



## **2025 Minnesota Nordic Skiing Lifetime Achievement Awards**

**Minnesota Nordic Skiing Lifetime, Biathlon, Master Skier,  
and Community Ski Organization  
Recognitions**

**Sunday, April 6, 2025  
Vasaloppet Nordic Center, Mora, MN**

# Minnesota Nordic Skiing Lifetime Achievement Awards Program

## ***2025 Lifetime Achievement Award*** Neil King, Ben Croft

### ***2025 Minnesota Biathlon, Master Skier, and Community Ski Organization Recognitions***

Minnesota Based Biathlon  
High Achievers:  
Annelise Baird, Eric Anderson

Minnesota Master Skiers:  
Adrian Watt, Patti Harvieux

Minnesota Community Ski Organization Excellence:  
North Star Ski Touring Club

### ***Recognition of past Lifetime Award Recipients***

2006 Glen Johnstone  
2007 Norm Oakvik  
2008 Mike Marciniak, Anne Rykken  
2009 Lars Kindem, George Hovland  
2010 Bob O'Hara, Pat Lanin  
2011 Bjorn Lasserude  
2012 Jack Jeffery  
2013 John Filander  
2014 Emily Lanin, Bill Simpson  
2015 Avho Taipale  
2016 Bob Montebello  
2017 Bonnie Fuller-Kask, Larry Myers  
2018 Bruce Adelman, Darby Nelson  
2019 Glenn A. Fuller, Roland Ring-Jarvi  
2020 Paula Anderson, Gary Larson  
2021 Dave Paulson, Mark Helmer  
2022 Antonina Anikin, Jan Guenther  
2023 Muriel Gilman, Dave Johnson  
2024 Kris Hansen, Nancy Bauer

### ***Recognition of Lifetime Legacy Award Recipients***

2016 Nikolai Anikin  
2016 Robin Baker  
2016 Charlie Banks  
2016 John Burton  
2016 Earle Dickinson  
2016 Tim Knopp  
2016 Jinny McWethy  
2016 Brother Charles Rademacher  
2016 Toni St. Pierre  
2016 Al Waverek  
2016 Don Wolter  
2023 Phil Zink  
2023 John Dyste  
2023 John Schmitt  
2023 Norman Kragseth



# 2025 MINNESOTA NORDIC SKIING LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

## Neil King

Neil King grew up in Park Rapids, MN where he started skiing at age 5 with his family at a local resort which offered a rope tow on a hill above a lake. At 16 he was teaching downhill skiing at the Val Chatel ski resort north of Park Rapids. One day the owner brought 10 sets of cross country skis, poles, and boots to the ski hill. Several hours later, he informed Neil that he had a cross country ski class to teach. It was the first time Neil had ever been on skinny skis. The class was satisfactory and Neil was on his way as a cross country skier and instructor. He also taught downhill skiing in Taos, New Mexico during his years out west in the mountains.

Neil and his family came back to Minnesota and he became involved with recreational Nordic skiing around the Park Rapids area when a new ski trail, Long Pine, was developed on the outskirts of the city in 1980. When conditions at that trail deteriorated due to adjacent development and logging in the mid 1990's, Neil joined with a core group of skiers to discuss the possibility of locating a new trail. At that meeting he was elected president of the ski group, that became what is now named the Itascatur Outdoor Activity Club, a position he held for 17 years. Currently, Neil is the Ski Director for the club. Previously, Neil had also served simultaneously as the club's Bike Director.



Under his leadership the Itascatur Outdoor Activity Club grew steadily. The new, longer Soaring Eagle trail was built and paid for by the club on DNR school forest land, located nine miles north of Park Rapids. In the early years the trails were groomed for classical skiing only, using one lone snowmobile, which could only be operated by the owner. Trails were only groomed when he had time. Neil realized that this needed to change and encouraged the club to purchase a snowmobile and to take over the grooming job themselves. Things progressed and a snowmobile and grooming attachments were acquired and a shed was built for the snowmobile with a little lean-to so the skiers could warm up in. In 2003, the club built the current very functional warming house, paid for entirely by the club.

Neil was instrumental in the club's provision of cross country ski equipment and exercise bike donations to the Century Middle School in Park Rapids. He also worked at obtaining and then donating used ski equipment for the Itascatur Club to keep at the Soaring Eagle Trailhead to loan out to people wanting to learn how to ski on the club's "Sunday Ski Days".

Outside of club activity Neil was, and remains to this day, a serious triathlete, having raced in about 200 triathlons around the country and participated in three Ironman triathlons including the Ironman World Championships in Hawaii. Neil has and continues to support and train other triathletes. Neil has raced in regional ski races including the Birkie, Mora Vasaloppet, Minnesota Finlandia, Pepsi Challenge, Buena Vista Snowjourn, Maplelag Lovolta Cup, and others.

One of his most enjoyable stints as a cross country ski instructor was the four years he taught visitors from all over the world (many of whom had never seen snow) at 3M's Wonenok corporate retreat near Park Rapids how to ski. He still teaches private lessons to skiers wanting to 'up their game' at many levels. Through Neil's efforts, over the decades, he has elevated the Itascatur Outdoor Activity Club in terms of better trails, improved trail head facilities, better grooming equipment, more ski equipment, and more ski classes. Neil has been a key leader in encouraging, mentoring, and enhancing the sport of Nordic skiing in North Central Minnesota and beyond, for which Neil is truly deserving of the Minnesota Nordic Skiing Lifetime Achievement Award!

# 2025 MINNESOTA NORDIC SKIING LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

## Ben Croft



Ben's cross country skiing adventures began with a night class for beginning Nordic skiers in Biwabik, where he was working for the railroad and coaching hockey and track. Ben had grown up playing hockey at Two Harbors High School, but it didn't take long for him to jump right into skiing as well, and he began participating in citizen ski races.

