President’s Message

By Julie Coppens

Fun
Joyful
Teamwork
Healthy
Happy
Snow

At our Ski for Light Board of Directors fall meeting the other night, on Zoom, I asked everyone to sum up, in a single word or phrase, their brightest hopes and fondest expectations for our upcoming International Event, Jan. 29-Feb. 5 in Granby, Colorado. Here’s some of what our volunteer leaders shared.

Laughter
Get back in shape
Inspirational
Better together, in person
FINALLY!!!
The warmth of old friends and new ones
Skiing
Reconnecting
Snow

(The word “snow” came up several times.)

And finally, from our resident German scholar, Tim McCorcle, “Wir schaffen das!”: “We can do it!”

Yes, we can.

Planning and pulling off a successful Ski for Light event—especially after two years of pandemic disruptions—can feel overwhelming sometimes. It’s kind of like Nordic skiing itself: so many moving parts to coordinate! So many different skills to master, so many muscles to employ in unaccustomed ways, and, let’s be real, always some fear of a spectacular face-plant.

But pared down to the essentials—fun, happy, healthy, snow—and mastered one piece at a time, it’s not all that complicated. Besides, if we do wipe out, what happens? Our Ski for Light friends are there to help us pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off (hold on while I chisel the ice out of my nostrils), and get back on the trail.

“Wir schaffen das!” We got this.

In this issue of the SFL Bulletin, you’ll hear how a whole team of people, led by 2023 Event Chair Michael Evelo, are putting all our hopes and expectations in motion, heading toward a truly joyful Ski for Light reboot (better than any Hulu series) this winter. You’ll also learn how some of your SFL friends have been staying active, upbeat and connected in the in-between time. One of my own journeys this fall season will take me to Minneapolis, to drop in on our dear friends at Sons of Norway and to scout possible future ski sites. I’ll also be venturing into the basement to make sure that my ski bag, in deep storage since 2020, hasn’t become a musty mouse nest. What a crazy crew of adventurers we are!

First, though, I invite you to pause, take a deep breath, and just think about Ski for Light for a moment. What word or phrase comes to mind?

Hold that thought.

Let it inspire you over the coming months of shorter days and chilly temps. Make it your motivation to nourish your body with healthy food, water and rest; to fit in some extra workouts, to stretch, strengthen, get your steps in; and to turn down any seasonal stress that might derail your efforts. Make it your reason to get a new COVID-19 vaccine booster and a flu shot, if you haven’t already—we want everyone to come to Snow Mountain Ranch well, to stay well, and to return home well.
Finally, let your one word or phrase move you to drop a line or call one of your Ski for Light friends, just to say hi, or to reach out to someone new to our community, or to ask one of us on the 2023 Event Planning Committee how you can help.

Fun
Joyful
Teamwork
Healthy
Happy
Snow

Fill in the blank. Let’s make it happen.

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A Great Time Awaits You at SFL 2023
By Michael Evelo, 2023 Event Chair

As I am writing this, snow is falling over the Northwoods of Wisconsin. Looking outside, the ground is white, and the colorful fall leaves have a coating of snow on them. Although it will be melted in a matter of hours, the snow gives me hope for the dream forecast later this winter: Afternoon temperatures in the upper 20s, with lows in the single digits at night—two feet of snow on the ground, gliding on trails groomed to perfection. Just imagine—the sun warming your face, sharing great times with friends new and old.

Anticipation for the 48th Ski for Light International Week mounts as the date keeps getting closer. A flurry of planning and work is happening to ensure a fun-filled week, January 29 through February 5, 2023. YMCA of the Rockies at Snow Mountain Ranch, Granby, Colo. is hosting the event. At the end of September, we held an on-site planning meeting. As we made our way to this beautiful venue (a longtime favorite of SFL), we could see that the mountains were just bare rock, but by the end of the next day, their peaks were beautifully covered with snow. Walking around the Nordic Center, I was flooded with fond memories of past ski weeks we’ve enjoyed there: The great snow, skiing with new friends, and, of course, who can forget the thrill of crossing the finish line on race/rally day.

