

Track Three brings skiing to all kids

By ANN KORNUA

Cutting down the track at Glen Eden, Melanie weaves like a professional skier attacking a mountain with ease. She turns heads with her skill and precision, not because she skis with only one leg. Her leg, long since amputated, may be gone but nothing stops her love for the sport of skiing. Track Three is a non-profit volunteer program that helps children and youth with disabilities across Ontario get active, have fun and gain confidence. It gives special needs kids an opportunity to ski and

snowboard using various facilities across Ontario.

Skiing is a part of our Canadian winter tradition. It requires training, endurance and skill to do the sport well. Most people would assume that those with challenges would find it impossible to master the skills required. That is a myth that Track Three plans to abolish. Karen Haist and Matt Burger from Spokes and Slopes in Milton have been taking time and energy in the busy ski season to ensure that challenged will get active, build self confidence and just have fun skiing.



PHOTO BY ANN KORNUA

Karen Haist and Mat Burger of Spokes and Slopes are making sure that every child in the Track Three program is going to have the perfect fit equipment this winter.

Some of the children in this program come from families that do not ski or where parents can't afford the equipment. When a child does not have the equipment, Track Three will supply it. That is also where Spokes and Slopes come into play, assessing equipment needs and working with students to make sure the fit is right, for a fun and safe lesson. "We get the kids set up with the right boots and equipment and problem solve to make sure that each child has equal opportunity," Karen says.

Some of the kids are unable get their feet into the boots as a result of a disability

or disease. One boy was unable to put his feet parallel. He had a condition that made it difficult to move his feet in a skiing position but the position was almost that used for snowboarding.

"He needed the support of a ski boot rather than the support of a snowboard boot," Karen said. "So, along with a group of people from Guelph and an engineer from Track Three, we got together one night in the store with the student and had him stand on cardboard and traced the outline of his feet. What we did was take ski binding and mounted them on a really wide snowboard. He was the first snowboarder in the program." Since each child is unique and individual, Track Three with the help of their sponsors take the time for each student to ensure that they will be safe, comfortable and warm when taking part in the program.

"Just to see these people perform the way they do is truly phenomenal," Matt Burger says. "They don't give up. The kids all arrive on mass in buses to the slopes, some new; some returning all with hopes to go sweeping down the hills. Most of the instructors keep coming back year after year working with these children and some of them are post Track Three clients."

Track Three will continue to work with challenged youth and children with brain injuries, autism, intellectual and physical disorders and accommodate their needs in the program. A new

phase will be for students with spinal cord injuries who are unable to support themselves on their legs. Introducing new technology in sophisticated sit-skis, bi-skis and mono skis will give every child a chance to get on the slopes. Through the Track Three program and with kind people, such as Karen and Matt from Spokes and Slopes volunteering their time and energy, these kids will discover more for themselves than just a challenging sport.

Visit the Track Three website at www.track3.org to learn more about this program and to donate.

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Halton Hills Papers Parliament Hill Report

MICHAEL CHONG, M.P. FOR WELLINGTON-HALTON HILLS



It is at this time of year we reflect on the past and look to the future. As we come to the end of another year, let us be thankful and take time to reflect on what we have in this great country of ours.

Canada is a strong nation, and we can take our place on the world stage with plenty of pride about who we are as a country. While there are problems facing us as a country, when I look around me I see plenty of courage and optimism. These are the qualities that exemplify the resilience of Canadians, and keep us going through good times and bad times.

As we join together to celebrate the holiday season, let us not forget what is most important: family and friends. Let us reflect on those closest to us - in the hectic pace of daily life, we often overlook to tell our loved ones how much they mean to us. Let us also remember those who passed on in the last year and are no longer with us.

Also in the spirit of this holiday season, we particularly remember those less fortunate than us. They may be lonely, sick, downtrodden, or depressed. A small effort can make a big difference, and we are reminded that the spirit of the season is in giving. A little donation to a local food bank, a short visit to a widowed senior, can go a long way.

Let us also remember those Canadian troops stationed abroad. Remember them, as they uphold and project Canadian interests abroad, far from family and loved ones.

I look forward to continuing to serve you in 2004. From my family to yours, best wishes for a Merry Christmas and for a New Year filled with prosperity, peace and happiness.

Spokes 'n Slopes

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