

https://www.telegraphherald.com/news/tri-state/article_6461cdd8-268f-5633-8f82-dfd21577f9fd.html

Galena ski resort celebrates 60th season

BY BEN JACOBSON ben.jacobson@thmedia.com

Jan 19, 2020

GALENA, Ill. — Graduates of Chestnut Mountain Resort's ski school can't be blamed for feeling a bit peckish.

After all, junk food serves as a core educational principle for fledgling skiers. To slow down, their skis should form a wedge, just like a slice of pizza. Speeding up means moving the skis parallel to each other, giving them the appearance of oversized French fries.

It's a concept that can be learned and understood in mere seconds. But when newcomers are plummeting down a hill covered in a fresh layer of powder, pizza and French fries might be the last things on their minds.

But that's part of the fun, ski instructor Kent Henderson said. They might end up eating snow and chasing down runaway skis every now and then, but there's no denying the rush.

Chestnut Mountain Resort is in the midst of its 60th season in northwest Illinois, located about 10 miles south of Galena off West Blackjack Road.

Many longtime employees, including General Manager Mike Murphy, are among those celebrating the milestone.

Murphy started at Chestnut as a busboy 40 years ago when he was a high school student.

"At that time, I just loved the industry," he said. "Skiing and snowboarding were exciting to me. It was a growing sport."

He stayed on year after year, eventually ascending to his current rank. He's watched a lot of things change.

"Our biggest change is probably we started with one lift in 1959, and now we have six lifts and a vast snow-making system, and year-round offerings, (both) summer and winter," Murphy said.

The resort was built in phases through the decades. The Chalet section came first in 1959, and the Edelweiss sections were built in 1971. The Skier Service building was added in 1997.

A hotel offers 99 guest rooms, and the resort can accommodate conferences of up to 200 people. A reception area also is available for large gatherings and banquets.

It's also a huge draw for the entire Jo Daviess County business community, according to Wendy Bade-Gilpin, president of the Galena Area Chamber of Commerce.

"They bring in a lot of overnight guests (and day-trippers)," she said. "It's going to be a trickle-down (effect). You're going to get the lodging, you're going to get the food and you're going to get the shoppers."

But the main draw is the slopes. There are 19 ski slopes and snowboard trails, the longest of which stretches 3,500 feet. Courses are available for skiers and snowboards of all skill levels.

Beginners typically meet with Henderson or his team. While his title is snow sports director, most will know him as the man behind "ski school."

"Teaching skiing is great," Henderson said. "It's not like physics or math or anything. There are people who really struggle with it, and there are people who really enjoy doing it."

Travis Andry, of Chicago, has been bringing his wife and four kids to Chestnut for about four years.

"It's the best one, I think, in the area for the whole family to go to," he said. "They've got the best lessons, but also the facilities."

Travis and his kids are active with the resort's race team, but his wife rarely spends the whole day on the slopes.

"They've got facilities where she can sit and relax," Andry said.

Andry, who has been skiing since he was a child, said Crazy Horse is his favorite run.

“It feels like it’s longer than the other ones because it kind of bends around,” he said. “As you’re coming around, you get a nice view of the whole countryside and the river.”

Henderson also boasts 30-plus years at Chestnut. He came to Galena to open a clay arts studio and was looking for a seasonal gig to tide him over during the slow season.

“I started working out here and just kind of fell in love with the scenery of Chestnut,” he said.

You never know who is going to find a new home out on the slopes.

“Our staff here on our ski school are excellent instructors,” Henderson said. “We had a gentleman named Bob who started skiing when he was 70 and he became a part-time ski instructor when he was 72.”

Longtime employees like Henderson are what keep Chestnut strong, Murphy said.

“I think the greatest strength is the number of long-term employees we have who are passionate about Chestnut,” he said. “(There are) a lot of lifelong employees here.”

chestnut mountain resort

Chestnut Mountain Resort is located at 8700 W. Chestnut Mountain Road in Galena, Ill. For more information, visit ChestnutMTN.com or call 800-397-1320.

To view live camera feeds of the action at Chestnut, visit <https://bit.ly/39WXtQr>.