A lot of volunteers are working hard to make sure the memories continue to be made. The evening entertainment has been scheduled and the lineup is fantastic. Have your dancing shoes ready for two evenings of showing off your moves out on the floor. Get your thinking caps on and keep a suspicious eye on your friends around you at the dinner table when The Murder Mystery Group comes to entertain us all. Be ready to laugh and sing along as cowboy poets Brenn ‘N’ Andy make a return performance. Get your poker face ready for the Friday Fun Day Poker Run. Take in some of the Special Interest sessions to hear about some of the amazing accomplishments and talents of your fellow SFL friends.

Applications continue to come in, and the number of participants keeps growing. I especially encourage guides to get your applications in soon so we can invite more skiers who are eager to make plans. As we get together for the first time in three years, we want to secure as many spots for skiers as we can.

Thinking of all the smiles on the faces of skiers experiencing the freedom of gliding across the snow, seeing the hugs of friends reuniting, and looking forward to the great times had by all as this awesome group comes together gives me mountains of motivation to work hard to make this a special event. Granby has been getting some snow showers. Start doing a snow dance to keep the white stuff coming. I am really looking forward to seeing everyone again.

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Skiing at Altitude for SFL Participants
By Carl Heine, MD PhD

Cross-country skiing at Snow Mountain Ranch in Granby, Colo., can be a wonderful experience, but a number of folks coming from sea level to ski at an elevation of 9,000 feet will have some challenges with the altitude. Here are some basic things you should know about altitude illness and things you can do to stay healthy at Ski for Light.

One of the most important facts is that adjusting to altitude takes time. Taking it easy in the beginning and spending a night at an intermediate elevation, such as in Denver, will help you feel better in Granby.

As you go up in elevation, atmospheric pressure goes down, which means oxygen molecules are farther apart. As a result, when you breathe in there are fewer oxygen molecules in that volume of air compared with the same volume of air at sea level. For most people this difference only becomes noticeable at altitudes above about 5,000 feet. What you’ll notice immediately is that your breathing rate and heart rate increase. This is normal; your body is working harder to get the oxygen you need. This increase in your breathing causes other changes in your body that make it important for you to
adjust from your regular routine. The most important thing is to stay well hydrated, and not with alcohol. (At least not for the first day or two.) Your kidneys need to do extra work to compensate for chemical changes from the increased breathing, plus the air is generally drier at altitude and you will lose more moisture when breathing harder. Staying well hydrated and drinking more water than you do at home will help you adjust to the altitude.

There are a number of signs and symptoms that are frequently associated with mild altitude illness. The most common is difficulty getting to sleep and staying asleep, especially the first night or two. Choosing the right approach to help you sleep is important. Avoid medications, or any substance, that suppresses the respiratory drive, such as most of the standard sleep aids and alcohol. These may help you sleep a bit better, but they will inhibit your acclimatization. The other very common complaint at altitude is a headache. There is now good data that over-the-counter ibuprofen and possibly acetaminophen will help with the altitude headache, and may also help with acclimatization. Some folks may feel nauseated at high altitude and, while vomiting is not common, anti-nausea medication can be helpful. A final comment on medications; if you are concerned that you will struggle at altitude, or if you have had altitude sickness in the past, Acetazolamide or Diamox is a useful medicine that your doctor can prescribe for you prior to coming to SFL.

Exercising (such as cross-country skiing) at altitude can be frustrating, as your sea level performance will be diminished at 9,000 feet. Your times for a set distance will increase, and you will get more winded than you are used to at home, especially on uphills. The best solution to this is to train before you come and to arrive at SFL in good physical shape, and to be happy and proud of the performance you can achieve during the week. It takes about 10 days to two weeks at altitude to regain your sea level performance. The fancy altitude simulators and hypoxia training aids generally do not work and should be avoided.

On a final note, while it will be common for many of us to have some mild issues with altitude at 9,000 feet, it is very unlikely that any of us will have a serious altitude illness. Signs that there is a more dangerous problem are things like staggering while trying to walk, or difficulty doing simple, everyday tasks, or having trouble catching your breath at rest. While we will all be more short of breath when skiing, or even walking upstairs, we should not be short of breath without doing something exertional. If you feel any of these symptoms, please see someone on the medical team right away.

