

Out of tragedy came bright tradition of Cato Memorial Race

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By Ben Jacklet
Shred Hood

(Editor’s note: Ben Jacklet is editor and co-founder of Shred Hood, a community news and information website founded in 2013 to cover the skiing, snowboarding, and back-country scene on Mount Hood. For more great content focused around the Mount Hood snow culture, visit www.shredhood.org)

For the 25th year in a row, hundreds of high school skiers and their families gathered on Mount Hood to dress up in whacky costumes, ski fast, cheer each other on, feast on turkey and roast beef, and have fun on the mountain. This year was the last of the Christine Cato Memorial Race, and a lot of people are going to miss it.

The goal of the Cato race was to build something positive out of something terrible. Christine Cato died from an accident involving a snowcat at Timberline Ski Area on July 9, 1989. She was 16 years old.

All these years later, the family still prefers not to discuss the details of the accident.

“I can still burst into tears about Christine at any time,” says her mother, Judy Cato. “She was a fabulous person. She made friends with everyone. There were people who showed up for her memorial who said they were her best friend who I had never met before. And I believed them.”

850 people attended a memorial service for Christine Cato in Beaverton. “The church was packed and there were people standing outside,” remembers Christine’s father, Stu. “It was overwhelming.”

Stu Cato has been skiing Mount Hood since the 1950s. He and Judy bought a cabin without running water in Government Camp in 1974, when Christine was two, and worked for many years to improve



Photo by Ben Jacklet

JUDY CATO speaks at the conclusion of the 25th and final Christine Cato Memorial Race with Christine’s picture re displayed on the podium.

it into a cozy refuge for friends and family. All three of the Cato children raced as Mitey Mites with the Mt. Hood Race Team and competed as high school racers. Their eldest daughter, Caroline, worked for Timberline Lodge after graduating from high school.

Skiing Mount Hood was a huge part of their life together, and now one of their children had died while skiing on the mountain. What could they possibly do to make things better?

‘A Fun Race for All’

While they were suffering from the shock of their daughter’s death, Stu and Judy Cato were approached by Richard Kohnstamm, president of RLK and Company, the company that rescued Timberline Lodge from bankruptcy in the 1950s and runs it to this day.

“Dick Kohnstamm came to us

and told us he felt awful about what happened,” Judy Cato recalls. “He said he wanted to do something positive, and so did we. So we talked to the kids, Christine’s friends, and we finally came up with this ski race.”

Kohnstamm committed to hosting the race at Timberline and insisted on providing a nice meal at the lodge for the racers and their families. The Catos reached out to friends for help with organizing the race and assembled a core team of volunteers who have worked together for 25 years.

They decided to create an event with Christine’s personality in mind. Christine Cato loved to ski and run gates, but she never loved the hyper-competitive world of high-level racing. She liked to see everyone get a chance, and she loved to cheer on racers new to the sport. In keeping with that spirit, the Cato Memorial has always embraced racers of all abilities and styles. Points and times do not count toward league competition, and there are no protests over times and rulings. Coaches are encouraged to give all of their racers a chance to compete, not just the fastest skiers. Racers are encouraged to relax and enjoy themselves rather than stressing out over their times. Unusual outfits are welcome.

“It’s a fun race for all,” says Stu Cato. “It’s great for skiers racing for the first time, or for racers who get tight in the gates. The idea is for everyone to walk away with smiles on their faces.”

A Spirit Award was added to the team and individual race awards, later followed by a Costume Award.

“We were sitting in a meeting one time, and someone said why don’t we do costumes?” recalls Judy Cato. “And I thought, well, Christine loved costumes, why not? So we put out the word that we were going to

have costumes, and these kids really got into it. It just took on a life of its own.”

A few years later, a prominent photo appeared in the Oregonian of a six-foot male racer in full Lycra racing regalia, wearing a tutu.

“One year Aloha High School made sport jackets out of duct tape,” says Judy. “Another year they showed up in coconut boobs and hula skirts. A guy showed up last year dressed as a tree.”

