

PNSA celebrates a quiet 50th birthday

By Bill Knight
P-I Reporter

Bill McNabb's been active in ski racing since his youth in Michigan, although he describes his skills as a collegiate skier as something less than Olympic caliber.

Seven of his eight kids have raced in the Northwest.

McNabb's once-fierce quest for the steepest slope and the fastest run has mellowed. "We used to look for the steepest hill, even if it was by two degrees," he said. "We found one like that at Crystal. Eventually, I used to ski it once a day to say I did it. Then it was once a weekend and, as time passed, once now and then. Now I avoid it like the plague."

Otherwise, McNabb's enthusiasm for the sport has not diminished. That's why as the president of the Pacific Northwest Ski Association, McNabb's mildly concerned that PNSA doesn't have a higher profile, especially with the many thousands of skiers in the area who don't realize the organization exists.

"PNSA is 50 years old," he said. "This is our 50th birthday. It's a big deal but nobody knows it but us."

Links all skiers

What is PNSA and who is Bill McNabb?

McNabb calls it "the only viable link" between all skiers, recreational and competitive, and those who have control of the sport, those who own and operate ski areas, those who run ski racing and government officials, and bodies charged with regulating the land and mountains — much of it federally owned — where skiing goes on. PNSA is an integral part of the United States Ski Association, one of several regional sub-divisions.

McNabb, a Bellevue manufacturer's representative, feels there's good reason to be concerned about all of those matters. He thinks perhaps the skiing public is misunderstood in some, like efforts to prevent future growth areas adjacent to ski slopes from being locked up forever as part of a wilderness area.

"We're interested in seeing them developed as ski areas for the general public," McNabb explained. "This is really for our infants and the yet unborn, because they won't have a

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good place to ski because everything will be so crowded."

Are skiers anti-environment?

"Some people feel we're opposing the environmentalists, but I don't think we are," McNabb said. "We're only trying to define our physical areas of interest. I think cooperation is the watchword. Skiers are not contrary to what the environmentalists want. In fact, most skiers are environmentalists to some extent."

"The idea is to give access to our mountains to the general public. We've got beautiful mountains," McNabb said. He pointed out the European approach "to get the halt, the lame and the crippled up there. That's why they have so many trams. Here it's more difficult." But no less important, he adds.

More than anything, though, PNSA stages ski races, more than 100 days of racing this winter, for those ranging in age from kids barely old enough to slide off a chairlift and into a starting position, to veterans, or seniors. In ability, the scope goes from those just out of the beginner ranks to the Mahre twins of World Cup fame.

"Over the years, PNSA has probably produced more national and international-level racers than any comparable division in the country," McNabb said, "certainly more than our population quota."

Way to reward competition

As anyone who's footed the bills for a ski-racing family can understand, McNabb has been deeply concerned with seeing the top skiers get a chance to develop their skills. It costs bucks, lots of bucks.

That's why he's anxious to talk about something called the Pacific Northwest Ski Education Foundation, a branch of PNSA.

"We started it about eight years ago," McNabb said, "so it's relatively new. We're strictly a foundation devoted to encouraging ski competition, and we raise money and distribute it to competitors on the basis of achievement or need."

"Almost every kid who had any significant achievement in the last year got some benefits from PNSEF,"

McNabb said. "We don't give a lot of money away to one individual but we give some money to a lot of individuals. The most we gave anybody was \$500 and the normal amount is \$200. I think last year we gave away about \$10,000 to roughly 50 people."

"We've got a bankroll of about \$100,000, and we're going to try to double that within a year or two. I think we have a good chance to do that."

Active in regional skiing

For those who earn financial support on the basis of achievement but aren't hurting for the cash, McNabb has a different pitch. "We hint broadly they should endorse the check back to us and match it with a check of their own."

McNabb and his wife, Sallie, are understandably involved in regional racing. Their three youngest sons, Peter, Drew and Paul, head for the slopes every weekend, often in different directions.

Peter, 20, broke a leg in eight places in the first downhill race of the 1980-81 season, but he's come back well this year. "He's skiing with a rod and screws in his leg but he's doing well in the downhill," McNabb said. Peter's on the NorAm circuit which will come to Mission Ridge and Crystal in late March with an assortment of promising newcomers, including Alan Lauba of Bellevue, Tom Bowers of Mission, Portland's Billy Johnson and Paul Mahre, the 20-year-old younger brother of the famous White Pass tribe.

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BLACKOUT — Ever wonder what it's like to ski in semi-darkness? Sue Locke, a UW senior, was riding up Chair No. 1 at Alpentel last Friday night and fog made visibility tough enough. Then most of the lights on the slopes went dim. "It was an eerie feeling," Locke said. "There was an occasional light on but I'd estimate about three-fourths of them were out. Most of the trip down was in almost pitch black." Taking it slow and easy, the Seattle skier made it through the moguls to the bottom. It was the first blackout for Ms. Locke this winter. Seems about the same thing happened over the Christmas week, she reports.