Ski For Light 2023 and COVID
By Carl Heine, MD PhD

As we transition COVID from a pandemic to an endemic disease, it has become harder to give clear advice on how to live and protect yourself from it. The CDC and public health departments have continued to relax their recommendations and restrictions. At this time, early November, 2022, COVID cases have declined dramatically from their peak, and hospitalizations and deaths have declined even more. The virus, however, is still with us, circulating in our communities, and continuing to evolve. The general population now has a certain amount of herd immunity, due both to the large number of folks who have recovered from infections, and to all the vaccinations. We are no longer worried about COVID as a major public health threat in the same way we have been for the past two years. Opening up opportunities for in person human interactions has also had very significant, positive impacts on our mental health, as we are meant to be social creatures.

My crystal ball is cloudy about the level of transmission of COVID, influenza, or RSV come January, 2023, but I do expect that all of these diseases will be widely circulating at some time this winter. I also expect that a couple of people will probably catch something at SFL 2023. I still think that the benefits of attending the event outweigh the risks, but there are things we can do to tip that scale even more in our favor. The most important thing is that, if you are feeling sick, don’t come to SFL, stay home and rest. Your individual risk of getting sick is significantly lower if you are fully vaccinated and boosted with the latest, bivalent vaccines, and I would include the annual flu shot as an important measure, too. If you are protected by being fully vaccinated, then you are doing your part to also protect everyone else around you. Requiring attendees to be vaccinated is still important and the right thing to do. We have also learned how effective mask wearing can be, especially indoors with crowds, and it is something individuals can do to further protect themselves. I strongly recommend wearing a mask when traveling to SFL, especially when in the airport, and when boarding and exiting the plane. While in flight, the plane’s air handling and filtration systems do a very good job of reducing exposure to airborne pathogens, but only when fully activated.

The bottom line on COVID and SFL 2023 is everyone needs to be fully vaccinated and take every precaution when traveling to our event. Don’t come if you are sick. Any additional, specific protocols needed to keep us all safe in Granby are still to be determined, so be on the lookout for any new information as we get toward the middle of January. It is also important to recognize the health value of cross country-skiing, and in coming together as a community, sharing all of the in person experiences. See you in Colorado!
Editor's Note: The following, two articles by Doug Powell and Marian Wildgruber may help to motivate us to stay—or to get in—better shape for the upcoming week of fun in Granby. We may want to use their ideas as springboards for coming up with whatever fitness practices work best for us.

**Getting in Shape for Granby**

*By Doug Powell*

Many of you know that I was a devoted triathlete for about 35 years. I completed one Ironman distance (2.4 mile swim, 112 mile bike, and 26.2 mile run). I also completed several triathlons of half those distances. A few years ago, 2018 or 2019, I decided I didn’t need to compete any longer, and over time, I pulled back my training to keeping fit, rather than trying to beat personal records every year. I’ve also been participating at Ski for Light for about 8 or 9 years.

I applied for Ski for Light about a month ago, and realized that I had been almost entirely relying on three swim practices per week as my fitness regimen. I realized that, if I didn’t want to embarrass myself on the mountain, I was going to have to add some weight-bearing exercise between then and the end of January. So now, I’m trying to get in two running workouts and one bike workout per week. On the treadmill, I’m adding workouts that use the incline feature to work on hill training.

I planned a target event, mapped out a schedule for getting in shape as well as I could simulate the specific muscles used in cross-country skiing, made it gradual so I didn’t injure myself, and am implementing that schedule. Saturday, February 4th, I’ll know how well I prepared! Whatever I do will be better than if I did nothing at all, right?

**SFL Ski Boot Camp on Zoom**

*By Marian Wildgruber*

The second season of SFL Ski Boot Camp is starting on November 27, the Sunday after Thanksgiving. Come join us for audio strength-building workouts on Zoom to get ready for a fun and safe week of skiing in Colorado. All are welcome, beginners and up, just do what you can and modify the exercises to meet your own fitness goals. VIP Marian Wildgruber will host the Zoom workouts every Thursday and Sunday from 6:00-7:00pm Eastern Time. Give it a try and come when you can!

