trails are, the less amount of snow it takes to open. We start getting good snow in the middle of November and try to open before December. Once it opens in December, we get serious about grooming every day.

### WHAT MACHINES DO YOU USE TO GROOM?

When there are early season conditions, we're usually running the snowmobile. We have an awesome snowmobile just like we have an awesome snowcat. It's a state of the art machine, and this is our third season with it. We hook up a trailer to it and we kind of rake the trails and lay some corduroy. The snowmobile is good for less snow because it's lighter weight and can get through narrower spots than the snowcat, so it's not going to hit as many rocks. We don't ever want to damage our snowcat. Once we get around 18 or more inches of snow, that's when we start running the snowcat.

### WHAT IS THE NEW SNOWCAT LIKE COMPARED TO THE OLD ONE?

It's like we had a 1991 Ford F150 and now we just got a 2020 Porsche. The difference it's made is amazing. The hydraulics help it move and articulate in all these different ways. There are a lot of narrow spots on our trails and the ease of driving it through the woods is great. The lighting on it is also great. It has eight different high-powered LED lights which really illuminate everything. The groomers from Purgatory say they can see me driving around down at Boyce Lake while they're up at Upper Hades. It's also more fuel efficient and has lower emissions, so it's better for the environment. It's a huge upgrade all around.

### WHAT DOES A TYPICAL DAY OF GROOMING LOOK LIKE?

The morning usually starts around 5 AM. That's when the machines are up and running. If it's snowing, you're leaving town at 4 AM to dig the machines out and warm them up. We groom so early in the mornings so the snow has time to set up before the skiers get on it.

We cruise around at about three to six miles an hour in the snowcat. In the snowmobile you can go a lot faster. Depending on the conditions, it takes about three to five hours to groom the whole trail system. So a skier might encounter the snowcat when it's returning to the shop late in the morning. It might be early for the skier, but late for the groomer.

We want to get it done as soon as we can, but we don't want to rush. There's a level of quality we want to try to provide. Some of those hills are really fast. We don't want to leave a speed bump at the bottom.

### WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE TYPE OF SNOW TO GROOM?

Powder. Driving the snowcat in fresh snow is awesome. It's so smooth and you get to be out there with the snow falling. Skate skiers don't necessarily like powder conditions, but our snowcat does an excellent job of tilling the fresh snow, and it doesn't take that long to set up, so skate skiers do get good conditions even on powder days. I also like driving through the narrow woods. I think it's a really special part of the job. You're driving a huge machine through the woods, but it feels like you're on the trail running or mountain biking.

### WHAT'S THE MOST CHALLENGING ASPECT OF GROOMING?

I'd say perfectionism. You're looking at the groom as you groom it, you're inspecting it, and you're driving this machine at the same time. That can be a little tricky. Do you keep your eyes on the road or do you keep your eyes in the mirror? Everything else is easy. Getting up early in the morning? No problem. Love it. Coming to work with three feet of snow? Awesome. All that stuff is fun. You just want to leave the best pass you can. We might not have a hundred kilometers of trails, but it's almost better in a way. We have a sense of closeness with the community. Skiers know every single turn and hill out there, so we want to provide the best grooming we can for them. There are a lot of variables, and we always want the product to be the same. Perfectly straight. Nice, ice cube tray track. No squiggles. The other groomers and I always talk about what it takes to get to that. Every day is a little different.

### IS THERE ANYTHING YOU'D LIKE SKIERS TO KNOW ABOUT GROOMING?

Don't be scared to talk to the groomers - we want to hear the feedback! Come say hi when it's snowing one day. I could talk about grooming all day.



Photo provided by Helen Low

# UPDATE FROM HEAD COACH TAD ELLIOTT



*Photo provided by Chad MacCluskey*

Durango Nordic welcomed Tad Elliott as the new head coach and program director for the 2019-2020 season. Although this was Elliott's first year in the role, he is far from a stranger to the program. Elliott grew up racing for Durango Nordic before going on to a successful career as a professional skier and mountain biker for 12 years. He is now happy to share his knowledge and experience with the next generation of athletes.

Elliott mostly works with high-school-aged skiers, which includes the U16/U18/U20 Race Program and the W.A.C.O. Program. Throughout the season, he traveled with the team to Junior National Qualifiers around Colorado and Utah. Over the four weekends of racing, Durango Nordic had a total of 60 athletes compete. Two of those athletes, Logan Moore (U18) and Maggie Holcomb (U16), qualified for Junior Nationals in Truckee, California. Elliott cites Holcomb's final race of the season in Soldier Hollow, UT, which secured her spot on the Junior National team, as one of the highlights of his coaching season.

