



News and Information about the People and Programs of SFL International

Skiing. Sharing. Learning.

The mission of Ski for Light is to enhance the quality of life and independence of visually or mobility impaired adults through a program of cross country skiing.

SKI FOR LIGHT BULLETIN

Fall 2025

President's Message | *By Julie Coppens*

It's fall, the busy pre-season here at Ski for Light, as we gear up and get psyched up for the next International Event, February 1-8, 2026, at our beloved Snow Mountain Ranch. Maybe you work out a little harder, when the days get shorter? Our Event Planning team, led by David Fisichella and Melinda Hollands, has been doing the heavy lifting, sweating every detail to ensure we have a fabulous week in Colorado, on and off the ski trails. More on that in a bit.

For many of us, it's also a season of gratitude and reflection. My own time as SFL President is winding down now, and I've been thinking about what an absolute gift it has been, to lead this organization that has meant so much to me and to thousands of others since 1975. Four years ago, I knew this role would be a learning experience (check), a growth experience (check), even a struggle at times (check, check, check). What I didn't expect, at least not fully, was the picture of Ski for Light I'd have the privilege to view from this vantage point. It is a beautiful sight. Y'all are some brilliant, giving, unstoppable people! We've been incredibly lucky to inherit a program that works so well and that remains so needed in this world.

But let me challenge you: What season is it, really, for Ski for Light? Is this an organization in its inevitable autumn? Like many other nonprofits established back in the ol' 1900s (cue the melancholy Ken Burns music), we have an aging volunteer corps. Rising travel costs and climate change are making it ever-harder for us to deliver an affordable week of Nordic skiing in a location with reliable snowfall and accommodations to suit our group. Sponsors we once relied on for donations have been lost to some changes in the outdoor industry, while the philanthropic sector has gotten more competitive. Are we doing enough now to buck these trends and keep SFL skiing and thriving for decades to come? Are we doing everything we can to foster the next generation of participants, guides, and especially, Ski for Light leaders?

On that subject... It's an election year for us, and I encourage anyone who's interested in Board service to reach out to Sheri Richardson (r.sheri@icloud.com), our fantastic SFL VP and elections chair. I can report, too, that we're continuing our pilot student internship program, while testing out some new ways to recruit and retain younger guides.

Also this winter, Ski for Light will be back at the American Birkebeiner in Hayward, Wisconsin, February 18-22, as a presenting sponsor of the adaptive ParaBirkie event. Please contact our Birkie team captain, Mike Evelo (evelosfl@charter.net), if you're interested in participating or contributing to that outreach effort.

Finally, I'm delighted to announce that we'll be sending another larger-than-usual Ridderrenn team to Norway in March 2026, thanks to the generosity of our donors and the boldness of our Board.

As always, I welcome your thoughts, seasonal and otherwise, at president@sfl.org. And I thank each and every one of you for being a part of the colorful, bountiful, magnificent picture of Ski for Light that I get to see every day.



Your SFL Board: The Source of Real Magic!

By Sheri Richardson

Have you ever wanted to peek behind the curtain to see how the SFL magic is performed? OK, maybe not, but I bet you've had some questions or ideas for improvement along the way, so I'll share a little of the secret.

The nonprofit organization of Ski for Light has no paid staff. Most of the planning, decision-making, and even some of the implementation is primarily done by your Board of 25 Directors. We often wish we were magicians, but the truth is that it takes dedication, time, and just plain old hard work to make our SFL events feel like they are magical.

Board members serve for four year terms, and elections take place every two years for approximately half of the board. This year, we will have twelve seats to fill. Some current Directors may run for another term, but we also definitely welcome new members to help keep the Board energized.

So, you may ask, what is expected of a Board Director, and what might one get in return? The Board meets three times a year, with the summer and fall meetings conducted over Zoom. The winter meeting takes place in person on the Friday before the SFL International event on location. This is an all-day meeting with an occasional spill-over into a short meeting on the Tuesday afternoon during the event. Since SFL is an all-volunteer organization, all Board Directors are expected to take an active role in its leadership. That means working on committees or as coordinators in a variety of roles, including site selection for events, fundraising, governance, finance, and more. As a Director, you will not only see how the magic happens, but you will be one of the magicians yourself!

