

When the gals at the Georgian Nordic Ski Club decide to help each other improve their skills, it quickly becomes a daylong social event.

In fact, the first annual Women on Skis day held back in 1996 was such a hit, that it's become a sell-out event – weather permitting – every year since.

“It was a day for women to come out and learn to ski and have fun,” explains Pam Wedd, who organized the first Women on Skis with Ann Dunningan, based on their success in running women's winter weekends, while working at the YWCA Camp Tapawingo at Rose Point.

“These were well received and popular, so we thought why don't we try it at the ski club?” says Pam. “And it was sold out from day one – I don't think we've ever had one that wasn't sold out.”

She remembers the Georgian Nordic Ski Club's first Women on Skis as being “pretty exciting”. They had a brand new ‘burrow’ clubhouse offering the ladies a comfortable place to gather as a group and the Nine Mile Lake trails had all been upgraded.

“It just went together really easily,” she recalls. “Women always step right up to help when it comes to meal time. It flowed nicely and was a lot of fun. At the end of the day everybody was really excited about it and they were already talking about the next year.”

The annual event, usually held around the third Sunday in January, follows a highly successful, yet simple formula. Participants consider instruction in either the traditional/classic or the freestyle/skating technique, then sign up at the beginner, intermediate or advanced level.

“The club always had enough good skiers that we've been able to share their expertise with others,” Pam explains. “And by and large it all seems to split up evenly.”

After an outdoor warm-up of aerobics or pilates, the ladies head out to the trails in their respective six groups for morning instruction by club volunteers. At noon, an inviting hot lunch of homemade soup or chili (usually with a vegetarian option), sandwiches, plus dessert, and plenty of steeping tea, coffee and hot chocolate, awaits by the woodstove in the burrow. After a rather boisterous chatty mealtime of catching up with old friends and meeting new ones, the ladies are treated to any combination of a local skiwear fashion show, a waxing demonstration, or a presentation of what's new in Nordic ski equipment. It's a break of learning, laughter, socializing, warming up chilly hands and toes, and relaxing tight muscles that remind these skiing women that they're practising new skills. Then, it's back to the trails for final instruction.

Club members who volunteer as instructors ensure the day isn't all play and no work. The girls practise a series of drills and soon find themselves gliding over the trails, up and down hills, and around tricky turns with newfound finesse.

“You do see improvement, although one day is a short period of time,” says former Georgian Nordic Ski Club president Wendy Grater. “What I try to do is leave people with the tools so they can work on things themselves afterwards. Not only am I teaching them, I'm trying to do it so that they understand and take little tips away with them.”

A World Masters silver medalist in the sport, Wendy has volunteered as an instructor since Women on Skis began.

“I feel that skiing has given me so much, that I like to be able to give back,” she explains. “And this particular day has such great energy. The people that go there are so keen and appreciative, that it makes volunteering for it very easy.”

She's been impressed by the tenacity of the women who band together to make it successful despite some challenging odds.

