

SCREEN FREE: Break from technology boosts well-being

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“It was weird at first,” said Bennett, “but now I’m playing more Monopoly, playing with my dog more, playing baseball — doing a lot more stuff outside than I normally would.”

Outdoor activity, time in nature, and making real connections with other people and animals: all have been shown to be good for kids (and adults, too). Too much screen use, on the other hand, has been linked to depression, anxiety, and feeling less empathy toward others.

Did he notice any changes in how he felt, during this unusual week? Bennett thought for a moment before replying, “I don’t get as mad as easily.” He said he’d like it if the school had screen-free times once a month, for a few days. He added he might do it even without a reward.

At Hoodoo on Friday, SES families gathered with their coupons after school. For \$15, each family member could enjoy skiing and riding in the late afternoon sun and on into the night—including equipment rental.

Clouds drifted overhead, dark grey and glowing peach, as the sun waned. The figures on the hill, skiing and snowboarding, became inky silhouettes against the dimly lit

snow. A dad reached out a pole to drag his preschooler in her pink helmet, back and forth.

A daredevil youngster on skis, not yet bothering with poles, zoomed down the dusk-tinted hill, directly back into the short, fast lift line, pushing his feet into a snowplow V at the very last second.

Parents and kids expressed delight that Hoodoo had offered this opportunity. One student got his very first chance to put on skis and give the sport a whirl. His mother, Renee Stelle, lamented that screen time is so “ingrained” in her family.

“It’s such a bad habit in our family,” Stelle said ruefully. “Everybody’s on their screen, every day. We try to limit the times — but if I’m busy with a big cleaning chore or cooking dinner, I forget to tell them to stop.”

Parents, kids, and other individuals of all ages experience frustration trying to scale back their screen use, partly because today’s games, apps, and devices are engineered specifically to promote “engagement.” This can lead to habitual use and addiction. (*See related story, page 17*).

Inside the lodge, some adults and teens stared at their phones. But mostly, a relaxed, friendly, small-town atmosphere permeated the scene.

Locals from around Sisters Country chatted and listened to live music. A talented harmonica player caught his groove, playing along with singer-guitarist Jerry Zyback.

The duo performed blues numbers and classics from Johnny Cash, The Beatles, and The Grateful Dead. Musicians play in the lodge weekly from 5 to 9 p.m. for Hoodoo’s Friday Night Lights program.

A pack of little children from nearby Camp Sherman rushed through the spacious upstairs loft. The town’s tiny Black Butte School includes Friday ski days at Hoodoo in their outdoor education program; teachers and parents lounged around tables and socialized. A gaggle of teenage boys leaped up the stairs and surrounded a mom well-stocked with snacks.

Plenty of beer, fries, steaks, and chicken strips were consumed. Some adventurous skiers brought campers and trailers for an overnight parking lot experience.

SES Principal Joan Warburg praised the work of Sisters Parent-Teacher Community group (SPTC), which spearheaded the event. She said she was especially appreciative of board member Haley Ellis, who worked hard to make it happen.

Outside, lights illuminated ski runs as the sky went black. Some skiers glowed or blinked, swathed in multicolored strings of LED lights. Eventually snow began to fall, billowing against the lodge’s walls, shining in its outdoor light. The big flakes looked like moths clustering at a streetlamp. A young man standing underneath suddenly flipped up his snowboard,



PHOTO BY TL BROWN

Hoodoo Ski Bowl hosted elementary school families Friday during a special Screen-Free Week event.

holding himself up with one arm, and landed gracefully.

Hoodoo opens 23 runs for night skiing and riding Thursday through Saturday from 3:30 to 9 p.m. More information is available at

www.hoodoo.com.

Sisters kids will share more with the community about their experiences trying out Screen-Free Week. Look for it in an upcoming edition of “Kids in Print” in *The Nugget*.

SKI CHAMPS: First trip to state competition in many years

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On the girls side, Lewis’s race looked to be one of her best slalom runs ever, but she caught a gate and crashed on her first run. Hollie skied a really clean second run and came in sixth and earned 22 points. Sydney Wilkins, Skylar Wilkins, and Adelt came in one right after the other with 29th, 30th, and 31st respective finishes. Cohen was 39th, and Cramer finished 41st. The Lady Outlaws finished fifth in the slalom race.

Both the boys and girls teams ended up with a fourth-place finish overall for the season. The boys were just a fraction away from grabbing the third-place spot.

“The seniors on the varsity boys team have been working hard for years, and this season represented a culmination of that effort,” said Chladek. “They came really close to a top-three season finish, and even though they fell just a bit short they exceeded

everyone’s expectations in the league this year.”

The top four varsity teams in the league advance to the State championships, and both the boys and girls teams will be in attendance. The State championships will be held on Mount Ashland, Wednesday through Friday, March 4-6.

“We’re super-excited to race at a new venue and see how we can do against some of the other Oregon teams that we haven’t seen in quite a long time,” said Chladek.

The boys JV team also got to participate in the league finals, and three

racers qualified for the finals in the giant slalom on Friday. Christopher Lundgren logged the best finish of the day at 37th overall, and was followed by Connor Petty, who finished in 42nd place. Simon Rhett raced hard, but sadly crashed on both runs.

“Simon may have crashed, but I always have a lot of respect for a racer who’s pushing hard and discovering the limits,” said Chladek.

On Saturday, Rhett was Sisters’ only JV racer that qualified for slalom finals. He skied two good runs and came in 35th overall for the day.



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