



1455 West Lake Street, Minneapolis, MN 55408-2648
(612) 827-3232

www.sfl.org

A Brief History of Ski for Light, Inc.®

In October 1952, a blind Norwegian musician named Erling Stordahl gave a concert in Voss, Norway. There he had a chance meeting with Olav Pedersen, a railway worker and freelance writer who then wrote a story about Erling. The two men became friends, and a few years later Erling returned to Voss to entertain at the Norwegian Nordic Ski Championships. One afternoon, Erling shared with Olav his idea to start a program to teach cross-country skiing to blind people.

Over the next several years, Erling's vision found understanding and support from the public, the media, members of the government and the Royal Family. It took shape in 1963 as the Ridderrenn (Knight's Race), which today annually hosts more than one thousand disabled skiers and guides from more than a dozen nations.

That same year, Olav Pedersen emigrated to Breckenridge, Colorado, and became a ski instructor. Olav frequently wondered how Erling's idea would work in the U.S., and in September 1973 he traveled to Norway to seek Erling's advice. Upon returning to Colorado, Olav gained support for a U.S. version of the Ridderrenn from the Summit County Lions Club and the Sons of Norway Foundation.

On February 17, 1975, some 60 blind and visually impaired skiers and guides, including Erling Stordahl and his wife Anna, were welcomed to the first Race for Light in Summit County, Colorado. That first Race for Light received national publicity when Charles Kuralt featured the event in his "On the Road" television series.

Plans quickly got underway for a second event in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1976. To shift the focus from racing to recreation and instruction, Race for Light became Ski for Light and a nonprofit organization, Ski for Light, Inc.® was formed. Unlike the first event, where participants stayed in private homes, the Minneapolis event gathered everyone together in a hotel to increase social contact and interaction.

The first "Regional" program began in New England in 1977 following the Ski for Light event held in Woodstock, Vermont, as experienced guides and skiers gathered on several subsequent weekends to continue skiing and socializing. Nine such local, independent programs now exist across the United States. Some offer both summer and winter activities.

While there have always been mobility impaired participants at Ski for Light, they were not actively recruited until 1986. Prior to that time mobility impaired participants sat on modified cargo sleds called pulks and pushed themselves around with shortened ski poles. With the development of lighter sleds that ride on skis and more effective poles, interest in cross-country skiing has grown among mobility impaired individuals along with their participation in Ski for Light.

Since 1975 Ski for Light has grown and flourished. Over the years, the international, week-long event has hosted as many as 350 participants and has been held in locations from Vermont to Alaska. Ski for Light continues to promote healthy, active lifestyles for visually and mobility impaired adults and to inspire all who participate.



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