If you have any interest in participating in the leadership of SFL as a Board Director, I encourage you to

send me your nomination. Nominations should include a brief statement written by the person seeking election to the Board that includes: an explanation of why the candidate is seeking election; a description of past and/or current involvement in the work of Ski for Light; details about possible future areas of involvement or responsibility that would be of interest to the candidate if elected to the Board; a summary of any applicable professional or volunteer experience outside of Ski for Light; and anything else you deem important or relevant.

Please send nominations to Sheri Richardson at r.sheri@icloud.com no later than December 20, 2025. This is a hard deadline. Also, please contact me with any questions you may have at r.sheri@icloud.com

Many thanks to the current Board of Directors!

2026 Ski for Light Event Preview:

What's New at SMR? *By David Fisichella*

The weekend of October 18 brought a team of SFL volunteers to Granby, Colorado to meet with staff of the YMCA of the Rockies—Snow Mountain Ranch. The purpose of this in-person planning session was to review the hundreds of details that go into a successful Ski for Light Week. With this visit, we had the opportunity to tour a new building near the Nordic Center, called Camper Hub, which will serve as our skiing base of operations. This fantastic facility will provide a warm place to eat our lunches, stash our belongings, and relax with friends during ski breaks. Those who have attended SFL at Snow Mountain Ranch in the past will appreciate how much more spacious and

accessible Camper Hub is compared with the old Nordic Center—though we'll still be going there for ski rental and waxing, as well as the ski shop if you wish to purchase any clothing or gear.

New trails have been cut from our lodging buildings to the Camper Hub for those who want the experience of skiing from their rooms. For others who prefer to start skiing from the trail head a shuttle bus will be provided to Camper Hub and Nordic Center.

We were also excited to meet the new meals director and his staff. This will be their first time serving SFL, and they are eager to show off their culinary skills. I am happy

to note that the food served during the planning meeting was both creative and delicious.

If you believe in omens, our visit to Snow Mountain Ranch coincided with some early-season snow. Though you could count the individual flakes falling around us, higher elevations showed an accumulation of “white gold”... with lots more to come, no doubt.

As applications continue to trickle in, we're still in need of a few more guides. SFL can only accept visually and mobility-impaired participants based on the number of committed guides, so keep recruiting potential volunteers

wherever you go. Also, we have a contest underway to name the fox mascot captured in this year's event logo. Send us your suggestions, and you might win some SFL swag! We'll be announcing the name soon.

I'm told that red foxes are intelligent, adaptable, agile, playful, and resourceful—all attributes of our 2026 Event Planning Committee. I'm grateful to this hardworking skulk,* who are in the process of creating a fun, safe, and memorable event for all of us.

(*skulk: noun, a group of foxes)

Skiing at Altitude for SFL Participants

 *By Carlton Heine MD PhD* 

Cross-country skiing at Snow Mountain Ranch in Granby, Colorado, 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 increases. 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 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 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 ft. Your times for a set distance will increase and you will get more winded than you are used to at home, especially on uphill. The best solution to this is to train before you come and 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.



SFL Silent Auction 2026



By Judy Dixon

Again this year, we will hold the ever-popular silent auction. This event will take place on Wednesday, February 4th. For the newbies among us, this is a chance to bid on more than 100 items: Many things like jackets, gloves, and neat dog gear are donated by our corporate sponsors while other fun or gifty things are donated by SFL attendees. Lots 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 chocolate-covered cherries from Michigan. Sometimes, there's even a nice bottle of wine or two. So if you have a one-of-a-kind something from your corner of the world, consider donating it to the silent auction. You will be amazed at how much such treats bring in for SFL. 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 great.

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

This year, we will again use an online submission form for all auction items. This process helps streamline things and vastly reduces the workload on our volunteers.

