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December 2018
Volume 40
Issue 4

IOWA SNOWMOBILER

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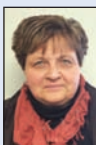
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IOWA SNOWMOBILER

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COVER: Spencer's Mitch Sebastian has raced snowmobiles most of his life, including the last six years in cross-country. Photo courtesy Aaron Kennedy, On the Plains Photography.

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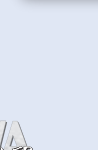
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Bitten by the Vintage Bug

Greetings, Iowa snowmobilers. This is my first column as your president. I want to thank you all for putting your trust in me to help lead the ISSA in the direction that we have been going. Chris Willey has done a great job as president, and now the torch has been handed down to me.

I will do my best to have all interests in mind going forward and hope that we can continue our success. I would like to try again for the one sticker as I believe a majority of Iowa snowmobilers want it.

I have ridden snowmobiles with my family all of my life. I started riding in the front of my mom on a JDX8 and then got a 1979 440 Trailfire. I have owned Ski-Doo machines since.

In the last couple years, I got an itch for the older stuff so I started my fleet of vintage John Deeres. I rode one of them on our club's vintage ride last year. Boy, that was an eye-opener the first few miles. I was laughing so hard and having such a good time that I didn't have time to notice just

how badly these machines rode.

My next two sleds to work on are a John Deere Spitfire that my sister Kim got brand new in 1979 and one I got from my uncle, Past ISSA President Dick Melick, which is an old mid-mount 400 John Deere that he bought new.



Brian Carmichael
ISSA President

I guess I like the history behind the old sleds but do love the ride of my newer ones. I currently ride a 2014 800 Ski-Doo Renegade, and on occasion, I bring out my late father's 1200 Ski-Doo for family rides up north and for when I go on the prestigious Iron Dog ride with friends and family.

I guess that's about it. I just wanted to give some information on me for those who don't know me. I look forward to seeing all Iowans on the trails that Mother Nature will let us ride this year

Think snow!!

Thanks for Great Convention

Hello, fellow snowmobilers! I would like to introduce myself. My name is Scott Nauman, and for the past few years, I have served on the ISSA Board of Directors, as the Region 4 Director.

At the State Convention last month, I was elected to the position of vice president. I look forward to serving in this position and getting to know more snowmobilers throughout the state.

Congratulations to Brian Carmichael, who took over as president. And thank you to Chris Willey for his past two years as president. I know Chris will continue to be involved as the Co-Administrator of the

Review and Selection Committee.

Thank you also to Dan Delperdang, the convention planning committee and all of the people who helped to make the convention in Okoboji a success. Your work is greatly appreciated. Congratulations also to all of the award winners announced at the convention banquet.



Scott Nauman
ISSA Vice President

Here's hoping that by the time this article is printed, we are riding our trails and the outlook for the snow

season is a very white one.

Ride safe and think snow!

Please Notify ISSA of Officer, Address Changes

If your club has elected new officers or if you have an address change, please email ISSA Membership Chair Brittany Paulus at bepaulus@outlook.com so we can keep our Club Directory current. Thank you.

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Remaining
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January..... Dec. 7
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ISSA Celebrates 45th Anniversary at Okoboji

by Cameron Hanson

The ISSA celebrated its 45th Anniversary the third weekend in November at its annual convention at the Arrowwood Resort and Conference Center in Okoboji. Hosted by clubs in Regions 1 and 2, 106 members attended the three-day event, which began Nov. 16.

As detailed in this and upcoming issues of the *Iowa Snowmobiler* magazine, the membership elected new leadership, ratified its legislative agenda for the year, attended groomer training and safety classes, listened to featured guests and honored a few of their own at the awards ceremony Saturday night. In all, 47 clubs, businesses and organizations contributed to the success of the weekend.

"I thought the convention went very well considering the late harvest in the state," noted Region 1 Director Dan Delperdang, who along with Assistant Region 1 Director Randy Magg and Past ISSA President Merv Hoermann co-chaired the convention planning committee. "Registrations were slow coming in; but in the last week or so, it really picked up, and the hotel sold out as well.

"The most amazing thing I recognized in heading up this convention with Randy and Merv is the amount of support the clubs and businesses give to make this event a success," continued Delperdang, who also emceed the weekend. "An event like this would not happen without the support of the clubs, businesses and ISSA members. We appreciate everyone who made the trip to northwest Iowa."

On Friday night, the Lyon County Sno-Lyons sponsored an avalanche awareness seminar



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Recognizing his service to the ISSA Board of Directors as well as for his efforts co-chairing and emceeding last month's state convention, Region 1 Director Dan Delperdang received the David Carmichael Memorial Region Director of the Year Award. Presenting the travelling trophy to Delperdang were outgoing ISSA President Chris Willey, left, and incoming ISSA President Brian Carmichael, son of the late David Carmichael.



2018 Club Donations at Convention

Event Sponsors

Vintage Snowmobile Show.....	Dickinson County Snowhawks
Avalanche Awareness Seminar	Lyon County Sno-Lyons
Friday Night Hospitality	Lyon County Sno-Lyons
Saturday Morning Brunch	Sac County Snow Lovers
	Buena Vista Blizzard Busters
Saturday Afternoon Seminars.....	Saylorville Dam Snowmobile Club
	O'Brien County Snowtrackers
	Dickinson County Snowhawks
	Central Iowa Snowmobilers
Social Hour.....	Eastern Iowa Sledheads
Banquet.....	Kossuth County Drift Skippers
Awards.....	Clay County Sno Broncs
	Floyd County Groomers Association
	Iowa River Riders
	Saylorville Dam Snowmobile Club
	Scott County Sno-Seekers
	Sno-Pak

Entertainment	Dickinson County Snowhawks
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Spina Bifida Association of Iowa

Saylorville Dam Snowmobile Club.....	\$2,200
Cedar Falls Snow Hawks	\$500
Central Iowa Snowmobilers.....	\$500
Eastern Iowa Sledheads.....	\$500
Tri-County Snowmobile Association	\$401
Lyon County Sno-Lyons	\$390
Floyd County Groomers Association	\$300
Bremer County Sno-Knights.....	\$250
Snowdrifters.....	\$250
Team Iowa Snowmobilers.....	\$200
Butler County Snow Snoops.....	\$100
Iowa River Riders	\$100

Club Challenge

Snowdrifters.....	\$500
Tri-County Snowmobile Association	\$401
Central Iowa Snowmobilers.....	\$350
Snow Pioneers	\$350
Sac County Snow Lovers	\$303
Floyd County Groomers Association	\$300
Bremer County Sno-Knights.....	\$250
Cedar Falls Snow Hawks	\$250
Eastern Iowa Sledheads.....	\$250
Team Iowa Snowmobilers.....	\$200
Dickinson County Snowhawks	\$150
Saylorville Dam Snowmobile Club.....	\$150
Iowa River Riders	\$100