"Maggie had an awesome bike season, but working into the Nordic season was a bit more of a challenge," said Elliott. "It all came together for her during the last race, and in such a neat venue too. It was so cool to see that progression happen."

While Elliott likes the competitive aspect of skiing, his main priority is promoting the sport as a fun way to enjoy time outside with friends.

"It's all about the kids and having fun on snow," Elliott said. "We get to do something fun in a gorgeous location every evening. That's pretty special."

## REMEMBERING BEN SONNTAG

Durango lost a great friend and community member this year when Ben Sonntag passed away while road biking in March. Sonntag, who was originally from Germany, moved to Durango in 2007 and quickly became an integral member of our tight-knit community. While cycling was his main focus, his friendly personality was familiar to many in the Durango Nordic community. He smiled at us on the ski trails. He stood next to us on start lines. He coached us during the fall of 2017. He is fondly remembered and sorely missed.

Sonntag's family, who still live in Germany, have generously donated his skis to Durango Nordic. They will be used as rental gear for developing athletes in the youth program. We hope they help empower young skiers to become, like Sonntag, enthusiastic athletes and supportive friends.



*Photo provided by Chad MacCluskey*



# ATHLETE HIGHLIGHT: KRISTINA BODEWES



Photo provided by Kristina Bodewes

**"NORDIC HELPS ME BECAUSE IT KEEPS ME ACTIVE. AND WHEN I'M ACTIVE, I THINK I'M MORE CENTERED. I THINK IT HELPS EVERYONE BE MORE FOCUSED."**



Photo provided by Chad MacCluskey

For U18 Kristina Bodewes, skiing isn't just a sport. It's a way of life. She grew up in northern Wisconsin and started skiing as soon as she was old enough to learn, around four years old. She and her family moved to Durango in 2017, and Bodewes joined Durango Nordic as she was entering eighth grade. She is now a junior at Animas High School and about to go into her fourth season with the team.

Bodewes loves skiing because it's a way to stay active in the colder, darker months.

"I love being outside in the winter," said Bodewes. "A lot of times people feel like since it's winter and cold, you can't be outside. But with Nordic, you're able to stay active. It's really fun and I love the team. I just love winter, so it all works out."

She's also particularly grateful for the rugged mountain backdrop and starry skies she and her teammates get to enjoy at the Durango Nordic Center each evening at practice.

"It's like being in a magazine ad every night. We're so lucky."

While Bodewes loves the actual activity of skiing, her favorite part of being a member of Durango Nordic is the positive team atmosphere her teammates and coaches help create.

"I really like the team dynamic. Last year I was able to connect with a lot of the other girls on the team, and it really helped me through a lot of things," said Bodewes. "It was nice to have a really tight-knit group. I also love the coaches. They make it so it's about so much more than skiing."

She particularly credits head coach, Tad Elliott, for his influence.

"Tad has been especially helpful to me. He's everyone's coach and everyone's friend," she said. "When we don't have organized practice, he still offers to come up with a training plan or meet for a run or bike ride. That's just how he is. He's also in school, so he has a lot to balance, but he always has a positive attitude. I really look up to him."

Bodewes also has a lot to keep her busy: she is a diligent student, member of student council, three-sport athlete (she runs cross-country in the fall and track in the spring), works at Grassburger, and likes to spend time with her family and friends. She admits that juggling it all can be a challenge, but Nordic helps her keep everything in balance.

"In a way, Nordic helps me because it keeps me active. And when I'm active, I think I'm more centered. I think it helps everyone be more focused."

During a year of great uncertainty, Bodewes is looking forward to the outlet Durango Nordic will provide this season.

"I think we're really lucky that we get to have a season this year at all," she said. "I'm really excited for it."



# MASTERS PROGRAMS

Durango Nordic ran another successful masters program during the 2019-2020 season. The program, which is intended for adult skiers who want to improve physical fitness and technique, saw a total of ten participants in its third season. Participants met weekly at the Durango Nordic Center and received instruction on skate technique from a rotating Durango Nordic coach. In addition to providing direct coaching, the program also aims to connect skiers with a group of fellow Nordic enthusiasts and prepare those who are interested in competing for a marathon ski race. A handful of the 2019-2020 masters participants seized this opportunity and traveled to Crested Butte, CO to compete in the Alley Loop ski marathon.