The form will ask for the Item name, Donated by, Description, Retail value, Minimum bid (fill this in only if you have a specific idea of what you would like the minimum bid to be, otherwise, we will set the minimum bid at approximately one-third of the retail value), Your email address, and Your phone number. The auction item submission form can be found at <https://www.sfl.org/auctionsubmission>.

If you would like to donate something to the silent auction, you may bring it with you to Granby. But if you are not attending the event, or would prefer to mail your item in advance, you can send it to:

If shipping using FedEx or UPS:

Snow Mountain Ranch - YMCA of the Rockies
Ski for Light Auction
ATTN: Conference Department
1101 County Road 53
Granby, CO 80446

If shipping using the US Postal Service:

Snow Mountain Ranch - YMCA of the Rockies
Ski for Light Auction
ATTN: Conference Department
PO BOX 169
Winter Park, CO 80482

If sending your item to SMR, please plan to have your item arrive within one week of our event. Whether you are bringing your item or sending it, be sure to submit the online form before we receive your item.

Please feel free to contact me, Judy Dixon, with any questions via email at judy@judydixon.net.

Happy bidding!

Ridderrenn 2026: Get Ready for An Amazing Week of Skiing!

By Marion Elmquist

The 2026 annual Ridderweek will be held in Beitostølen, Norway, beginning Sunday, March 15 and ending on Sunday, March 22, with the actual 20 kilometer race on Saturday, March 21.

Ridderweek is a wonderful opportunity to ski, to make new ski friends, to enjoy outstanding Norwegian hospitality, and to learn more about the program that is the “granddaddy” of Ski for Light. The event is much like the SFL International week, with evening programs, dances, a talent show, and a live auction that raises money for the Ridderrenn. There are several opportunities to challenge yourself on the trails during the week: a biathlon, using laser rifles, and a 5 K race for women and a 10 K for men. In addition, there is an alpine slalom race for mobility and visually-impaired skiers on Friday. During that race, there’s also a picnic at the base of the ski area, which is right across from our hotel, so you can enjoy hot dogs wrapped in lefse or hamburgers while cheering on the racers.

Located about three hours from Oslo, Beitostølen is a summer and winter resort town that boasts a downhill ski area and many kilometers of Nordic ski trails. There are some gift shops, restaurants, bars, a couple of grocery stores, and ski shops, where you can rent skis.

After the week in Beitostølen, we’ll spend a day or so sightseeing in Oslo, a beautiful and easy to navigate city.

It’s a great time, and I’ll be having a gathering during SFL week to fill folks in on what to expect for the trip to Norway.

You will want to leave the U.S. no later than Friday, March 13 for the overnight trip and arrival in Oslo on Saturday, March 14. We will travel by bus to Beitostølen on Sunday, March 15.

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

Hanging Up (and Donating) My Sit-Ski Gear

By Jeff (Rainbow) Pagels

After forty years of cross-country skiing, including more than thirty SFL International weeks, twelve trips to Norway, two skiing/coaching trips to Japan, winning two gold and three silver Paralympic medals in Nordic skiing events in France and Norway, trips to Sweden and England to coach sled hockey, and one darn broken arm, I have decided to retire from the winter sports that gave me so many memories and so many friendships. These incredible blessings comfort me and will carry me forward to whatever is next.

Unfortunately, I do not have a Charlie Wirth/Energizer Bunny body type. As I get ready to welcome my 77th trip around the sun, that previously mentioned broken arm and some other well-worn parts are telling me it’s time to change gears. Two other factors driving my decision: global climate changes that have really diminished skiing opportunities in my neck of the Wisconsin woods, and the loss of skiing partners who live near me, because of their own age-related issues.

Because I won’t need it anymore, I am giving all my sit-ski gear—two frames, ski poles, skis, mounting parts, bindings, waxes, melting iron, etc.—to Ski for Light. Scott Bertrand and I could use some help getting it from somewhere near Green Bay to someplace near Denver before the next International Event in Granby. If you are driving out there anytime soon and could take some or all of the gear, please contact me at 920-366-5731 (phone or text) or email jcpagels@att.net.