ACSA Legal Defense Fund

Team Iowa Snowmobilers.....	\$200
Snowdrifters.....	\$250
Eastern Iowa Sledheads.....	\$250
Saylorville Dam Snowmobile Club.....	\$250
Sac County Snow Lovers	\$100
Floyd County Groomers Association	\$200
Central Iowa Snowmobilers.....	\$200
Iowa River Riders	\$100

Scholarship

Floyd County Groomers Association	\$200
Dickinson County Snowhawks	\$150
Snow Pioneers	\$100

Communications

Iowa River Riders	\$100
Driftrunners.....	\$100



Jamie Rohlf of Wall Lake announces his club's donations at convention for the Sac County Snow Lovers of Region 6.

followed by a hog roast; and on Saturday, the Dickinson County Snowhawks held a vintage snowmobile show in the banquet hall of the resort. Clubs, dealers and organizations also staffed display booths in the nearby exhibit hall, and Sno-Pak members staffed the registration table.

Throughout convention weekend, raffles, silent auctions and donations raised more than \$15,000 for the various programs supported by the ISSA: \$6,000 for the Spina Bifida Association of Iowa, \$3,500 for the ISSA's lobbying efforts, \$1,650 for the ACSA Legal Defense Fund, nearly \$1,300 for the scholarship program, \$1,030 for the ISSA's general fund cooler raffle, and \$860 for the Camoplast track youth program raffle.

For his efforts with convention as well as recognizing his service on the ISSA board, Delperdang received the David Carmichael Region Director of the Year Award at the Saturday evening banquet. In addition to a travelling trophy, the award includes a free snowmobile shock rebuild from award sponsor, A-Maize-Ing Kustoms.

Next year's convention will be held in Burlington.



Mike Duffy of Avalanche1, Colorado, leads training to 42 mountain riders Friday night.



Approximately 35 club members renewed their groomer operator certificate for five years during training at convention.

Second Generation

Three Consecutive Officers Follow in their Fathers' Footsteps on ISSA Board

by Cameron Hanson

First billing themselves as the “sons of snowmobiling” at the 2015 annual convention at Storm Lake, three second-generation ISSA board members have aligned themselves in leadership roles within the state organization and, following elections at the 2018 convention at Okoboji, are on track to serve as ISSA officers for eight consecutive years.

Each has followed in his dad's footsteps, beginning with former Region 5 Director Chris Willey's election as vice president at Dubuque in 2014. Two years later at Waterloo, he moved up to the position of president, at which time he and his father, Past ISSA President Jim Willey (2013-14), became the first father-son tandem to ever to hold the top office within the ISSA.

Also at Waterloo, Region 4 Assistant Director Brian Carmichael was elected vice president, and at last month's convention, he succeeded Willey as president, becoming the second father-son duo to lead the organization. Carmichael's father, David, served as ISSA president from 1995-96 and remained active in the organization until his death in late 2013.

Completing the trifecta last month, Scott Nauman, son of Past ISSA President Dennis Nauman (2001-02), was elected vice president. If everything goes according to plan, he too will serve as president from 2020-22. His Region 4 seat on the board was filled by current Assistant Director Seth Bram, president of the Butler County Snow Snoops. No other changes to the board occurred convention week-end.

Looking Back

In recapping his four years of service as an officer for the ISSA, Chris Willey said he was most proud of the landmark legislation passed in 2017 which shifted management of the state snowmobile program from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) to the ISSA. Now known as the Iowa State Snowmobile Trail Grant Program, 70 percent of snowmobile registration receipts in Iowa are controlled by the ISSA's Review and Selection Committee (RSC).

Along with Past ISSA President Terry Durby, Willey serves as co-administrator of the program and will continue to oversee the groomer operator training. Along with other RSC members, they decide equipment placement across the state, issue trail grants to clubs and will help shape the future of snowmobiling in Iowa.

Willey said the transition was a group effort with support coming from the board and from grassroots snowmobilers. He did, however, single out his dad and Durby for their guidance throughout the process and presented them each at convention with a



Outgoing president Chris Willey, left, passes the gavel to incoming president Brian Carmichael. Willey also received a plaque of appreciation for his service to the ISSA.

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Past ISSA Presidents Jim Willey, center left, and Terry Durby, center right, received President's Appreciation Awards from outgoing president Chris Willey, left, and incoming president Brian Carmichael.

President's Appreciation Award.

"These two have been snowmobiling for a long time and have been influential throughout my presidency and my whole time with the ISSA," Willey said. "They are the reason we are able today to talk about the RSC and how that wild idea came about to take control of the funds."

According to Durby, the ISSA had been floating the proposal to the IDNR to assume control of snowmobile registrations since 2002, when the Iowa Legislature de-appropriated nearly \$1 million in program reserves. That money was eventually restored, but Durby said the ISSA Legislative Committee—then led by Past ISSA Presidents Carmichael, Nauman and Bruno Andreini—"felt we could do a better job" of handling the funds.

"They took us seriously at the time but ended up hiring another person who was just as good for snowmobiling in Iowa," Durby said of the appointment of David Downing as snowmobile program manager at the IDNR.

Fast forward 13 years, and Downing announces he was leaving that position for another post within the IDNR. The ISSA board eyed an opportunity to seize control, and the idea took flight under the leadership of Chris Willey, Durby and others.

"I think everyone here can appreciate the amount of work the ISSA has gone through over the last two years to make monumental changes to our program and to witness ground-breaking progress on how our snowmobile program can be successful," Jim Willey said in accepting his award from Chris. "It's really been because of a community of snowmobilers, many of

whom are here tonight.

"There's particular pride in it for me to have my son in this position for the last two years," Jim Willey continued. "It's very satisfying to see, and I only wish Dave Carmichael was here tonight to see Brian going into the presidency. The three sons of snowmobiling make us proud as fathers."

Offering Advice

Chris Willey said gaining control of the state snowmobile program was his top priority as ISSA president. He said he would have liked to have seen the single-sticker measure pass during his tenure, but that and other legislative initiatives have now been passed on to Carmichael and Nauman. Willey said he will continue with the RSC and

serve in a support role with the board.

"I won't be going anywhere. I will still be active as a past president and continue to work with the board and provide guidance as needed," he said. "Everybody knew this day was coming, and Brian has been given a lot of advice. It's up to him now to see how it needs to be done. There's a lot of work yet to do, and Brian is going to need everyone's help."

The first task at hand will be guiding the ISSA through its third attempt at doubling the snowmobile registration fee in Iowa and eliminating the need for a trail permit for in-state residents. They will also be reviewing administrative rules to change the definition of a snowmobile to include snow bikes. Both of these issues were approved through resolution by the ISSA general membership at convention.

