

Winter Tour celebrates women, winter and chocolate

BY ERIN ANDERSON

Special to the Record-Eagle

In case you're already having trouble keeping that New Year's resolution of health and fitness, why not ease yourself into exercise with help from hundreds of other women?

On Sunday, Feb. 6, nearly 1,500 women of all ages, shapes, athletic levels and sizes will take to the VASA ski trail for the 2005 Women's Winter Tour.

Begun as the "VASA Loppet" in 1999, the event has grown from founder Kaye Krapohl's brainstorm of hosting an all-female outdoor event on Superbowl Sunday to an expertly organized festival celebrating women, winter and chocolate.

A long-time outdoor enthusiast, Krapohl particularly enjoyed time spent skiing the VASA, but noticed an all too obvious lack of women interested in racing the trail. This dearth was confirmed during her time as VASA president when she found that only 10 to 15 percent of participants in the race were women.

"I knew women were out there skiing because I'd see them on the trail, but most of them weren't racing or participating in larger, group events," she said.

During this time, Krapohl

was also involved with the Nordic Ski Club, which would typically see upward of 70 women gathering to ski together on Wednesday nights. This was all the encouragement she needed, and with the help of a few fliers and enthusiastic word of mouth, the event was born.

The purpose of the event was not to be competitive but to introduce women to the incredible community resource that exists in the VASA, encourage them to enjoy the outdoors, even in the wintertime, and to experience the camaraderie many people aren't aware exists even within the atmosphere of a race.

"Women come in all shapes and sizes, and skiing and snowshoeing are things anyone can do and enjoy," she said.

But skiing requires ample energy, and what better way to replenish than by enjoying a delicious snack — or three — along the way?

Eager to continue the event's purpose of connecting with the community, Krapohl approached local business people with her concept. Soon, restaurants, specialty shops and wineries were donating food and spirits to sustain the skiers.

Still, Krapohl knew it was not enough. There was one

key element missing, one of life's barest necessities—chocolate. Eager to provide this essential ingredient to the participants, Kay went in search of a chocolatier willing to donate delectable delicacies to the endeavor, and Kilwin's was more than happy to oblige.

In 2000, the event became the Madeline Thomas Memorial Women's Ski Tour, named for the prominent local attorney and community activist.

Proceeds support several local charities including Madeline's House, a family transition residence for those persecuted by domestic violence.

The 2005 northwest Michigan event has been renamed the Madeline Thomas Memorial Women's Winter Tour to further include the growing number of snowshoers participating each year.

"The idea is for women to get out there and support each other, as well as other women who need their help to recover from abusive situations and take control of their lives. I like to say, 'We get on our own two skis to help women get on their own two feet,'" Krapohl said.

This year's event includes a 3, 5 and 8K course, each served by a different restaurant.



Record-Eagle file photo

The Women's Winter Tour encourages snowshoers to join skiers on the VASA trail.

**Women's
Winter
Tour '05**

February 6, 2005
Timber Ridge Nordic Center

Pick up/drop off registrations at Brick Wheels in TC, or visit our website. The first 500 online registrants win a chance at Fischer Skis and other prizes. Fee is \$35 til Feb 2, 2005. \$50 event day.

www.womenswintertour.com

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