I do still love to fish, and enjoy the shooting sports (trap, skeet, and sporting clays). I’m a member of an all-wheelchair trap team, competing in an able-bodied league, and we’re currently tied for first place. Also, Madeline and I enjoyed Tuesday night fish dinners all summer from the fish I caught on Mondays... so don’t worry, this old rainbow is still shining.

Be well and keep in touch!

Jeff

An Off the Snow Amazing Workout

By Cecile Evans

For me an amazing work out is not always completing a long race or reviewing how many miles I have run, but in those moments that are just that, amazing.

In a late Spring trip to Hong Kong, I went out for a morning walk to view Victoria Harbor and to find a warm morning beverage. Wandering like the classic tourist, taking photos of basically everything, I spotted a group of older Hong Kongers (OK, my age) gathering to engage in what I assumed was Tai Chi. As a mountain girl, outdoor Tai Chi is not always easy to find in my backyard. So, with my phone camera now stashed away, I walked up to someone in the back row and asked if I could join.

I was informed that this was no ordinary Tai Chi morning

gathering, it was a group of Tai Chi instructors that meet every Sunday for a special class in, Tai Chi Line Dancing! So, with a large music box of traditional Chinese music and a mambo combo or Tai Chi and Line dancing, right there on Victoria Harbor I joined in the fun. Just an hour, but an amazing exercise experience for me.

At the end, many instructors took the lead. And while I would have loved to have led the group in the "Boot Scootin' Boogie," they graciously declined my offer. Maybe next time. While exploring Hong Kong's exotic markets and cool neighborhoods was fun, Tai Chi Line Dancing by the sea wall of Victoria's Harbor was an amazing work out.



Making Connections at SFL

By Marian Wildgruber

Ski For Light is about so much more than just cross-country skiing. It's about trying new experiences, like skiing, but also traveling to an event where you don't know anyone, for some to another country, meeting all kinds of new and interesting people, learning about so many things through Après Ski sessions, laughing, sharing, helping. It is a life-changing experience for so many who come.

It was for me in 2019 on my first event, and for Nils Jankowski, who tried to come from Berlin in 2021, but Covid canceled that plan. He finally got to try Ski for Light in 2025, and he told his best friend when he returned home, "I have a new family!"

Nils and I sat together on the bus from Provo to the airport at Salt Lake City, at the end of SFL week, and became fast friends. Nils and his friend, Eckert, stopped over this October in Knoxville, where I live, on their trip to Las Vegas, Scottsdale and Hawaii to stay with my husband and me for four days. We had fun at Dollywood, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and even caught a performance

livecast on radio in Knoxville the day they left. We are looking forward to meeting up again soon in Granby!



From left, Marian Wildgruber, Nils Jankowski, Eckert Golly at the Dollywood, Tennessee Fall Harvest Festival. The Giant Pumpkin weighs more than 2,100 pounds.

News from Our Regional Groups

from Susan Zak

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 winter events that include teaching and guiding visually- and mobility-impaired adults in cross-country skiing. Many of them also offer summer and/or fall programs, ranging from single-day hikes to week-long adventures. To check out the offerings of each organization for this year visit their respective websites, all linked from the Regionals page on the SFL website at www.sfl.org/events/regionals.

