

Camp directors turn to kids, ski instruction

By JUDITH BERNE

How do summer enterprises make out in winter?

Ice cream parlors push candy and other confections. Bicycle stores offer cross country skis. And directors of one Michigan summer camp operate a local downhill ski school, Winter Walden, for youngsters.

Local directors of Camp Walden, Cheboygan, came up with the idea of a ski school while holed up in a Chicago hotel five years ago, waiting out a blizzard.

Neal Schechter, Larry Stevens, Harvey Rubenstein and Don Sill were in

the Windy City promoting the summer camp which attracts a sizeable number of Chicago-area youngsters.

"We were looking for different ways for the four of us to get involved in something during the winter that was child-related," Schechter, a West Bloomfield resident, said.

Rubenstein, a Southfield resident, and Sill, of Novi, both teach in the Birmingham School District.

Schechter and Stevens, of Farmington Hills, are former teachers turned full-time camp directors.

"We hit upon the idea of teaching skiing to children," Schechter added, "be-

cause this was something we all know. We all ski."

WINTER WALDEN was launched four winters ago with about 80 youngsters transported via two buses on snowy Saturdays to local ski areas.

This year, more than 500 children participate with transportation provided from Huntington Woods, Southfield, Birmingham, Bloomfield Township and West Bloomfield.

Each child pays a membership fee (about \$65) and then \$16.50 each week to cover transportation, instruction (one or two lessons) and ski area fees.

Although the venture shows growth,

Schechter said enrollment is small compared to the better-established Blizzard Ski School, based in Birmingham. Blizzard's offers ski lessons to both children and adults.

"We have a great deal of admiration for Blizzard's," Schechter said, believing there are enough skiers to go around. "Our growth is in people new to skiing," he said.

ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS and a child-oriented philosophy applied at their summer camp transfer readily to the ski school, Schechter discovered. "We keep asking ourselves, why we didn't do it before," he laughed.

Sill, an expert skier, set up the instructional program in which a child receives a patch each time he or she masters a skill level.

Beginners' patches represent local ski areas such as Caberfae, Sugarloaf and Boyne and progress to more challenging ski slopes such as Aspen and Alpine skiers. There are 22 instructional levels.

Rubenstein has responsibility for getting skiers to the hills each week, including a telephone fan out system and administering tender loving care, once they're there.

Fellow school teachers ride each bus,

setting up a seating chart, making announcements and handing out rope tow and ski lift passes.

Once at the ski area, the chaperones operate as a ski patrol, watching for children having trouble on the slopes. Rubenstein haunts the ski lodge seeking out and responding to kids with problems.

Most of these relate to lost ski mittens, poles and lunches, but occasionally there is a ski accident. "Skiing is a potentially dangerous sport," Rubenstein said. "Our hearts are in our mouths the whole day. The easiest part is when they're with an instructor."

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