"I would like to think we can get those things done this year," Carmichael said.

Carmichael said he is proud to follow his father in service to the ISSA. Few can dispute the elder Carmichael's commitment to snowmobiling in Iowa for more than two decades. However, the younger Carmichael said he is his own person and will be making decisions based on what he feels is best for the organization.

"I don't feel I will be serving under my dad's shadow. I still recognize and appreciate everything I've learned from him, but I want to do things my way," Carmichael said. "I think as an organization we've been heading in the right direction, and I want to do my best to keep it going. I want to continue a lot of it, and there's a lot of things Scott and I need to work on."

"The best advice I can give is to not do this how I did this or how any past presidents have done it before you, but to do it how you see it needs to be done. You've been elected to this position," Willey said.

Iowa State Snowmobile Trail Grant Program Review and Selection Committee

Permanent Administrative Positions

- Chris Willey, Past ISSA President
- Terry Durby, Past ISSA President

Members By Position

- Brian Carmichael, ISSA President
- Scott Nauman, ISSA Vice President

Members By Election

- Randy Magg (Western representative)
- John Kahler (Central representative)
- Todd Sieverding (Eastern representative)

Iowa DNR Representative

- Rhonda Fowler

Iowa Recreational Trails Advisory Committee Representative

- John Kahler (by appointment)

Please communicate with the committee via email at ISSA.RSC@gmail.com.





ISSA Renews Effort to Merge Registration, Trail Pass into One Sticker

by Cameron Hanson

By a show of outstretched arms at the Saturday morning General Assembly meeting, ISSA members overwhelmingly approved a resolution to once again support legislation to merge the snowmobile registration sticker with the optional trail pass at the 2018 state convention at Okoboji last month.

Only one member voted against the proposal. The ISSA Legislative Committee is now tasked with pursuing this initiative for the third time this decade. If passed by the Iowa Legislature, the measure would double the snowmobile registration fee in Iowa from \$15 to \$30 and eliminate the need for the optional \$15 trail permit for in-state residents.

"This is not an increase to ride your sled in Iowa," explained then-ISSA President Chris Willey at the Nov. 17 meeting. "It costs you \$30 for two stickers or \$30 for one sticker. This idea really comes down to making things simpler across the board and providing stable revenue to fund the clubs which are out there doing all the work."

Working closely with lobbyists Mike Heller and Paula Feltner, the ISSA has been pushing for this increase since the 2010 convention in Storm Lake. The trail pass emerged in 2013 as a compromise to an increase in registration dollars. Legislators at the time were afraid to double the fee because it could be perceived as tax increase by their constituents.

The problem, as ISSA leaders see it, is not every registered snowmobiler purchases a trail pass. In fact, compliance hovered around 50 percent last winter before late-season snow brought it up closer to 70 percent. By capturing those owners who do not buy the permit, the measure would increase funding to the ISSA-led Iowa State Snowmobile Trail Grant Program by roughly \$90,000.

"We need this additional revenue to keep our trail grant program going, just from a fiscal standpoint," said Willey, who also serves as program co-administrator. "We need to increase our revenue stream by combining both stickers. We could do a lot more stuff for the clubs with more income."



Randy Magg
Supports

Measure Died Last Spring

In 2017, a similar measure passed the Iowa House of Representatives 97-0 but stalled in the Senate Ways and Means Committee earlier this year. Willey said the bill was "stonewalled" by committee chair, Sen. Randy Feenstra, R-Hull, who declined to bring it up for a committee vote and refused to discuss the issue with ISSA leaders.

"I just wouldn't put it on one person," Heller cautioned at convention. "In fairness to Sen. Feenstra, the committee did have a lot



ISSA members raise their hands in support of merging the \$15 snowmobile registration sticker with the \$15 user permit in Iowa at the 2018 convention in Okoboji.

on their plate last session. He was dealing with a major tax bill that was a whole lot more important to him than our bill."

In the end, the combined sticker proposal failed to see the light of day and died last spring. When the Iowa Legislature convenes next month, the ISSA will have to start over by finding a new bill sponsor and renewing its grassroots effort to drum up support from state legislators, some of whom will be new to the issue following last month's elections.

"We need Senate Republicans who are committed to saying, 'I want this and our constituents want it.' I'm not saying it will happen, but we came closer in recent years than we have in the past when we've tried it," Heller said.

According to Heller, perceived opposition to the legislation last year came from snowmobilers and dealers in southern and western Iowa. Arguing against the bill, some snowmobilers—mostly mountain riders—said they should not have to purchase the trail permit because they do not ride in Iowa. Dealers, Heller noted, said the legislation would "increase their cost of doing business."

In an email to the ISSA Board of Directors, Gary Lansink, a member of the O'Brien County Snowtrackers of Region 1, spoke out against the merger last January and was the lone dissenter at convention last month. Based on conversations he said he had with other snowmobilers and dealers, he again raised the argument that the merger is a tax increase and not everyone should have to pay it.

"As much as we all hate the double stickers that we have, that's really not the issue," Lansink said at convention. "It's the fact that we are doubling the registration. It's a tax to them. It's not a permit any more. There are a lot of guys who don't even ride in Iowa, and the dealers around here are not really for it because it raises the cost of the whole sport."



Gary Lansink
Opposes

Drumming Up Support

At convention, Randy Magg, a member of the Dickinson County Snowhawks and an Assistant Region 1 Director, was re-elected as the western representative on the Review Selection Committee. This administrative arm of the ISSA oversees how the registration dollars are spent in the trail program. Directly involved in budget



issues, Magg spoke out in favor of the merger at convention.

"We are constantly looking at the best ways to spend your money," Magg said during the meeting. "But there seems to be a contingency fighting this single-sticker proposal; yet they are the ones receiving benefits from the registration dollars. I find it ironic. I have a hard time believing that if you want to spend \$12,000 on a new mountain sled, that you cannot find it in your wallet to spend another \$15 to support the organization that makes this program work in this state."

"You know as well as I do that the minute we get a big snowfall in this area, those same guys are going to go out, jump on their sleds and ride in Iowa. You can't tell me it's not going to happen," Willey said.

As he has repeatedly on the pages of this publication, Willey again addressed the perception among non-ISSA members that if it doesn't snow in Iowa, the program doesn't spend any money.

"If you really look at what's going on with our trail program, the only thing you are really saving in a low-snow year is groomer fuel. We still have signs to buy, equipment to maintain and insurance to purchase. You can't wait to do all that until the snow flies," he said.

Fearing "burnout" from ISSA members on this third attempt at this hot-button legislation, retired Region 7 Director Steve Klinkefus from the Saylorville Dam Snowmobile Club urged the ISSA board to meet with Sen. Feenstra.

"It's a futile attempt this year to try and get anything accomplished if he's not going to go for it," Klinkefus said.