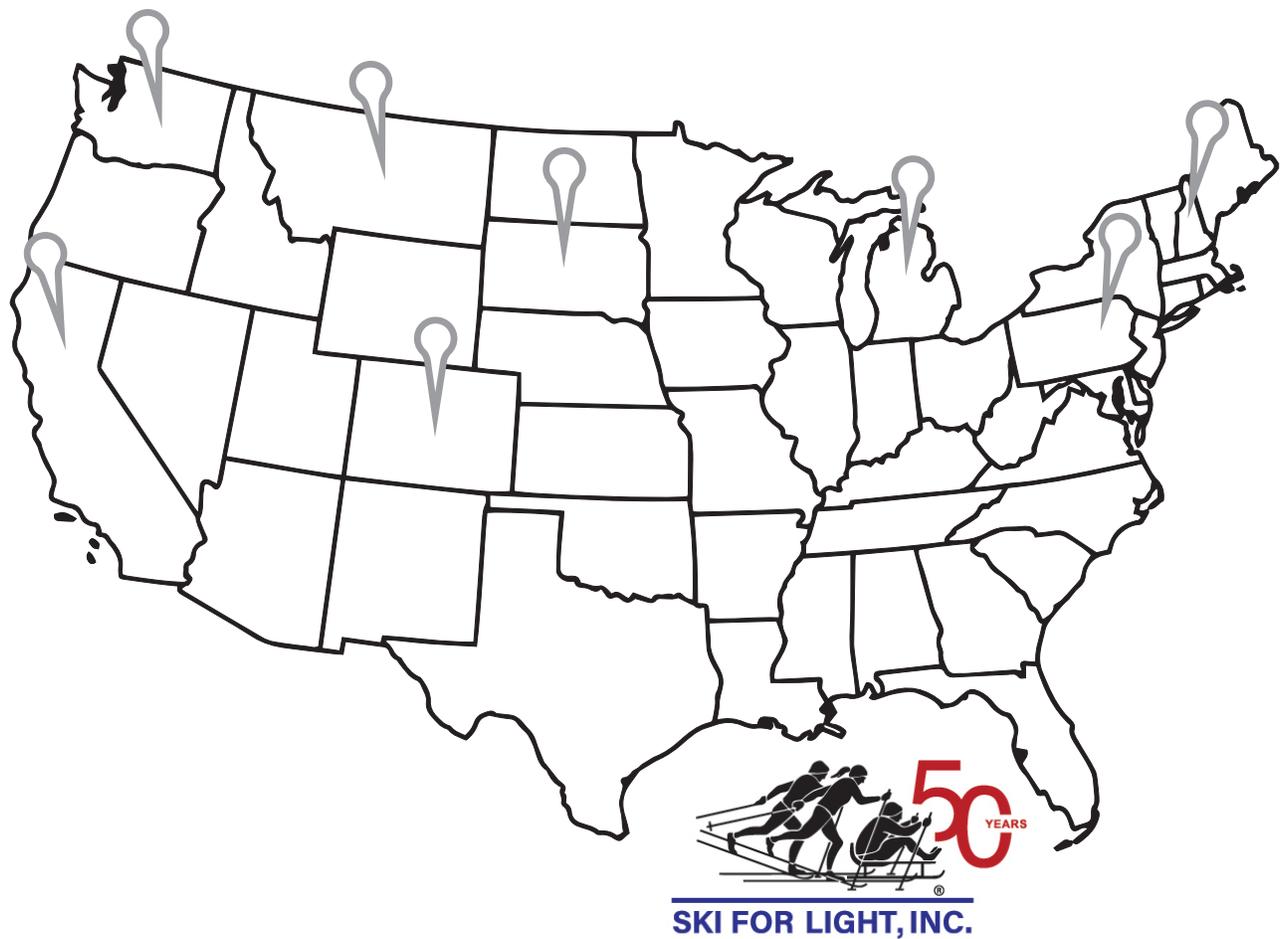
The Michigan Regional will be celebrating its 50th anniversary this January 16-18! Come join us for our three day event held each year on MLK weekend. Full details and registration available at <https://msfl.org>.

The Montana Regional annual event will be held in West Yellowstone, Montana February 12-16. Applications will be up on our website sflmt.org on November 1.

The New England Regional has several winter trips scheduled including: Winter Hiking at the AMC Highland Center in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, February 20-22; and Skiing and Snowshoeing at Craftsbury Outdoor Center in Craftsbury, Vermont, March 5-8. Applications will be coming soon. Stay tuned to the NESFL website for news and trip applications, or email info@nesfl.org to join our mailing list.

The Sierra Regional annual Three Day Event will be March 14-16. It will be held at Tahoe Donner Adventure Center. A possible Day Trip and new Guide Training is set for Saturday, February 21. Applications and additional information will be available mid-November via

<https://srsfl.org>. For more information contact Edie Lott at thelotts@gmail.com or (530) 414-0799.





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You may submit articles as e-mail

or as a Word or text attachment.

Send all items to Sheri Richardson

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Regional Events

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