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Community

Ullr Ski Club

Sheboygan area families enjoy winter sport at member-owned ski hill

By MARTHA E. SCHOTT
Special to The Press

The ancient god Ull was not nearly as well known to Scandinavian worshippers as was his step-father, Thor, the god of thunder. But to the few who worshipped him, Ull was envisioned as a good-looking huntsman travelling on skis.

Ullr ski hill is not nearly as well known as neighboring Sunburst or Hidden Valley, or the more famous attractions in northern Wisconsin. But to the few who worship the idea of cheap and frequent Ull-style transportation, this hill in the heart of the kettle moraine is unique.

In operation since 1960, Ullr is not your typical pay-as-you-go (and through the nose) ski facility, with long lines at the tow lifts and expensive concession stands in the chalet. In fact there are no concession stands at all. That's right, it's BYO.

This is a member owned and operated ski club.

The cooperative nature of the club was apparent on a recent crisp October Saturday when many of the 60 adults and 84 kids who belong to the Ullr Ski Club pitched in for the annual work day, to mow the lawn, chop wood, spray wasp nests, wash windows, post signs and maintain tow equipment.

Ullr is located just southwest of Plymouth, about 20 minutes from Sheboygan. The county roads enroute to the hill weave through beautiful glacier-carved farmland, which sparkled with color on that sunny fall day.

The entrance, just past the intersection of highway S and U, brings you up an incline and perches you on the top of a magnificent glacial kame, overlooking a valley which drops 140 feet (vertical drop) to the north, encircled by more wooded rolling hills. The Silver Springs Trout Farm and Restaurant is nestled in the valley below.

Lori Beringer, Plymouth, was busy posting new, hand lettered "Unload Ahead" and "Ski Under Control" signs, products of a sign making business she operates out of her home.

"This is something I can contribute," said Lori, adding that the club is built on members who donate their talents, from welding expertise to ski patrol experience.

As Lori and the other grown-ups worked, the kids scouted out green and yellow grass snakes and romped in the three foot tall grass. Only temporarily distracted with the bounty which autumn at Ullr had to offer, the kids had no trouble capsulizing the club's true raison d'etre.

"We like it 'cause we got a big hill to go down!" said Amy Beringer, 6.

For just a moment, think snow. Project yourself two months into the future. Put on your down jacket, fill your lungs with that crisp arctic air, hear the excitement of kids playing follow-the-leader, and the swoosh of skis traversing fresh powder.

Picture six groomed ski runs, averaging 1200 feet each, mounded with snow, winding through the trees. Two rope tows, attended by club members who take shifts throughout the day, offer swift no-wait transport to the top. Quartz lights are available for night skiing.

One is likely to see children as young as two years old skillfully descending the slopes, to be taxied up the rope tow in the lap of a grown-up.

"We've had four kids learn to ski here," says Peter Reichelsdorfer, Sheboygan, who joined the club in 1974. "I used to take those little buggers up the tow between my legs. It's surprising how soon the kids are saying 'hey old man, we'll slow down so we can ski with you!'"

"The kids learn controlled skiing in an atmosphere of patience and tolerance," says Russ Smith, Whitefish Bay, whose sons Morgan and Alex picked up the knack at ages three and two. Parents of older children offer hints and frequently participate in the process of turning that run-away-toddler-on-skids into a master snow-plower.

Morgan Smith, 7, is still aglow over his third place award in last year's Ullr Olympics, one of the special events which the club sponsors annually. "I did real good," says Morgan. "I got a third place in the race for kids 10 and under. The two kids who beat me were 10!"

The hill offers a variety of runs to challenge skiiers from beginner to expert. Juan Hauradou, 17, of Panama, a foreign student staying with the Dennis Shea family in St. Cloud, developed his skills at Ullr and was accepted on the Fond du Lac ski team.

After several invigorating runs you can park your skis and crunch up the steps of the rustic A-frame chalet to be welcomed by the warmth and smell of a roaring fire in one of the two massive fireplaces. It is a time to relax with friends who share your love for skiing.

The friendships fostered working together in the cooperative ski club are what members feel most distinguishes the club from commercial ski hills.

"Aside from the fact that we do get good skiing, it's the camaraderie, the social gatherings, that make this a winter wonderland," says Ron Lutzke, Sheboygan.

Another distinguishing factor is the price. Ullr Ski club offers a seasonal family membership at $130 (plus a on-time initiation fee of $75) which enables the family to ski all winter — which is exactly what many members do.

"A family wuld easily spend the equivalent to the annual membership in about three Saturdays at other hills," says Smith, who also points out the savings involved in bringing your own food, which can be heated in the club's kitchen.

Ullr is open every week-end and some evenings, and members can open and operate the club at any other time, as long as a ski patrol member is present. The club is a member of the National Ski Patrol System.

The season begins as soon as the snow is adequate, and lasts until the thaw of spring.

"The club is hoping to attract new members," says Ullr president Ed Morgan, Sheboygan. "Anyone interested in learning more about the club is invited to attend our opening event on Dec. 12. For more information, contact Morgan at 459-7266.

Chair lifts? Indoor plumbing? Don't expect to find all the advantages of traditional ski hills at Ullr. Perhaps it is the lack of these amenities which keep the lines short, the price right, and the hill relatively unknown.

It may be unknown, but members of Ullr take considerable pride in labeling their club "Sheboygan County's best kept skiing secret."

Wasps nests
From left to right, Morgan Smith, 7, Ryan Beringer, 5, and Amy Beringer, 6, spray the wasp nests in the tow attendant's shelter. For them, the ski season can't start too soon.

Work to do
On scaffolding, left to right, John Schott, Dennis Shea, and Juan Hauradou secure the pulley for the rope tow on a new post. This is a co-operative club and all members work.

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