Each year the Spirit Award and the Costume Award are selected and presented by a group of longtime volunteers including Dave Porter, Erik Bjorge, Steve Schaffer, Barry Jackson, Brian Thompson and Drew Porter — friends of Christine Cato who have made it an annual tradition to help with the race. They have grown from high school kids to college kids to adults with families, but to this day Judy still refers to them as “the boys,” and she credits them with making the race a success. They all get together every year on the Friday night before the race to sort the bibs and dine at Timberline Lodge, to reconnect, and to remember Christine.

“The Cato family really adopted us after Christine died,” says Dave Porter, now a 43-year-old contractor with two kids of his own who are learning to ski. “We were all friends of Christine’s and we became family after her death. That bond is something that doesn’t leave you.”

Porter has never missed a Cato race. “It’s a beautiful thing to see these kids having so much fun,” he says, “kids doing what Christine would be doing, just goofing off and having a blast.”

Over a quarter century the Cato Memorial has grown into possibly the largest, and certainly one of the most popular, high school ski races in the U.S. Thousands of racers —

between 250 and 450 per year — have competed in the race and enjoyed the festivities.

Last year’s Cato race brought together skiers of all ability levels, including racers dressed as bears, fairy princesses and vikings — not to mention the daring lad who shredded down in just his birthday suit.

‘The whole family has been healing’

Stu and Judy Cato never planned for the race they started to continue for 25 years. It just kept going. Richard Kohnstamm insisted on hosting the event at Timberline and after his death at the age of 80 in 2006, his son Jeffrey Kohnstamm, the current president of RLK and Company, continued to support the event.

Now Judy Cato says it is time to move on. She believes the race has fulfilled its goal of creating something positive and lasting out of the tragedy of her daughter’s death. It also has helped family and friends to heal from the shock of losing Christine as such a young age.

“25 years ago I could hardly go to the cabin, let alone Timberline,” Judy recalls. “Through the years and with loving understanding the whole family has been healing to the point that our son Ray was married at Timberline on Christine’s birthday this past August.”

Stu Cato says he is proud of the fact that his family and Richard Kohnstamm were able to come to an understanding rather than fighting one another.

“We both suffered,” he says. “We lost a daughter and he had a terrible thing happen at his Lodge. What can we do to make this thing positive? You bring attorneys in and they’re going to convince you to hate the other person. Well we’re not that kind of people.”

CATO

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ing as favorites to dominate Mt. Hood League and state competition. Both racers finished as individual league champions in slalom and GS last season, and both are out for revenge after untimely falls at state that kept them off the podium.

Not far off Keillor’s 21.54 pace was William Lamer, who returns to the varsity boys’ No. 2 slot as last year’s top state finisher (3rd combined, 4th slalom, 10th GS) and will likely keep Keillor in check as the season progresses. Lamer’s time of 23.61 was good enough for third place; he was followed by Oskar Anderson in 33rd, Tucker Fitz Simons in 45th and Charlie Sutherland in 56th to round out the boys’ top five finishers.

McLean’s run of 33.90 was two full seconds faster than the next-best finisher, Isabella Hoffman of Lakeridge. Behind McLean were Sarah Hall in 13th, Hannah Bergemann in 29th and Savannah Boersma in 57th. Kelli Clark, who was runner up to McLean in overall league standings last season and led the team at state with an 8th place combined finish, had a mishap at the bottom of the course and had to hike back to a missed gate. The lost time put her toward the bottom of the standings in 80th.

Another highlight of the day, the JV boys team took first, led by freshman Mitchell Lamer who won the race with a time of 30.64. The JV girls were third, with Claire Davies leading the team in 10th.

The Eagles return to league action this weekend, with slalom Friday and giant slalom Saturday at Mt. Hood Meadows. As a perennial powerhouse in the league, skiers from the Cleveland, Grant, Gresham, Barlow, Sandy, St. Mary’s and The Dalles will once again have their work cut out for them as they chase the fastest skiers on Mt. Hood for the next few months.