Plan Moving Forward

Past ISSA President Jim Willey was appointed chair of the ISSA's Legislative Committee at convention and agreed to try and set up a pre-session meeting with Feenstra and other key legislators. The legislative committee is also in the process of renewing the ISSA's annual contract with Heller and Feltner, who will once

again be critical to the success of any bill this winter.

"We need to get all of our elected officials on board to make this happen," Jim Willey said. "We have to get overwhelming support, and I know that's going to be hard coming off several low-snow years, but we have to do it. We have to make it happen. Let's all get behind this."

"A lot can change in politics," Heller said. "The important thing to remember is this group has accomplished a ton of things over the years, and I hope you keep it up because the key to your success with any bill is dependent on you."

A lesson learned from the last legislative session was to make sure the ISSA presents a unified front this session. Heller said last year that legislators at the Statehouse in Des Moines "pointed to a division within the membership," and Chris Willey said he frequently heard from snowmobilers in Iowa that they were never given a chance to vote on the single-sticker measure.

Besides the initial support in 2010, the ISSA Board of Directors unanimously approved the legislative initiative in August of 2017, but Willey admitted leaders failed to bring it up for discussion at the 2017 convention, although surveys have supported it in the past. He said he wasn't going to make the same mistake twice and did not want to leave Okoboji without clear direction from the ISSA membership.

"I've heard for two years that members felt it was never discussed at an open meeting and that they never got a say," he said before the General Assembly vote at the Arrowwood Resort. "I'm telling you right now, you have a say. Tell us right now that you don't want to pay \$30 to register your sled and ride in Iowa."

"It's my belief that if you vote as a group, you stand as a group," Magg said. "I would say it was less than a handful of people who stopped this process last year. As ISSA members, it's okay to have a discussion and to agree or disagree, but when you walk out of this room, you stand as one."



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Make Plans to Visit the Iowa Great Lakes This Winter

by Jantina Carney

Publicity Chair, Dickinson County Snowhawks

The Dickinson County Snowhawks invite all snowmobilers from across Iowa to explore the Iowa Great Lakes and all it has to offer this winter! With more than 100 miles of groomed trails in Dickinson County, the riding is pretty awesome... when the winter weather cooperates!

Our trails mostly consist of ditches along primary and secondary roads and portions of the Dickinson County Trails.

We are working closely with our Bike Trail board on the construction of a new trail that would start in neighboring Osceola County and end at the Emmet County line. This will be a wonderful addition to our trail system!

Annually, the members of the club sign all the trails, and we work closely with neighboring counties to connect with their groomed trails as well as grooming to the Minnesota border on Highway 86 and Highway 9 to connect with the expansive Minnesota trail system.

For the past couple years, we've been involved in the Take-A-Friend Snowmobiling Week, coordinating with our local high schools as well as employers to introduce our sport to as many people as we can!

Annually, we also encourage our high school seniors in the county to apply for our club scholarship. We encourage all high school seniors to apply, and in years past, we've also had winners of the ISSA's scholarship.



Annually, during the University of Okoboji Winter Games, we host an event—120 Demo rides—introducing our young, future riders to the sport of snowmobiling. We host an average of 100-plus kids on a small groomed area and turn them loose

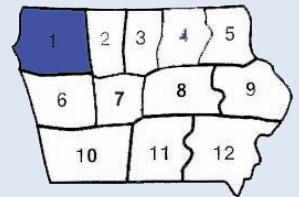
to experience the sport of snowmobiling.

Speaking of Winter Games... Mark your calendars for Jan. 24-27 for the 39th Annual University of Okoboji Winter Games. For a full list of events, go to www.uofowintergames.com. There is something for everyone,

including ATV/Motorcycle Studded Oval Races, Flag Football, Broomball, Softball, Craft Fairs, card tournaments, a Freeze Your Fanny Bike Ride, inflatables and so much more! Load up your sleds and join us for a great weekend of events!

The Dickinson County Snowhawks is a very active club and works to grow and maintain our members. We have a wonderful relationship with many of our local businesses, which offer discounts during the riding season to our members.

If you haven't been to our little corner of the state for your winter getaway... maybe 2019 is the year! For more on the Dickinson County Snowhawks, check out www.dickinsoncountysnowhawks.com or find us on Facebook!



Region 1 Profile



Crossing between East and West Lake Okoboji through the tunnel under Highway 71.



