

Volunteer Profile – Abbi May

Cross Country Canada 2018 Volunteer of the Year Award

Abbi started her cross-country skiing career as a young child in Deep River, Ontario. Growing up, she did a lot of skiing in the bush near her family home. She also raced as a member of the very strong Deep River Cross Country Ski Club. Her highlights as an athlete included two 4th place finishes at the Junior National Championships in the late 80's. She continued ski racing through university (winning the OUAA championships) and into her adult life.

After moving to Salmon Arm, BC in 2005, Abbi became more and more involved in coaching and club development within the Larch Hills Nordic Society. Her coaching roles have included ...

- (1) Bunnyrabbit and Jackrabbit Coach: With small children of her own, becoming a coach within the Bunnyrabbit and Jackrabbit program was a natural first step. Abbi was a Bunnyrabbit and Jackrabbit coach from 2005 through to 2010.
- (2) Junior Ski Team Coach: Abbi began as a coach on the Junior Ski team in 2010 and has been coaching the team since then. She has coached a variety of age groups. The last few seasons, she has been the Lead coach for the Midget-aged group. She has also been involved in coaching the older athletes. She helps coach their weekly strength sessions (making use of her professional training as a physiotherapist). She has also been the club's head coach for the team attending National Championships for past four seasons.
- (3) Para-Nordic Coach: In 2016, an accident in high-school shop class left 15 year old Larch Hills athlete Natalie Wilkie with a significant hand injury. Although Natalie continued skiing as an able-bodied athlete, her injury qualified her to compete in para-nordic events, and Abbi stepped up immediately to help guide her through this new athletic landscape. To say this coach/athlete partnership has been a success would be an understatement. Natalie won a medal at the Nationals (able-bodied) in her first year back after her injury, and, this past season, she won three medals – gold, silver and bronze – at the Paralympics in Pyeongchang, Korea! As Natalie's personal coach Abbi played a key role in guiding her through her training and helping her with both her able-bodied and para-nordic racing. Abbi has now become quite active within the para-community, taking coaching courses and attending various training camps and races along with Natalie.
- (4) Provincial Coaching Roles: While most of Abbi's coaching has been at the club level, she has also been active within the provincial coaching community. She has helped coach at a variety of regional and provincial-level training camps (BC Talent Squad, BC Development Squad and BC Team). She also coached the Okanagan zone team at the 2014 BC Winter Games. Most recently, Abbi was a support coach on BC's B-Tour trip to Austria, Italy and Germany. She was one of only a few female coaches/wax technicians from any nation to attend these events.

Abbi has also been actively involved in a wide variety of non-coach roles within the Larch Hills Nordic Society.

- (1) SDP Programmer: After gaining experience as a coach, Abbi took over the role of SDP Programmer for the Larch Hills program (from 2007 to 2010). The Larch Hills SDP program typically had around 100 and 130 children during that time period. Abbi spearheaded a number of new initiatives, including the purchase of a set of skate skis for use by Jackrabbit kids just beginning to learn how to skate ski.
- (2) Junior Ski Team Head Coach: When Phil Wallenstein (a long-time builder of the Larch Hills junior racing team) stepped aside as head coach in 2014, Abbi jumped into the role with enthusiasm. She has been leading the club's junior race team since then. Over the years, the race team has grown steadily (from roughly 30 athletes 10 years ago to 110 athletes this past season). Abbi (and Phil before her) have established a very inclusive environment that encourages participation from skiers with a wide range of abilities. The club has had great competitive success, winning the BC Club Championship trophy 7 of the last 8 years.
- (3) Larch Hills Nordic Society Board Member: Abbi has been a member of the LHNS board since becoming a Director in 2007. Her main role has been to provide oversight on issues related to programs (e.g., SDP, Race Team, Adventure program, lessons), but she is also involved in decision making with respect to operations, trail development and (most recently) the building of the new chalet.
- (4) Reino Keski-Salmi Loppet Committee: Abbi has been involved with the Loppet organization for a number of years. One of many cogs in a large organization, she has been responsible for making arrangements with a variety of community sponsors.

Throughout Abbi's years of involvement with the Larch Hills Nordic Society, a few key factors have made her an incredibly valued member of the local ski community.

- Love of Skiing – It is abundantly clear to all those around her that this is why she is out there. There is no greater motivation than simply enjoying the activity.
- Sport for All – Whether it is Bunnyrabbits or Junior Race Team, she has continued a philosophy that the club is for all those who would like to participate. No matter how rich or poor, how naturally gifted or otherwise, there is a spot in the LHNS for all those who would like to join.
- Wholesomeness – There are many occasions where coaches make challenging decisions. Abbi's philosophy has very much been about "doing the right thing". A recent example is her push to reduce the usage of high-fluoro waxes within our domestic races, which has been received quite positively throughout BC.

In addition to the above Abbi is busy year-round with coaching and volunteering for activities/sports that provide cross-training benefits to club members. Five years ago in April,

when most coaches get a bit of a break, Abbi and another mother from the Larch Hills racing team started a trail running series called Wild Soles. This was four Monday night races held on different running trails around Salmon Arm. These family-oriented events have been very popular with more than 150 participants attending on some nights, many of whom are members of ski team families. Abbi also helped get orienteering started in Salmon Arm by organizing events. Again, the participants in these events are mostly ski team families.

Testimonials

Phil Wallensteen, former LHNS Head Coach

“Abbi is a great role model for the girls on the ski team. She sets a great example with her enthusiasm for sports and the outdoors, her leadership skills, her fitness, and the hours and hours of volunteer time she puts into the club and ski team.

Abbi has organized waxing nights for mothers of the ski racers so that they know how to wax their kids skis if necessary. This has led to mothers being part of our waxing team at races and sets a good example for the girls on our team.”

Chris Manhard, CCBC Provincial Coach

Last season Abbi became the first female coach from BC to ever go on a B-Tour to Europe. Even though this was her first time doing a trip at this level, she handled it like a pro. She dug in and worked hard on all aspects of her assignment, from wax technician to coach. Abbi is a big asset to the coaching community in her club and province.

Duncan Moore (LHNS Club Chair) and Randi Ostby (LHNS Club Coach)

Abbi is a dedicated member of the Larch Hills Nordic Society and exemplifies the club culture of volunteerism and community involvement. She is passionate about cross country skiing, and has contributed to growth of this sport in our community in so many ways. She is a parent, a coach, and a board member who gives freely of her time, her skills, and her knowledge. She is the Head Coach of the Larch Hills Junior Race Team, one of the largest Junior race programs in Canada. In contrast to most other Canadian programs of this size (over 100 skiers) this is an unpaid position. Although supported by a strong group of volunteer coaches, Abbi takes on a lot of administrative and organizational duties that can be tedious and time consuming. She works tirelessly to make sure that what needs to be done gets done and is very modest about her accomplishments.