Freestyle skiers get their start to the season Friday as well, with a slopestyle con-



Submitted photo

LUCY MCLEAN races down the hill on the way to winning her fourth straight Cato Race title on Saturday at Timberline Lodge.

2014 Christine Cato Memorial Race highlights

Varsity boys: 2nd overall, total time 1:13.90 (1st was West Linn, 1:12.71)
Austin Keillor: 1st, 21.54
William Lamer: 3rd, 23.61
Oskar Anderson: 33rd, 28.75
Tucker Fitz Simons: 45th, 32.02
Charlie Sutherland: 56th, 35.40

JV boys: 1st overall (Top five: Mitchell Lamer 1st, Donald Bryce 4th, Zack Colson 7th, Austin Marques 14th, Thomas Mixon, 17th)

Varsity girls: 2nd overall, total time 2:05.77 (1st was Lakeridge, 2:03.53)
Lucy McLean: 1st, 33.90
Sarah Hall: 13th, 43.90
Hannah Bergemann: 29th, 47.97
Savannah Boersma: 57th, 52.12
Kelli Clarke: 80th, 1:04.03

JV girls: 3rd overall (Top five: Claire Davies 10th, Nicolette Paulus 14th, Casey Sherer 16th, Avrie Van Tillburg 17th, Savanna Brentlinger 18th)

test at Meadows’ terrain park. Expected to dominate again this season, HRV’s freestyle ski team has established itself as the trail-blazer in the developing sport of high school freestyle (slopestyle, halfpipe, rail jam and skier cross) competition. The Eagles claimed league and state titles in every freestyle event last season and among the standouts back on the lineup are returning state champions Bergemann (overall, skiercross, slopestyle and rail jam), Tucker Fitz Simons (overall, rail jam and slopestyle) and Partick Crompton (skiercross). Bergemann, a senior, finished her 2013-2014 season in Copper Mountain, Colo., where she won USASA freeskiing national titles in her division in slopestyle, halfpipe and rail jam events.

In all, coach Keillor says

he has a bigger, better team to work with this season, so he expects good things both at the league and state level.

“We have 46 kids this year,” he said. “There’s a healthy amount of competition at the top level and I would expect to see several of our athletes right up there.”

He said the low snowpack and late opening to the season did have an effect on his athletes, but that there’s still plenty of time to get proper training in before league and state championships.

The team competes at Meadows for most of the season, with a few races scheduled for Ski Bowl, assuming there’s enough snow. Both alpine and freestyle state championships are at also Meadows this season (March 4-6).



Photo by Adam Lapiere

WINNERS

Seven young sure-shots advanced qualified for the annual Knights of Columbus Hoop Shoot district championship, set for Feb. 8 at Wy’east Middle School. The qualifier contest was held at Hood River Valley High School, on the final day of the HRVHS holiday break basketball camp last week. Contestants had 15 shots from the free-throw line and the highest-percentage shooter in each age group won. Qualifying for the regional event, which is a qualifier for the state contest, will be (back to front, left to right) Jack Siekkinen, Greyson Losee, Dylan Santee, Robert Rowan, Emma Kelly, Izaiah Adams and Abigail Witt Inman.

HIGHS

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■ We’ve also had some more round winners in our leagues. In the Tuesday morning ladies Workshirkers, the dynasty Nobi’s foursome emerged on top once again as they have so often done in the past. Bowling for Nobi’s are local legends Shirley Thornhill, Nina Kruckenberg, Charlotte Sevrens and Nancy Asai.

In the Tuesday Nite Mixed the Take Ten crew of Dawnell Espersen, Slats Jeffries, Carl Casey, Sandy Holmes and Ken Espersen



HIGH ROLLERS: Pat Olson and Nancy Asai hold the highest averages in town with 217 and 193, respectively.



took top honors.

Winning the first half in the Wednesday afternoon senior Colts & Fillies league are the Hit and Miss quartet of Karen Driver, Kevin Rogers, Adria Erwin and Kim McCartney.

The importance of winning a round is big because these teams qualify to bowl for their respective league titles in their championship roll off matches at the end of the season. Great bowling everybody!

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