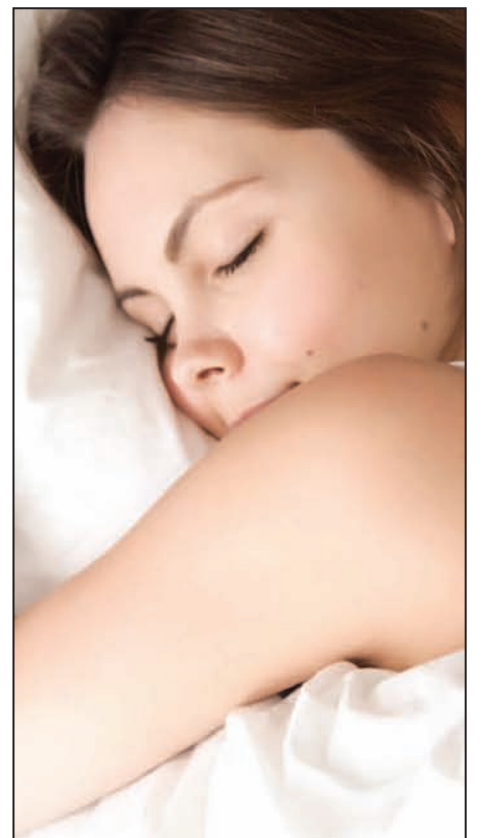
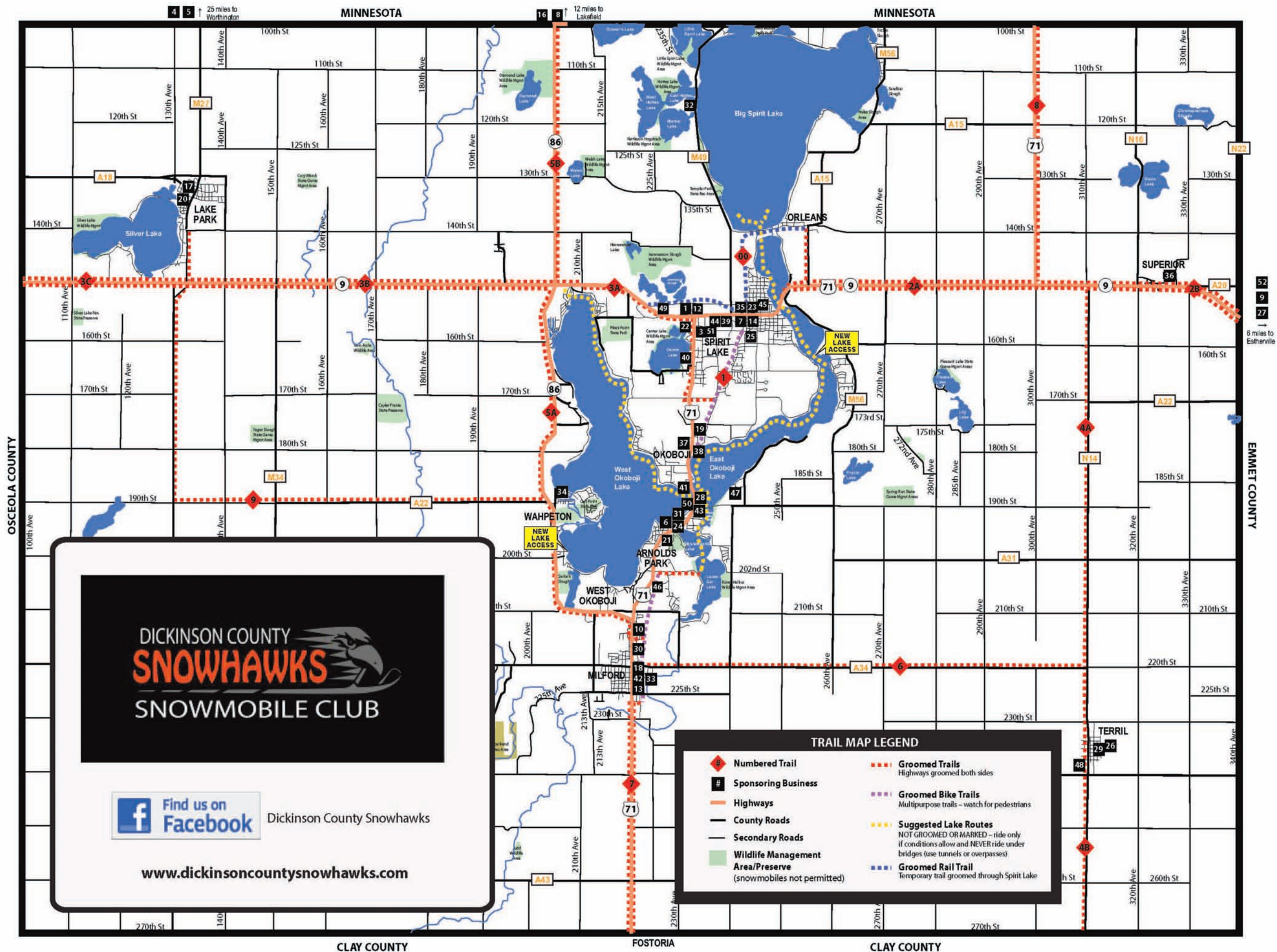
Multi-purpose Iowa Great Lakes Trail at Spirit Lake.



Trail signage along Highway 9.



Leo "Butch" Parks, a long-time member of the Dickinson County Snowhawks, invited fellow snowmobilers to the Iowa Great Lakes Region for Winter Games during his seminar on the area at the 2018 convention in Okoboji.



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Over the Hills and Through the Woods

Racing snowmobiles most of his life, Mitch Sebastian of Spencer has spent the last six seasons in cross-country competition

by Cameron Hanson

As a teenager, Mitch Sebastian of Spencer used to drag race snowmobiles on both grass and ice in local and regional competition. He has the hardware to prove it, including the junior division championship at Hay Days two years in a row in 2009 and 2010.

Despite that success, however, he became bored with what he was doing, like most kids at that age. He grew tired of racing in a straight line and wanted to “ride my snowmobile for more than five seconds at a time,” he joked.

So in 2012, he left drag racing behind and made the switch to terrain racing. Now, instead of five-second bursts, he bounces around the northern Minnesota countryside in timed events which can last up to two hours and sometimes longer.

Later this month, Sebastian, now 22, will enter his seventh season of cross-country competition and his second straight year with Team Arctic Cat. Last month, he dropped by the 2018 ISSA Annual Convention at nearby Okoboji to share his story in a presentation he called, ‘Racing from Day 1’.

Started Out Dreaming of Snocross

A lifelong member of the Clay County Sno Broncs of Region 1, Sebastian said he grew up as a typical northwest Iowa kid, riding his bike all over town and playing baseball during the summer months. But as soon as the weather would turn cold and the snow began to fly, little could be done to pry his grip from the handlebars of a snowmobile.



Graduating from Spencer High School in 2015, Sebastian said he experienced his first ride on a snowmobile when he was just two years old. His parents gave him a youth model to ride, and he proceeded to wear out the snow around their house in town or at his grandparents’ acreage north of Spencer.

“I played some sports growing up, but I was really never good at it,” Sebastian confessed during his Saturday afternoon seminar where his family occupied the first row. “My friends and I would also ride our bikes and have fun, but nothing would give me the same feeling as when I rode my snowmobile. That’s all I ever wanted to do.”

At six years old, he entered his first race, a junior snocross challenge in Minnesota. Although he finished last, he said he was “hooked on racing after that.” As a youth, he said he was inspired by snocross legends Blair Morgan and Tucker Hibbert and had initially wanted to follow in their tracks.

“To be honest, my dream was to be a snocross racer, but that’s not how the chips fell,” he acknowledged from the banquet hall floor after



Following his afternoon seminar at the 2018 ISSA convention Nov. 17, Mitch Sebastian poses with his race sled in the banquet hall at the Arrowwood Resort. At last year’s convention, the long-time member of the Clay County Sno Broncs won the ISSA’s Young Adult Snowmobiler of the Year Award.



his seminar had ended. “You get certain opportunities, and I ended up going this direction.

“Doing a snocross series—either nationally or regionally—would have taken a lot of effort with all the expenses and longer travel times,” he continued. “Cross-country racing became more reasonable for us to do.”

So after dabbling in drag racing during his adolescent years, Sebastian said he was ready “to take the next big step.” “I wasn’t really sure what I was getting myself into,” he admitted. “But all I knew is if I wanted to make my dreams come true in racing, I was going to have to jump in and make the switch to cross-country.”

Independent Team Formed

With that goal in mind, Sebastian and his dad, Bryan, who also raced, began shopping around for a suitable race sled. The elder made a few phone calls from his contacts during his racing days, and they ended up building a Yamaha Phazer for competition. Inheriting his dad’s 650 bib number, Sebastian entered the cross-country racing circuit as an independent in 2012-13.

“We completely tore that machine down and built what we thought was our best shot at winning,” Sebastian recalled. “At that time, I didn’t even know what I wanted in a race sled...how I wanted it to handle. Every year, I’ve learned something new about riding and sled set up. That first sled really didn’t handle the greatest, but that’s all part of the learning curve in terrain racing.”

