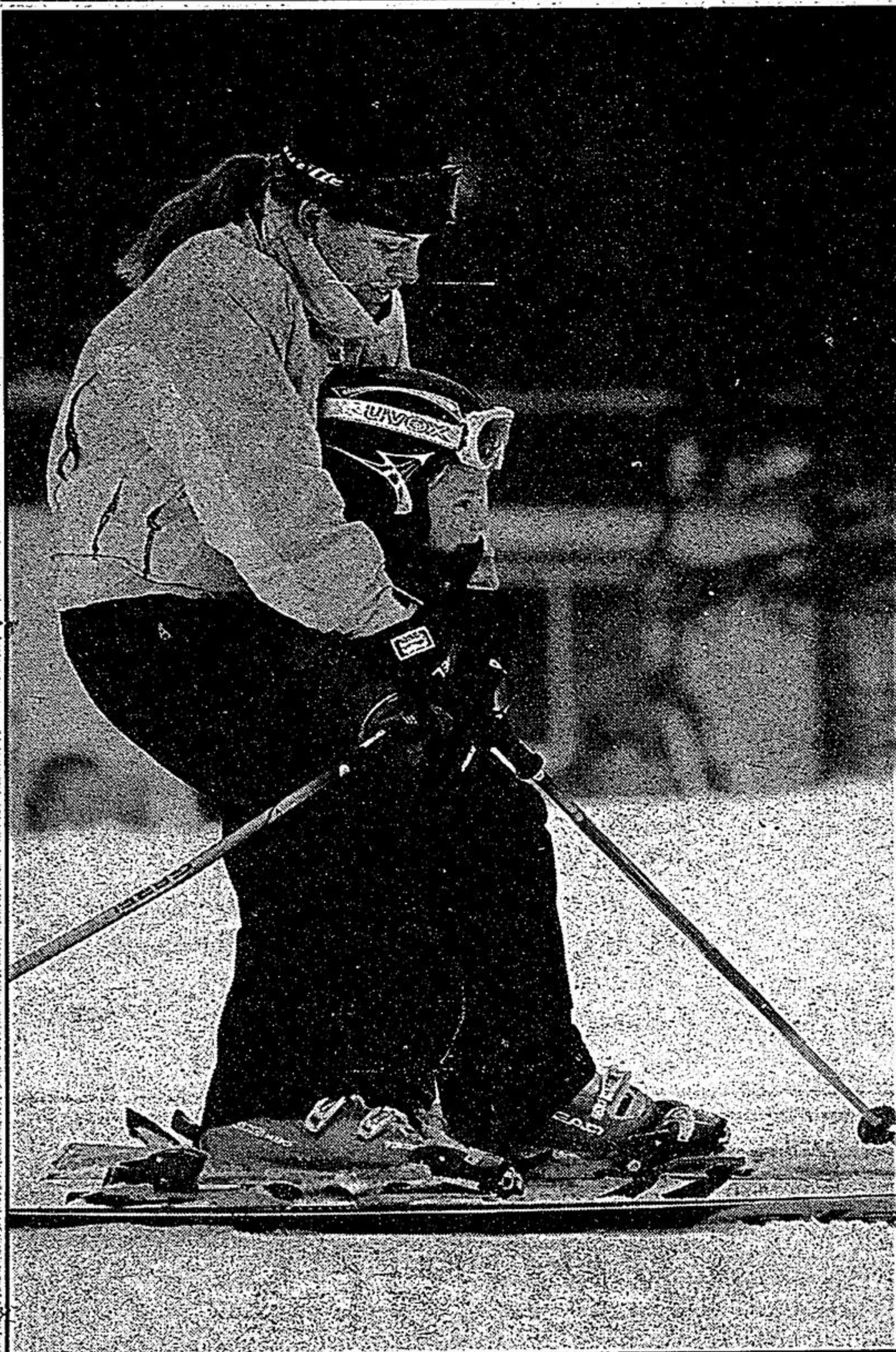


Stouffville Sports

SPORTS DEADLINE 12 noon, Mondays
 Phone 640-2612, Fax 640-8778
 E-mail sports@stouffvillesun.com
 Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2003
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FULL SUPPORT SYSTEM: With winter now in full swing, skiers and snowboarders are heading to nearby Skyloft Ski Resort for a little winter fun. Here, Anne Macnab braces her three-year-old son, Noah, for a ride down the slopes on Saturday. MIKE BARRETT PHOTO

It's all uphill for skiers and boarders at Skyloft

By Jim Thomas
 Stouffville Sun

It's been called "Ontario's best-kept secret."

But no more. Skyloft Ski and Country Club, owned and operated by Markham resident Doug Meharg is rapidly gaining the recognition it deserves.

Located in Durham Region, three miles south of Uxbridge and five miles west of Port Perry, the 250-acre site is the highest on the Oak Ridges moraine, even higher than any point on the Hamilton escarpment. From its peak, one can see as far as Olcott, New York.

Established in 1944 by the late Howard Langelle, the resort was later sold to an established club, then purchased by Mr. Meharg in 1995.

"It's magic," the Markham resident says, "I love the place."

This is obvious. For he spends much of his time there, all year round.

Skyloft's 18 runs are served by four lifts including one quad chair, two T-bars and a handle-tow for children and beginners. The two T-bars will soon be replaced and a new quad chair will be installed sometime this year.

A two-storey, 13,000-square-foot clubhouse was constructed two years ago as well as a new maintenance shop. SkyLoft is the winter home to many Stouffville-area skiers.

