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Ski for Light 2009 **Going For Gold**

A golden glow suffuses the trails at Soldier Hollow, and smiles are everywhere as visually and mobility impaired skiers, along with their guides, race across the finish line and receive their medals to choruses of cowbells and congratulations. While the event shares many elements of any other cross-country ski race at Utah's beautiful 2002 Olympic site, it is in fact the culmination of a week of life-changing adventure.

This year Ski for Light, Inc. (SFL), an all volunteer non-profit organization promoting an active lifestyle among visually and mobility impaired adults through the vehicle of cross-country skiing, hosted its 34th annual international event at Soldier Hollow near Midway. Some 250 adults from seven countries participated in an unforgettable week of cross-country skiing and socializing. Since the first Ski for Light event in 1975, participants have come to regard Ski for Light as a "family" and look forward eagerly to the organization's yearly "reunion."

"This event became more than a ski week for me. It became a supportive family," reflects second year participant Theresa Montano of Denver, Colorado. "I realized this year what a special event this really is."

A similar passion for SFL was expressed by visually impaired skier Janice Newman of England, "There is always such a great atmosphere at SFL," she declared. "We are like a big happy family."

Of course, there's more to the event than skiing and socializing. Special interest workshops conducted by skiers and guides illuminate attendees on everything from poker to plant therapy. Morning yoga sessions, a silent auction, an awards banquet and evening dancing are all part of the well-choreographed program.

Each visually or mobility impaired participant is paired with an instructor guide for a week of learning, laughing and skiing. Many guides also leave the event with a strong sense of family and return year after year to see old friends and make new ones. First year guide Sheree MacRitchie summed up her experience in two simple sentences: "It was a great week of skiing, giving and fun. The family of Ski for Light welcomed me immediately, and it makes me smile whenever I think of them."

Sheree's skiing partner for the week, long-time participant Peter Slatin, echoes Sheree's sentiments. "I met some wonderful people, as always, and especially enjoyed the mix of nationalities attending, literally from all over the globe. I miss it already. It's the only chance I have every year to get together with other visually and mobility impaired people – and not really talk too much about the issues surrounding our disabilities, but simply enjoy sharing time together and learning in that way."

While everyone was a gold medal winner at Ski for Light's 2009 event, first time Cincinnati participant Lynn M. Wachtell called the experience, "A great one-week adventure where everyone had a story of accomplishment to tell, and it didn't matter how big or how little, the accomplishments of guides and skiers alike were all celebrated!"

For all who participate in the annual get-together, Ski for Light becomes, for at least a week, a way of life. When the week ends, attendees treasure the learning and the fun they've enjoyed, carrying it back home – until next year.

Additional information about Ski for Light, Inc. can be found at www.sfl.org.



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