For the 2020-2021 season, Durango Nordic is expanding the masters program to better meet the needs and ability levels of its participants. The program is now structured into three tiers that participants can choose from - Beginner, Enthusiast, and Elite. Each tier has its own designated coach. While the experience level of the participants may differ, the overall goals of the program remain the same:

## IMPROVE SKIING ABILITY

Nordic skiing is such a nuanced sport that no matter your experience level, there is always something to work on. Even Olympic athletes do regular technique drills. Daniel Murray, who is a Durango Nordic board member and has been skiing for over 15 years, plans to participate in the program this season.

"What I think is fascinating is that people, including myself, will have skied for years and years but never actually had any formal training or coaching," said Murray. "I think a lot of us could stand to gain from asking for feedback. It applies to beginners, enthusiasts, and goes all the way up to elite skiers."

## BUILD COMMUNITY

During a year when we've really recognized the importance and value of our social interactions, the Masters Program hopes to connect skiers in the Nordic community in a manner that is safe and follows COVID-19 protocols.

"There's a camaraderie aspect to it," said Murray. "We're going to meet a new group of people and enjoy that social aspect of it. This is a way to do something that is good for our physical and mental health."

Murray also points out that getting to know others in the program might encourage meeting up to ski outside of designated sessions.

"It might not be something you would have done on your own," said Murray. "So it's motivating to find that group of people."

## PROVIDE ACCOUNTABILITY

One of the benefits of signing up for a structured program is that it will naturally build more skiing and time outdoors into your life.

"You'll inherently ski more," said Murray. "You've made a financial commitment. You've made a time commitment. You've got other people who are there at a particular time, ready to ski. You have a bit more accountability."

## PREPARE TO RACE (BUT ONLY IF YOU WANT TO)

Racing can be a great way to motivate yourself, realize fitness and technique gains, and participate in a community event. Set your sights high with the Pine Needle Langlauf 30k or tackle something a bit shorter with one of our Coke Races. Or you can always don a costume and cheer from the sidelines. The Masters Program provides something for everyone. Visit our website to learn more and sign up.

We want to extend a special thank you to Animas Orthopedic Associates for being the presenting sponsor of our Masters Programs.



Photo provided by Ben Mitchell

# FORT LEWIS COLLEGE NORDIC CLUB



New for the 2019-2020 season, Durango Nordic collaborated with Fort Lewis College to run a recreational Nordic program for Fort Lewis students. Camryn Sippy, a former Durango Nordic athlete and current Fort Lewis student, facilitated the organization and execution of the program.

From January through March, the group met twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays and carpooled to the Durango Nordic Center to spend a couple hours distance skiing under the stars and Twilight mountains.

“When it’s dark in the winter and you get out of class late, it’s hard to really want to go do anything,” said Sippy. “Having this program helped us motivate each other and say, wait, let’s all go skiing for a couple hours. Then we’ll do our homework.”

The group, which totaled about 12 people on its biggest day, represented a wide variety of skiing backgrounds. A handful of participants grew up skiing and attended high school at places like Vail Ski and Snowboard Academy. Others, including one student from Israel, had never put on skis before. A significant portion of the group was recruited through some of the college’s other athletic teams, such as the cycling and cross-country running teams.

The main focus of the program was to provide college students the opportunity to try skiing and foster a sense of community among winter enthusiasts.

When you graduate high school, there aren’t many options to keep skiing unless you want to be really competitive,” said Sippy. “So I love the fact that I’m kind of helping keep Durango Nordic going into college. It’s an awesome way to do something wintry with your friends and still have this great team atmosphere.”

While the group usually arrived at the Nordic Center later than the Durango Nordic team, they did occasionally have the chance to join the team for some fun games and relays at the end of practice.

“That was really, really fun,” said Sippy. “All these college kids were getting beat by the U12s. We were all like, wow, these kids really know what they’re doing.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented the program with funding and organizational challenges this year, but Sippy, who is a senior, hopes to see the program experience continued success.

“We live in such a great area for skiing,” said Sippy. “We have the Nordic Center, Vallecito, and Hillcrest when there’s enough snow. You can even just put on scale skis and go romp around in the woods. I just want to open up college kids’ eyes to this mode of skiing that not everyone knows about or has tried before.”

# THANK YOU!

## 2019-2020 SUSTAINING SPONSORS



## 2019-2020 DONORS

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Tyson Brimhall  
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## 2019-2020 MEMBERS

Drew Bourey  
Colleen Brennan  
Tyson Brimhall  
John Byrd  
Tom Cohn  
Moirra Compton  
Ted Compton  
Jim Daly

Bryan Dear  
Jacquelyn Dear  
Buck Farley  
Chelsea Farley  
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Eric Wilson  
Brett Wilson  
Michelle Wilson  
Carolyn Zeiher  
Kurt Zeiner





*Photo provided by Chad MacCluskey*



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