Questions? Contact Marian at mwildgruber@comcast.net

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**Special-Interest Sessions for SFL 2023**

Only three months to go until we are at last together again! I am beginning to put together a list of Special-Interest Sessions for all of us to enjoy during our wonderful week at beautiful Snow Mountain Ranch in the Rocky Mountains.

Special-Interest Sessions take place Tuesday through Friday from 5:15 pm to 6:15 pm. Each presentation is delivered by a Ski for Light attendee who wants to share information or a skill/talent. It could be something they are passionate about, something that they do as a career, something that they enjoy doing, a special trip that they have taken, or anything else they think their fellow SFL participants will want to know about. Each presenter has just one, 60-minute time slot during the week. Past topics have included bicycling across the country, ski waxing, hiking trips, boating adventures, meditation, guide dog topics, a talk about the history of the dog, traveling while blind, discussing adaptive technology, etc.

If you would like to explore the possibility of giving one of these presentations one afternoon while you are at Ski for Light, please fill out the Special-Interest Session form which you can find here:

[https://www.sfl.org/applications/special](https://www.sfl.org/applications/special)

We only have space for a total of twelve sessions for the week. These will be scheduled on a first come, first served basis. To ensure that your presentation will be assigned a time, please send in your Special-Interest Session form as soon as possible.

Questions? Please call me at (317) 506-8837.

I am looking forward to hearing from you about your idea for a presentation.

Very Sincerely,
Karen Wood
2023 Special-Interest Sessions Coordinator
karenawood58@icloud.com
During the SFL event, we will again hold the ever-popular silent auction. This is your chance to bid on a wide variety of items that usually include jackets, gloves, and useful dog gear products—all donated by our generous corporate sponsors. Lots of other unique and fun items are donated by SFL attendees. Many of us especially look forward to bidding on those great locally sourced edible goodies, such as wild rice from Minnesota, almond roca from Seattle, and cherry products from Michigan. Sometimes, there is even a nice bottle of wine or two! So, if you have a one-of-a-kind something from your corner of the world, please consider donating it to the silent auction. You will be amazed at how much money such items raise for Ski for Light! Here are just a few guidelines to keep in mind:

* All contributions must be new, in original packaging, if applicable.

* Handmade items are welcome and anything unique would be much appreciated.

* A minimum retail value of $20 is appreciated. This makes the tasks of sorting, cataloging, Brailling, and recording sales more manageable for the volunteers who put everything together in just a few short days.

If you have any questions about the silent auction, please contact Judy Dixon via e-mail at judy@judydixon.net.

If you would like to donate something to the auction, you may bring it with you to SFL. If you would prefer to send your item in advance, please ship it to the address listed below. Please plan your shipment so that it is delivered no more than two weeks before the event. Be sure to include your name, along with Ski for Light Silent Auction, prominently on the address label.

* UPS/FedEx: 1101 County Road 53, Granby, CO 80446
* U.S. Mail: PO Box 169, Winter Park, CO 80482

Happy bidding!

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Ridderweek 2023 will be held at Beitostolen, Norway, and will run from Sunday, March 19, to Sunday, March 26. The actual Ridderrenn, or Knight’s Race, is a 20 kilometer event that will be held Saturday, March 25. If 20 k sounds a bit ambitious, there are shorter routes available as well.

As many of you know, Ridderweek is the event upon which Ski for Light is based. It was begun by blind Norwegian entertainer, Erling Stordahl, who adapted the sport for other cross-country skiers who are blind or visually impaired. Like SFL, it’s a week-long event full of fun and activities.

Ridderweek is a wonderful opportunity to ski, to make new ski friends, to enjoy wonderful Norwegian hospitality, and to learn more about the program that spawned Ski for Light.

The week is much like the Ski for Light week, with evening programs, dances, a talent show, and a live auction that raises money for the Ridderrenn. There are a couple more opportunities to challenge yourself on the trails during the week—a biathlon, using audible, tone-guided laser rifles, and a 5 k race for women and a 10 k for men. There is also an alpine slalom race for mobility-impaired skiers and VIPs on Friday. There’s also a picnic so you can enjoy hot dogs wrapped in lefse or hamburgers while cheering on the racers that day.