Despite some growing pains, Sebastian said he was good enough to earn the Cor Powersports Tour Rookie of the Year honors in 2013. A year later, he joined the Yamaha factory racing team full time, competing primarily in regional events and a little on the United States X-Country Snowmobile (USXC) racing circuit.

Sebastian spent more than two years with Yamaha before that team shut its doors in the summer of 2016. When he first joined them, Wade West, Yamaha’s snowmobile marketing manager at the time, described Sebastian as “a great up-and-coming racer with an amazing work ethic.” Sebastian said the two have remained friends since, and he even worked as a blogger last season for West’s maxsled.com website.

Including a points championship in the Sport Improved Stock class in 2014-15, Sebastian said he earned some modest success in cross-country racing to this point in his career. He had also moved on to the semi-pro class, but without factory backing, he and his team were back to operating as an independent.

“It wasn’t the first time my dad and I had to figure things out,

and it wouldn’t be the last,” Sebastian said.

Having raced exclusively with Yamaha equipment, they decided to build a four-stroke Yamaha Viper race sled for the 2016-17 campaign. Later that year, the team added a two-stroke Arctic Cat to the stable, and he was able to switch rides back and forth, depending on the course layout for a particular race.

“I loved how the Arctic Cat handled,” Sebastian said. “With me being a smaller guy, the two-stroke fit me a lot better. I liked how the lighter Cat handled through rough terrain, but on a smoother, faster track, the Yamaha four-stroke power was the way to go.”

Last season, he joined the Arctic Cat factory team full time, and he races primarily on the USXC circuit now with the first race of the 2018-19 season slated for Dec. 15-16 at Pine Lake near Gonsvik, Minn. A total of eight events are posted on the USXC website this year. Most of the races are located in northern Minnesota, and the terrain varies from woods to ditches to lakes.

“My long-term goal is to eventually go pro, but for this season, I’m still going to be running in the semi-pro class,” he said. “I’ve earned some semi-pro wins on the regional series, but as far as the national series, I’m still trying to get that first semi-pro win.

“I want to win some races and, at the end of the year, be in the hunt for the championship,” Sebastian added. “I’m definitely happy with the team at Arctic Cat. Everyone’s great to work with, and their passion for racing is incredible.”

Milestone Events

Besides joining team green, last season proved to be a milestone year for Sebastian as he competed in both the International I-500 endurance race at Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.—otherwise known as the Soo—and the three-day I-500 cross-country race at Thief River Falls, Minn., in back-to-back weekends.

“Last season, I didn’t get the best race results. They were definitely short of my expectations. But the places I was able to go and experience are things I will remember forever,” he said. “The Soo is unlike any place I have ever been. Just to be able to go up and compete in that race was a dream come true.”

Sebastian said he would do it all over again, but after competing in those events two weekends in a row, he said his body needed some time to recover. “After a normal race, I feel pretty good, but after doing two 500-mile races back-to-back, I definitely needed a break,” he admitted. “I had never done that before.”

Sebastian said he tries to stay in shape during the season with a fitness regimen and rides his dirt bike in the summer to remain ac-

tive in the off-season. To this point, he said he has not been injured in cross-country racing, but he has crashed a few times and even suffered from an occasional frost-bite.

Depending on the type of terrain for each race, he said speeds can range from 80 mph in a roadside ditch to more than 100 mph on straightaways. The only time he said he held back in racing was during the Soo race, when snow dust from the ice oval hampered his vision.

"I wish I could say I was fearless, but snow dust is one thing that I just can't handle. If I can't see, it's hard to hold it wide open," he said. "Otherwise, if it's a super tough track with gnarly bumps, I can usually handle that."

Sponsors Key to Success

Keeping his sled track-side down is not only important to competing in timed race events but also to minimizing his overall costs. Any prizemoney he wins is usually reinvested in the team, and if he wrecks, it hurts more than just his pride.

"Your return on this is all based on how good you do," he said. "If you have a good year, the more you can spend. The pressure is on, so if I crash and wasn't in the money for an event, then it's on me to fix the sled. That's when it can get a little tough."

In addition to factory backing, Sebastian said he relies heavily on other sponsors to financially support his racing endeavor. He said he leans on social media to build his brand and to promote his sponsors.

Racing, for now, is not a full-time gig. Sebastian said he still works at a parts store in Milford and is grateful for the generous time off he's granted during the season.

"It's a crazy schedule. I'm gone almost every weekend," he noted. "My job is super awesome with me and gives me all the time I need to go race. My family and friends are all very supportive, too, and help out quite a bit."

Sebastian also recognized those professionals he's met along the way in this journey. In addition to West, he remains close to



Sebastian met Levi LaVallee at last year's state convention.

former professional cross-country racer Nathan Titus, and at last year's ISSA convention in Cedar Rapids, he received valuable advice from snowmobile stunt ride and snocross team owner Levi LaVallee following his keynote address.

"Levi is such an icon in snowmobiling," Sebastian said. "We ended up talking for quite a bit. He gave me advice on how to approach a sponsor, how to make a

name for yourself and what he does with social media to build a following. He was super cool to talk to."

Sebastian said sponsors will continue to be key to his future success. He said he would eventually like to turn pro but will need the continued support from those who have carried him this far toward that goal.

"Without any of my family and my sponsors, anything that I do would not be possible," he said. "Many of them have been with me since the beginning and still support me today. If it wasn't for many of these people, I would not be able to go racing on the weekends."

Follow Sebastian on Facebook at Mitch Sebastian Motorsports or on Instagram @mitch_sebastian.

SPINA BIFIDA GROWS UP

SECOND IN A SERIES

Editor's Note: The Spina Bifida Association of Iowa (SBAIA) has been the ISSA's official charity since 1982. Last month, we began a series profiling adults living with the condition. This month, we visit with Rhonda Brown.

by Diane Glass, SBAIA Board Member

Rhonda Brown, 60, is both a dreamer and an activist. You can see that in her travels, her volunteer work and her relationships.

"I have always wanted to see the world. So I applied to Joni and Friends, a ministry that restores and distributes wheelchairs in countries that need them," Rhonda said. "Lack of mobility isolates many people with disabilities."

Through that program, she traveled to Poland, Peru and Ghana West Africa, countries where the public often shuts away from view people with disabilities."

"When I encountered a child in Ghana crawling on the ground because he didn't have a wheelchair, I tried not to cry," she said. "In Peru, when I held a baby who was disabled and told the mother how beautiful he is, she started to cry. No one had ever said that about her child."

Her willingness to volunteer creates unexpected travel opportunities. A volunteer secretary's job at her church led to a trip to the Philippines to aid people living on the street after an earthquake. She helped restore their library during her 10-day stay.

"The hardest thing about this kind of travel is that you need to be strong physically. Luckily host countries prepare for that," she said.

