

VENTURE

Snow business

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By John Ross

Ohio today isn't known for pristine mountain descents, but it's a paradise compared to 1958, when an eager bunch of local outdoorsmen founded the Columbus Ski Club, an organization for the singular purpose of hitting the slopes as much as possible.

Back when they signed the charter, Ohio didn't have a public ski resort and wouldn't get one until 1961, when Snow Trails began to attract those unable to access the private operations boasting an occasional tow rope. Other small resorts would follow.

Nor did the state have artificial snowmaking 50 years ago. The expensive technology had been used since the early 1950s around the Catskill Mountains, but never as far south as Ohio, leaving the Buckeye season perilously short. Other equipment that brought the sport to masses was years away, and the predecessors of fiberglass skis and plastic boots were about as sleek as a station wagon.

But the club's first board members were Midwestern skiers - optimistic, desperate and a bit crazy by definition - and it has flourished for a half-century as a multifaceted social group ideal for those in search of athletic friends or resolving to learn a sport in the New Year.

But, members will tell you, you don't have to ski.

"We do a lot more than skiing, and we have a lot of members that don't even ski," said Brooke Georgiton, one of the group's numerous committee chairs. "We do soccer, euchre, billiards and happy hours every Friday after meetings."

The group has its own softball, soccer and bowling leagues, as well as one-time events like ice skating, volleyball clinics and golf scrambles.

"I have a lot of fun doing things - so much that I sign up for too much and eventually have to cut back," Georgiton added.

But with the arrival of winter weather, the group will offer plenty of slope-side opportunities for first-time snow bunnies and more experienced skiers.

A Learn-to-Ski program starts Jan. 6 and runs Tuesdays through mid-February at Mad River Mountain, while a Learn-to-Race program teaching fundamental techniques of slalom is already underway at the resort. Even if spots are filled, skiers and snowboarders can take the group party bus to the mountain for \$10.

In addition to the local action, the group will host a series of extended trips to Holimont Resort in New York, Boyle Highlands in Michigan and other ski destinations across the globe. Whether hitting the Alps or Alpine Valley, members enjoy group discounts, plenty of camaraderie and the ease of simply signing up.

Prospective members are encouraged to come to group meetings on the first Wednesday of the month (the next one's Jan. 7) to learn of upcoming events and meet those who will reconvene two days later at a monthly happy hour.

"We have people come out to hang, while others come in, sign up for a trip and they're out," said Herb Beidel, who's in charge of membership. "Everybody is pretty laid-back."

Ski Club calendar
Monthly CSC meeting

6:30 p.m. Jan. 7

Sanese Services, The Continent

Meet members and sign up for activities and trips

Ice skating

1:30 p.m. Jan. 10

The Chiller, Lewis Center

The group will use frozen water of a different kind at the North Side rink. Cost is \$8

Canaan Ski Trip

Feb. 19-22

Canaan, West Virginia

Twenty-eight carpool spots are available to this Allegheny resort boasting 39 runs and a vertical drop of 850 feet. Cost is \$310 for double occupancy

Boyne Highlands Ski Trip

March 13-15

Harbor Springs, Michigan

The trip will bus 48 people to the Lower Peninsula's best winter playground. Cost is \$370 for double occupancy

Web: columbuskidclub.org

Registration and membership required for events.