Beitostolen is a summer and winter resort town, with a downhill ski area and many kilometers of Nordic ski trails in the area. There are some shops, restaurants, bars, a couple of grocery stores, and ski shops where you can rent XC skis.

After the week of skiing, we’ll spend a couple of days in Oslo, which is about a three-hour drive from Beitostolen. The city of Oslo is beautiful and easy to navigate. We will stay at a hotel that’s convenient to sightseeing, and to the harbor lined with shops and restaurants. It also happens to be close to the royal palace, to the parliament and to the city hall.

It’s a great trip, and I’ll be available during SFL week to fill you in on what to expect, whether you are just curious, or are actually planning to join some of us in Norway.

You will want to plan to leave the U.S. no later than Friday, March 17 for the overnight trip and arrival in Oslo on Saturday, March 18.

If you have questions about the Ridderrenn, feel free to contact me via e-mail, mlelmquist@aol.com, or by phone at 515-279-3681.

It’s a fabulous trip!
Both Ski for Light and The American Birkebeiner have their origins in programs with strong ties to Norway and Norwegian culture. We are familiar with how, in 1975, Ski for Light started in the U.S. and is modeled after a program in Norway called the Ridderrenn. The Ridderrenn was started in 1964 by a blind Norwegian musician named Erling Stordahl. The Ridderrennet is the world’s largest winter sports week for people who are visually-impaired or disabled.

The American Birkebeiner’s origins go all the way back to the year 1206. The Birkebeiner Rennet X-C ski marathon was started in Norway in 1932 to honor and re-create a historic event. During the Norwegian Civil War in 1206, two Birkebeiner warrior soldiers skied infant Prince Haakon and his mother to safety—a distance of 54k. Prince Haakon subsequently became king of Norway, and the Birkebeiner soldiers became a Norwegian symbol of courage, perseverance, and character in the face of adversity. The soldiers were called “Birkebeiners” because of the birch bark leggings they wore. When skiing the current-day Birkebeiner Rennet, the skiers wear a backpack whose contents weigh 8 pounds, replicating the weight of carrying the prince to safety.

The late Tony Wise looked to his Norwegian heritage and the Birkebeiner soldiers when he started The American version, called the “Birkie” for short. The first Birkie X-C ski marathon in the U.S. was in 1973. 35 skiers traversed the challenging hills of the Northwoods of Wisconsin, on scantily marked trails, from Hayward, Wisc., to Cable, Wisc. Today, the Birkie is skied the other way, from Cable to Hayward. The distance is 55K for Classic skiers and 50K for skate skiers. To honor the 35 participants who were in that very first race in 1973, the first wave of racers to leave the Birkie’s start line is called the “Spirit of 35” and consists of the 35 skiers who have skied the Birkie the most. Ernie St. Germaine has the honor of being the only person who has skied every Birkie since 1973.

Instead of all the skiers carrying 8 pounds in a backpack, the Birkie has a contest every year: Applicants compete to be a trio who will ski the Birkie while portraying Prince Haakon’s mother, Inga, and the Birkebeiner warriors, Torstein and Skjervald. The skiers re-enact the historic rescue, carrying the King’s son, Prince Haakon, to safety through the mountains and rugged forests of Norway. The trio re-enacts the flight on wooden skies, in full period costume and carrying the prince along the entire Birkie 55K classic race course. They finish their journey by climbing up over, and gliding down, the Birkie International Bridge onto Main Street amidst cheers from skiers and spectators alike, as they make their way to the finish line.

Birkie is a multi-event week, and offers more than 14,000 skiers of many capabilities, ages, and styles a chance to catch what is affectionately known as “Birkie Fever.” I have had this fever since I skied my first Birkie in 2009. I normally don’t like skiing among thousands of other people doing the same, but there is something about being among others who, like me, think REAL skiers ski uphill! We endure summer so we can get back to winter, when we can glide on the skinny skis again.