Rhonda's travels make her realize how fortunate we are in the United States.

"The government tries to help people with disabilities. We are lucky to have access to wheelchairs and other services," she said.

Yet there's more to do for people with special needs, she believes. In the spring of 2018 she traveled to Washington, D.C. as part of the Spina Bifida Association's "Teal on the Hill" lobbying effort.

"You have a voice, use it!" she advocates. "Don't be silent on issues you are passionate about."

Rhonda's career has included work at the Principal Financial Group, Sears Credit and her church where she created a Friendship Group for adults with mental challenges, a ministry she did for 20 years before retiring.

"When you have a disability, your world becomes increasingly small unless you work at it," Rhonda said. "You need to put yourself in situations where you will meet people. The result will be new friends and new opportunities."

Attendance at a Spina Bifida Association of America opened her eyes to a new way of viewing her life as a single woman.

"I looked around at the crowd. Especially at the women who were well dressed, who carried a cane or used a chair. One blond woman especially caught my eye. She was beautiful, in a bright blue dress, carrying an artistic looking cane. I want to be like that, I said to myself. Beautiful, confident, and yes, disabled."

Her next adventure?

"I would love to go on a cruise to Australia," she said. "I've been to every other continent except this one. It's my way of showing that people with disabilities can travel the whole world. We have no boundaries."

Expect this doer to realize yet another one of her dreams.



Region 1

O'Brien County Snowtrackers

by Zelda Buse Christensen, Reporter

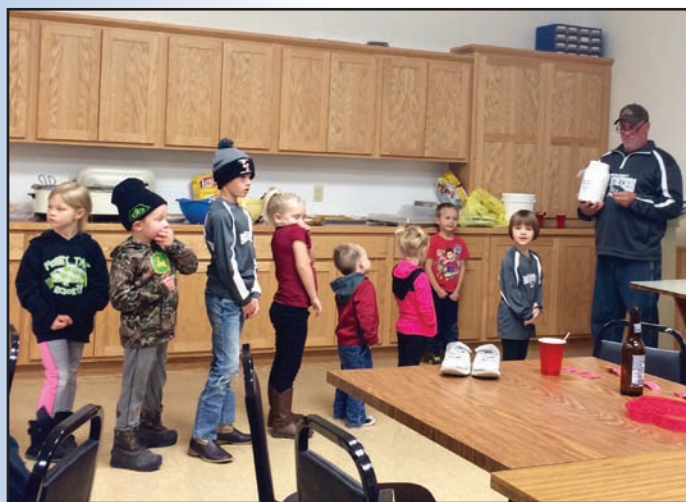
I write this on Friday night, preparing to leave for Arrowwood Resort and the annual ISSA convention early tomorrow morning. (Yeah, I know, I am missing some of the social events tonight.) And what is Spencer radio saying? There is a possibility of some slippery roads in the morning because of a chance of snow! But not much.

Last week, Gary Lansink was going to move our groomer so a farmer could get some farm equipment into the shed at the county fairgrounds. A problem: The starter only clicked, not the desired response. That night, Gary removed the starter, took it home and tore it all apart. When the brushes looked good and the armature looked good, he put it all back together again. Back on the groomer, again all seemed good, so he backed it out so the farm machinery could go in. The next day, the groomer started immediately when Gary went to put it back into the shed. Hopefully, it won't act up again when it is really needed to move snow on our trails!

Another youth safety class is scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 1, at Northwest Iowa Community College in Sheldon.

As always, when approaching winter, THINK SNOW!

**Club
News**



Plenty of young riders showed up for the Worth County Fence Stretchers annual membership drive.

Region 3

Worth County Fence Stretchers

by Nicole Knudson, Secretary

Well, who would have thought that we would see measurable snow in October and a dusting again in November...bit kinda exciting for us snowmobile enthusiasts!

The old Farmers Almanac wasn't wrong when it says that we can expect snow earlier in the season. However, it speaks to that January may have less snow and mild temps. If this is any indication, we must get out and mark our trails earlier than later in order to enjoy a few local rides. We hope this is the year that we can enjoy our Iowa trails, but all in all, we keep our fingers crossed.

Our club just hosted our annual membership drive with a meal, raffle and lots of socializing! We had a great turnout, and it was kinda fun to see snow on the ground for our "kick off to winter." We had several kids also in attendance, which is the future of snowmobiling!

Our club wishes you all Happy Holidays, and hopefully we can meet up on the Iowa trails!

Region 5

Cresco Driftrunners

by Bob Martinek, Treasurer

Hello and welcome to December from Cresco! Now is a good time to remind all that snow or no snow, our trails never open until after the end of second season shotgun deer hunting. This year, the day after is Dec. 17. We do this to retain the "privilege" to have our trails on private property. Many of our landowners are also deer hunters, and everyone needs to respect their wishes.

At this time, we are finalizing plans for the 48th annual Snow Fest, which is Jan. 24-27. One thing I am able to share at this time is the band we have booked for Saturday night's Jan. 26 Snowball Dance is "Lonesome Road" from the La Crosse area. I checked them out on You Tube, and they are really good! Several of them used to be in the "Back Home Boys," and they are looking forward to coming back to Cresco. Lots of fun to be sure. I will have details on raffle prizes, trail rides, fun run, breakfast brunch and more next month.

That's about it for now. Merry Christmas to all and happy trails (soon?).

Allamakee Sno Blazers

by Amy Howard

Hello from the Allamakee Sno Blazers. We have set a date for our third annual Radar Run/Fundraiser. The date is set for Saturday, Feb. 9. So far, sign-up starts at 1 p.m., and racing will start around 2 p.m. I will have more information and details by the January newsletter.

Our trails have been marked and worked on. Now, all we need is the snow to go sledding on. Membership forms have been sent out.

Hope everyone had a good Thanksgiving and enjoyed their time with family and friends. It's so hard to believe how fast this last year has went. Til next time, be safe and always stay on the trails when riding and respect the landowners.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

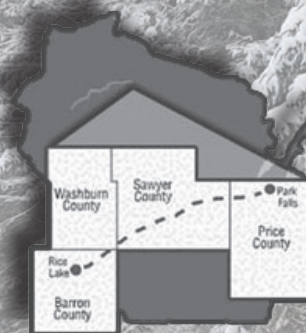
December

- Snowmobile Education Course Dec. 1 at Northwest Iowa Community College, Sheldon.
- Groomer Operator Training Dec. 4 at St. Mary Church School, 2395 Highway 14, Marble Rock, IA.
- Groomer Operator Training Dec. 5 at Kuennen's House of Power, 455 Main St., Maynard, IA.
- Groomer Operator Training Dec. 6 at 6 p.m. at the fire station in Stratford, 630 Highway 175. Visit Team Iowa's Facebook page for more information.
- Snowmobile Education Course Dec. 15 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Hancock County Courthouse Law Enforcement Center, 855 State St., Garner, IA. Bring a sack lunch. To pre-register, contact Ross at (641) 923-2871.
- Groomer Operator Training Dec. 15 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the American Legion, St. Ansgar. Meal provided. Please RSVP to tdurb@yahoo.com by Dec. 8.
- Groomer Operator Training Dec. 18 at Seibert Park Community Building, 508 Quaker Mill Dr, Manchester, IA.

