

Ithaca Ski Club Makes Emotional Return to the Slopes



After a horrific bus accident on the last trip of the season in March 2022, the Ithaca Ski Club gathered a record number of members for 2023. Last Wednesday, the group boarded a chartered bus for the first of five trips.

By William Meiners
Herald Staff Writer

Some brave souls took to the slopes of Snow Snake Ski & Golf in Harrison as part of the Ithaca Ski Club last Wednesday evening. Though that braveness did not extend from any daringness on skis or snowboards. Many of these same students survived a bus crash last March on their last trip of the season.

Kent Whitford, a kindergarten teacher at South Elementary School who coordinated the program over the last several years, told The Herald that this year's club has actually grown, from a total of 45 members in 2022 to more than 60 this year. Some 58 students and a half dozen chaperones made their way north in the early afternoon.

"Lots of emotions and scared kiddos, trying to make that step up onto the bus," Whitford said before the trip.

Fortunately, they've chartered a bus this year. Cody Middett, the tour bus owner who sent one of his busses to retrieve the kids after last year's accident, is providing a comfortable ride, with videos, this season.

Despite a somewhat slushy evening on the slopes, where Snow Snake was dealing with

some rising temperatures that could even threaten the manmade snow, all went well on day one of the five-week ski season. Though the roundtrip bus ride may have been the most important thing.

"It was a very emotional day for me," said Whitford, who suffered significant injuries in the March accident. "I didn't know if I was riding up on the bus or not. I did not reserve a seat for myself on the spreadsheet."

As fate would have it, Whitford reported, two students did not show, leaving him with an open seat. "So the decision was made easily enough, at the last minute!" he said. "The comfort of the bus and distraction of the movie screens helped with the transition. The ride was quick, and the excitement of the hill had dominated the atmosphere."

Whitford co-coordinated the ski club last year with April Harlow, an assistant secretary in the Ithaca superintendent's office. Though Harlow is pretty much running the show this year with some on-board assistance from Whitford.

Harlow stayed behind last March on the final makeup ski trip because of a conflict with a bookfair she worked. Of her two daughters, one accompanied her to the book-

store and another rode in the accompanying van. So none of them were on the school bus that rolled several times.

She also had some mixed emotions on the first day of the 2023 season. "I woke up very early on Wednesday and couldn't get back to sleep," Harlow said. "I was anxious throughout the day, but also very happy that we were able to start the ski club again. I was very proud of the kids that got back on the bus."

For Whitford, the students' bravery was inspiring. "I was overwhelmed with the response we had from kids this year, especially the ones that were involved with that traumatic experience," he said. "We only had a couple that skipped the bus ride on the first trip, but I am very hopeful that they will overcome that fear before the end of the season."

Recovery from a serious accident, on both the physical and mental front, can be an ongoing thing. Whitford claimed his own healing journey "went pretty smooth after the surgery." An "amazing staff" covered his kindergarten classroom and a "lift chair," courtesy of Mike and Janel Ball, certainly helped him get better.

"My family support and all the commu-

nity support helped me through the healing," Whitford said. "They say it takes a year to heal, and an occasional bump to my upper body is enough reminder that I am still healing as I feel it in my neck. But I am very hopeful that I will be strong enough to water ski again next summer."

For the winter ski season, both Harlow and Whitford know that they need a little more snow. Additionally, anyone looking to support the cause, including the higher cost of a chartered bus, can contribute to the funding through Ithaca Schools. Each of them has also worked long enough to know many of these kids from their preschool days. And they're thrilled to see all that they're accomplishing.

"These kids are amazingly resilient," Whitford said. They are very supportive of each other from what I see. Of course, there are those that are emotionally scarred more than others and will carry these memories for the rest of their lives. I was very impressed with the emotional support that was provided by the school and how administration recognized the need. I am very proud to be a part of this group. And I'm very confident that we will continue growing in the future."

County Urging Citizens, Local Businesses to Challenge FCC Broadband Maps

By Matt Hewitt
Gratiot County IT Director

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has released a new location-based national broadband map. This map is being used to determine eligibility for various broadband grant funding opportunities.

Currently this map shows that Gratiot County is nearly 100 percent covered by broadband access.

In reviewing the FCC maps, many residents, businesses, and others have found that few adequate, affordable options are actually available.

Gratiot County has found that while many companies have claimed to currently provide Internet services to a home or business, service is non-existent or underperforming in many areas. Furthermore, those services that may claim to be available via cellular towers, fixed wireless, or satellite have tied high monthly costs and marginal speeds to them.

Since high-speed internet is not accessible to many rural businesses and homes in Gratiot County, it is important that all citizens and businesses check their home and/or business addresses on the broadband map to ensure it accurately reflects their level of internet access.

The maps are based on data provided to the FCC by

internet service providers (ISPs) and the FCC is relying on individual citizens and business to challenge the maps.

Once maps are successfully challenged and corrected, the amended areas can become eligible for federal funding given to the states to construct or upgrade new areas of Internet service.

Individual residents, home-based businesses, and businesses located in Gratiot County can file an individual challenge through the FCC Website.

Gratiot County urgently requests all residents and businesses go to the FCC webpage to view alleged Internet services. If residents do not have access to the Internet, Gratiot County encourages them to utilize local libraries and their public-use computers to file a possible challenge. A public workstation is also available for use for this purpose on the first floor of the Gratiot County Courthouse (214 E. Center St. Ithaca, Mich.) near the information technology office.

A YouTube video that walks citizens and business through the challenge process is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ldS3bi4bjc>.

To ensure an accurate map is used for funding decisions, all challenges must be submitted by January 13, 2023.

The Gratiot County Herald
Your Neighborhood, Your News

PIONEER
AUCTION SERVICE

ONLINE AUCTION

Kloeckner / Ryan Estate

2611 N. Alger Rd., Alma, MI 48801

Item Preview: Monday, January 23rd from 4pm - 6pm

Soft Closing: Wednesday, January 25th at 7:00pm



www.pioneerauctionservice.com

Questions Contact: Amanda (989) 304-1574 or Jason (989) 621-7194

123 N. Main St.,
Ithaca

989-875-4163

We Ship
via UPS



Personal • Business •

Team Sports

No job too big

or too small!