For many years, a number of Ski for Light guides, and a few SFL skiers, have participated in Birkie week events. At Birkie week, 2022, SFL participated as an organization for the first time: In an effort to recruit guides, we had a booth at the Birkie Expo. When I went in to set up the booth, and saw that the Sons of Norway were setting up across from us—showing their strong ties to Norwegian culture and passing out their awesome cookies—I knew we were going to have a great show. We were successful, sharing what Ski for Light is all about with many Birkie skiers who were interested in becoming guides. After that first appearance there in 2022, SFL will be at the Birkie Expo again in 2023, promoting and recruiting for SFL International Week 2024 at Rhinelander, Wisc. This year will be exciting, with ever more SFL skiers and guides catching Birkie Fever during that exciting week: We will be skiing the Para Birkie, the Giant Ski, the Kortelopet and the Birkie. SFL guides and skiers will also be volunteering at some of the Birkie aid stations, handing out energy drinks, energy gel, bananas, and oranges to skiers seeking more calories to finish the marathon.

I highly doubt the Birkebeiner Warriors had any idea or hopes of the impact their brave actions would have more than 800 years later, but I do believe Erling Stordahl and Tony Wise each had high hopes for their visions of the future. I am very grateful for their sharing of their Norwegian culture, which has led to the Ski for Light family’s being such a big and positive part of our lives.
Dancing Until We Can Ski
By Andrea Brown and Deng Kong

As September drew to a close, a handful of Puget Sound Regionalers and friends gathered for a 7-day campout at Fort Flagler State Park, located on an island in Puget Sound, and approximately a two-and-a-half-hour drive northwest of Seattle. In keeping all participants safe and as COVID-free as possible, the outing was split into two groups, 3/night and 4/day each. Below are the highlights from Andrea Brown, our local guide:

I had never visited Fort Flagler, so what a delight when I drove on to the island for a 3 day “campout” with the Ski for Light group! The weather was perfectly sunny and warm, the views across the Sound to Whidbey Island and beyond to Mount Baker were beautiful, but most of all, the company was fantastic. Our cabin had 2 bathrooms with showers and a dining area and step up living room. I roomed with Anisa Proda, who was a perfect fit—we were both late sleepers.

I can’t begin to thank Deng Kong and Cecilia Walsh for all the planning and preparation that went into the meals and activities—especially the careful attention to dietary needs. Our first day was spent hiking around the island and exploring all the old battlements and an excellent museum. Day 2 was a wonderful kayak trip in the sound, at the end of which, Anisa and Kelley Craig took a cold plunge. Brrrr. Not me! Later we walked around the camp some more. We were always active.

Each night after dinner, I played classical guitar for a very appreciative audience, but the last night was really special. I wanted to teach everyone a Hebrew song, He May Ma Tov, which means, “It is lovely when we are together as one.” The group were fast learners and enthusiastic singers! Before we knew it, we were all up dancing the Hora to Hava Nagila and Mayim. I didn’t expect to be a dance instructor!

As wonderful as was my ride out with Richie Frantz, my ferry ride back with Patrick McManus was a treat as well. I can’t wait to do this again!”

Regional Events

Ski for Light, Inc. is loosely affiliated with eight regional organizations around the United States that share our name, but are independent organizations. They are located in New England, Northeast Pennsylvania, Michigan, South Dakota, Colorado, Montana, Northern California and Washington. Each group holds one or more local winter events that include teaching and guiding visually and mobility impaired adults in cross-country skiing. Some of the groups also offer other outdoor winter activities. Most of the regional programs have been largely inactive during the COVID pandemic, but all of them are now emerging with programs for this winter. Check out the offerings of each organization by following the links to each of their websites found on the regionals page of the SFL website at sfl.org/events/regionals.

The SFL Bulletin

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In addition to an online edition that may be read in your browser, you will find a downloadable pdf version of the current issue. For future Bulletins, remember that your contributions and feedback are always most welcome.

You may submit articles as e-mail or as a word or text attachment. Send all items to:

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The deadline for the Spring 2023 Bulletin is March 15, 2023. We look forward to hearing from you.

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