Due to the fact recent winters have been unkind to ski resort

operators, Mr. Meharg has installed eight kilometres of underground piping and expanded his snow-making equipment.

Nine hundred gallons of water a minute can be pumped from a 17-foot deep pond.

To maintain the facility, Mr. Meharg has a staff of 200 full and part-time employees, including a general manager.

Daughter Angela, an expert skier and snowboarder, handles sales and marketing. A second daughter, Sarah, a graduate of Queen's University in Kingston, is an Ontario telemark ski champion, 19th best in the world.

Skiers, both downhill and cross-country are flocking to the site in ever increasing numbers.

Mr. Meharg says this season's total, due to an earlier than usual start, is expected to break all records.

School children especially, find the resort inviting and exciting with 15,000 visits anticipated over an eight-week period.

"The kids bring their parents," Mr. Meharg says. "It's a wonderful family atmosphere."

Registrations are now up to 200 with a 500 enrolment the owner's goal. Prince Andrew often skied at Skyloft while attending nearby Lakefield College.

Skyloft, says Mr. Meharg, has one of the best ski schools in Ontario with an instructor/student ratio of one to one and two to one. As a member of the Southern

Ontario Ski Racing Association, both adults and children participate in competitions with other resorts across the province.

During a race, it's not uncommon to have up to 1,000 spectators watching from the sidelines, he says.

Skyloft offers public skiing Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. The site is open to members only on weekends from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Every Wednesday is ladies day with child care provided Saturdays and Sundays. Mr. Meharg's dream is to operate the resort year-round. Staff catered to 30 weddings last summer.

Despite the fact Skyloft has an exceptionally low accident rate, insurance costs have skyrocketed, going from \$7,000 and \$500 deductible three years ago, to \$40,000 and \$10,000 deductible last year.

"This is hitting the smaller resorts real hard," Mr. Meharg says.

In addition to serving the community recreationally, Skyloft is proving itself an excellent corporate citizen, donating over \$25,000 to local charities in 2002.

Now 71, Mr. Meharg says he didn't begin hitting the slopes until age 33.

"From the very beginning, I loved it, but I never once thought I'd have a resort of my own," he concludes. "It's a dream come true."

Spirit receives rude awakening to begin 2003

So much for the Stouffville Spirit fending off the two teams behind them and making up ground on the two in front of them.

The Spirit opened 2003 with a pair of duds, losing 4-2 to the Collingwood Blues on Thursday and 5-4 against the host Couchiching Terriers on Friday.

Collingwood is in fourth place and Couchiching fifth.

The Provincial Junior A Hockey League playoffs are a month away.

This week, the third-place Spirit hosts North Conference leading Aurora Tigers (34-2-1-1) Thursday and second-place Newmarket Saturday.

Aurora, the defending North champs, is on an incredible 31-game unbeaten streak after one-goal wins over the Blues and

Thornhill Rattlers on the weekend.

The Tigers have the second-best winning percentage of the 135 teams in Canada Junior A Hockey League.



MICHAEL COMMISSO

Only the once-beaten Wellington Dukes (34-1-1) of the Provincial league's East Conference have a better record.

On Friday in Couchiching, Michael Commisso scored two third-period goals to bring the Spirit to within one goal but that was as close as they'd get.

Mark Versteeg-Lytwyn and J.D. Smithson had the other Spirit goals.

The Spirit outshot Couchiching 46-24. Kyle Zoon relieved Steven Carota in the Spirit net.

SPIRITED NOTES: The league trade deadline is this Friday. Aurora has the oldest team — average age 19.4 — in the North and Stouffville the youngest — 18 — according to NHL Central Scouting... Saturday's game is an 8 p.m. start, not 7:30 as previously advertised... for more on the Canadian Junior A Hockey League go to www.cjahl.com/e/index.html... a bid to move the dormant Caledon franchise to Richmond Hill was vetoed by several teams including the Spirit.

Minor bantams downed in tournament semi

The Stouffville minor bantam Clippers advanced to the semi-finals of the recent Richard Bell Memorial Tournament in Oakville before they were eliminated 2-1 by West Mall.

In round-robin action, the Clippers won their first game over Burlington 4-3 but lost their sec-

ond match to Oakville 4-1 before concluding it with a 6-3 win over Cheektowaga, New York.



Scoring for the Clippers in the tournament were Kenny Higgins, three goals, one assist,

Mitchell Raithby three goals, two assists; Greg Hovanessian two goals, one assist; Michael Bigioni and Nick Stratas one goal, two assists; Jeff McGuckin and Dennis O'Shaughnessy one goal, one assist; Andrew Stewart, Adam Brown, Stephen Moller and Cory Tomson one assist.

SPRIT AT A GLANCE

SCORES

Collingwood 4, Stouffville 2
 Couchiching 5, Stouffville 4

WHO'S HOT:

Michael Commisso, Mark Versteeg-Lytwyn

SCHEDULE:

Aurora at Stouffville, Thursday, 7:30 p.m.
 Newmarket at Stouffville, Saturday, 8 p.m.

PROVINCIAL JR. A LEAGUE NORTH CONFERENCE

STANDINGS (AS OF JAN. 6)

TEAM	GP	W	L	T	OTL	GF	GA	P
Aurora	38	34	2	1	1	206	84	70
Newmarket	39	25	12	1	1	178	128	52
Stouffville	38	22	14	2	0	175	123	46
Collingwood	38	20	16	0	1	160	124	41
Couchiching	38	16	17	4	1	139	143	37
Huntsville	40	1	38	0	1	104	324	3

one point for overtime loss