January

- Groomer Operator Training Jan. 2 from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Coulter Community Center, Coulter, IA
- University of Okoboji Winter Games Jan. 24-27.
- Driftrunners 48th Annual Snow Fest Jan. 24-27 at Cresco.

Backpacking to Park Falls



Timely Snow Leads to Perfect Weekend Getaway to Northern Wisconsin

by Cameron Hanson

Given the sorry state of snowmobiling in Iowa last winter, I ended up cramming three trips to Wisconsin over the span of about five weeks to get in some decent riding before the season was over. I guess you could call it supply and demand. They had the snow, and I wanted to ride.

My first trip sent me north to Iron River for our annual male retreat the first weekend of February, and my third visit occurred in early March with my youngest son over Spring Break. Wedged in between those rides was a spur-of-the-moment, weekend getaway with Past ISSA President Gary McVicker of Hampton.

With our work schedules and personal commitments finally aligning, Gary and I were able to reward ourselves with fresh snow in the Rice Lake area Feb. 23-25. The day before our arrival, a storm system had brought heavy snow to the Barron and lower Sawyer County areas; and as we normally try to do, we planned to backpack—this time over to Park Falls—over the next two days.

From our corner of the state, Rice Lake is a quick three and a half hour drive from home. Heading northeast on blind faith, we left Iowa after work Friday with no hotel res-

ervations booked and no trail reports to assure us we were heading in the right direction. It wasn't like we had any good luck riding in Iowa to this point in the season, so things had to turn around for us.

Travelling at night, we were initially unable to tell if we had made the right decision, but by the time we reached the Barron County line from the south, snowmobile traffic was starting to pick up, as we could see headlights darting in and out of the woods.

Besides the promise of ample snow, Rice Lake served as our launch site because—based on previous visits to the area—spur trails led us directly from the hotel to the main corridor.

Once we reached town, large piles of snow in the parking lots also reaffirmed our choice to land here, and we soon began searching for a place to stay. After finding a room, we parked the trailer out of the way, cleared it with the hotel staff we would be back in two days and hit the hay around 10 p.m.

Getting an Early Start

Normally on vacations, I'm not much of an early riser, but on this weekend, I didn't need to recharge my batteries and didn't need a wake-up call to get moving in the morning. Geared up before daybreak, we were up there to simply take care of one thing: to squeeze the throttle and get some adrenaline back pumping through our veins.

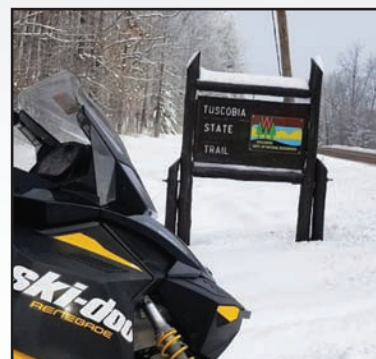
From the hotel spur, we picked up Corridor 33 North just outside of Rice Lake Saturday morning. Our plan for the day was to head up to the Tuscobia Trail, which began a few miles north of town, and to follow it to its eastern terminus at Park Falls. Otherwise known as Corridor 10 on the map, this abandoned railroad grade provided the main artery for our weekend adventure and offered plenty of riding loops.

Our first departure from the Tuscobia was a 10-mile scenic excursion on Trail 11 in southern Sawyer County. This hidden gem saw very little traffic this early in the weekend, and we were able to enjoy the soft, lush snow on the heavily-wooded trail. Oftentimes, the snow was spilling over our skis, and as a seasoned mountain rider, Gary even dipped off to the side of the main trail to play in the deep stuff.

Back on the Tuscobia, we headed up toward Couderay and stopped for dinner at Winter. Just seemed fitting to take a break in a town named after our favorite season. Without a set schedule, we decided to follow temporary signs to nearby Winter Lake after lunch and take in a local club's radar runs. This break in the action also gave Gary a chance to promote the Jack Race back home at Clear Lake.



Cruising down Trail 11 off the Tuscobia



Tuscobia Trail sign



Heading north on Corridor 33 near Rice Lake



North of Loretta



On the trail to Lugerville

With our curiosity satisfied, we hopped back on the saddle and spotted a freshly groomed trail heading north from the Tuscobia at Loretta. So like any responsible snowmobiler would do, we took it. This diversion would eventually lead us to some nice, wide fire roads that would—35 miles later—dump us back down on the Tuscobia near the Price County line.

Once inside the next county, we followed a pair of local club trails to Butternut Lake for an extended break at the Timber Breeze Resort. We felt we were close enough to our final destination at Park Falls that we could afford to spend a little extra time there. The only thing nagging us in the back of our minds was, once again, the lack of a hotel reservation.

So with a little daylight left, we turned

southeast from the lake and came into Park Falls from the north. Fortunately, we found a hotel on the south end of town and booked a room for the night. By now, snow was starting to fall again, and watching it out the window from our room was just not an option for the evening. We instead jumped back on our sleds and cruised down to Lugerville for a late supper.

To get there, we followed the Doc Frye Memorial Trail south of Fifield, at which time I noticed a sign for Wintergreen Lake, a destination I had visited 15 years earlier in my snowmobiling career. After scarfing down some pizza, we turned back toward the hotel and topped off our fuel tanks along the way.

Heading Back Sunday

The next morning, we brushed off about six inches of fresh snow from our sleds, and the anticipation for Sunday's ride was just as high as the previous day's. Knowing how long it would take to get back to our tow vehicle, we felt we had enough time to ride north to Clam Lake for brunch. Starting out on the same fire roads as yesterday, we eventually picked up Corridor 25 North.

Again, with undisturbed snow on the trail and meeting very little traffic, we made great time on this 70-mile jaunt. Even though we could say it about the entire weekend, this morning's ride was probably the best of the

two days. For the most part, we were the first tracks along the entire route.

From Clam Lake, Gary, who has more experience riding in this area, led us down to the Chippewa Flowage for an afternoon break at Pat's Landing, a long-time supporter of the ISSA. Here, we ran into a pair of riders from the Mitchell County E-Z Riders from Region 4 and spent some time visiting with them before heading back down to the Tuscobia.

With just a fraction of daylight left, we made it back to the hotel in Rice Lake to load up and head south. Evenly split over the two days, we racked up 340 miles for the weekend and enjoyed our time there so much a repeat trip will likely be in store this winter, snow and schedules permitting.



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