At about this time the Nordic trails were being developed at Giants Ridge. Ben wanted to be part of this growing sport, so he took a ski patrolling class and became one of the first Nordic ski patrollers at Giants Ridge.

In 1984 Ben volunteered to work with John Filander and Gary Larson as part of the course crew for the World Cup that was held at Giants Ridge that year. From 1986 to 1989 Ben was the race director of the Pepsi Challenge. He was also the race director for the Hoyt Lakes Skate from 1997 to 2004. Ben's philosophy has been that it takes many good people to make a ski

team, or to run a quality race, and he has always worked with a great supporting cast.

In 1989 Ben was recruited by Jack Jeffery, who had helped him improve his skiing technique at the start of his skiing journey, to help coach high school skiers with the Mesabi East Nordic Ski Team. Ben enjoyed coaching and continued on to become head coach of the team. In 1993 he coached at the Junior National Championships in Bend, Oregon. In 2009 and 2015 Ben was named assistant coach of the year by the Minnesota High School Nordic Ski Coaches Association. Skiers that Ben has coached have excelled at high levels in high school and USSA races. Ben continues to coach individual skiers and helps the high school ski teams at Mesabi East, Cloquet, and Two Harbors.

In recent years Ben has been more involved in race organizing as part of a group of 'older' coaches who help to organize and run high school races, Sections, and the State High School Nordic Ski Meet. Ben also continues to work on the ski course for the Pepsi Challenge. He was a course groomer for eight years at Giants Ridge, and two years at Pine Valley in Cloquet.

When not coaching, grooming, or organizing Ben is an avid skier, biker, and canoeist. In the early nineties Ben joined the Excel/Peloton ski team that was run by Mike Hecker. Over the years Ben has completed many Birkies, Korties, and numerous citizen races, usually finishing near the top of his age group. Ben has also done several long-distance bike tours, and completed the Border to Border (run, bike, canoe) race in 1988 and 1995.

In 2016 Ben started assisting Mike Hecker, who had become a Rex Ski Wax distributor, with waxing skis for young skiers competing in CXC races. In 2018 a group of these skiers, coached by Ben, formed a group named 'Croft's Crew'. The enterprising young men contacted Rex Wax in Finland and secured sponsorship for Rex ski suits to wear at the USSA races. The 'Crew' gave back to the community by adopting a two-mile section of highway for the semi-annual Minnesota Highway clean-up.

For over 50 years Ben has been a positive influence in the ski community with his involvement in virtually every aspect of Nordic Skiing: racing, coaching, organizing, trail development, trail grooming, and waxing. Ben's contributions are very deserving of recognition with the Minnesota Nordic Skiing Lifetime Achievement Award!

# 2025 MINNESOTA BASED BIATHLON HIGH ACHIEVEMENT

## Annelise Baird



Annelise is 17 and is a junior at Brainerd High School. She started skiing shortly after her 2nd birthday and has been on skis ever since. Annelise started training for biathlon with coach Bill Meyer in summer 2022 and has been competing in biathlon ever since. Her top biathlon results include a 1st place finish in the Youth Women's Sprint at the August 2024 Summer Rollerski Biathlon Nationals (Jericho, VT), 3rd in the Youth Women's 6km Sprint, and 3rd in Youth Women's 9km Mass Start in the December 2024 U.S. Biathlon Youth and Junior Nationals & International Team Trials (Soldier Hollow, UT).

Following the US Team Trials, Annelise represented the US in IBU Junior Cup Races in January 2005 in Jakuszyce, Poland and the IBU Junior Open European Championships in Altenberg, Germany. In Poland she was 50th in the Sprint, 56th in the Mass Start 60, and 72nd in a second sprint. In Germany Annelise raced to 78th in the Individual, 16th in the Mixed Relay (with Eric Anderson as one of her teammates), and 79th in the Sprint. Annelise has skied

on the Brainerd High School Nordic varsity team for four years and has attended the last four State Nordic Ski Meets, along with six State Meets in her other sports of track and cross country. Annelise has brought home three All State finishes, including two for Nordic skiing.

When Annelise is not training, she can be found playing with her dogs, cooking good food and hanging out with her friends. She also really enjoys learning more about the sport of cross country skiing and biathlon and watching World Cup races. In her future Annelise hopes to ski in college or pursue a full time biathlon career, and is forever excited about where the sports of cross country skiing and biathlon might take her. Annelise's parents are Owen and Heather Baird.

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## Eric Anderson

Eric is a senior at Lake City High School. He is on the Nordic, cross country, and track teams. He has been skiing competitively since 7th grade. Eric skied to first place in all his 2024-25 regular season high school Nordic races, was the Section 1 Champion, and finished 13th at State. Eric also trains with the Minneapolis Ski Club and skis at JNQ races. Eric was introduced to biathlon as a 7th grader by Holly Hanson of Bluff Country Biathlon. That same year he attended a novice race and he has been very committed as a biathlete ever since!

Eric attended the 2022 and 2023 US Biathlon Nationals placing 2nd in the U17 Boys Pursuit race both years. In the 2025 season, Eric competed in the USBA team trials at Soldier Hollow, UT, and had a 1st place finish in the Youth 7.5K Sprint and a 3rd place finish in the Youth 12K Mass Start, qualifying him for both the USBA Youth and Junior teams competing in Poland, Germany, and Sweden. Eric had a 53rd place finish in the IBU Junior Cup 10K Sprint race in Jakuszyce, Poland, a 22nd place in the 12.5K Individual, and anchored the 10th place finish in the Men's 3x 7.5K Relay at the Youth and Junior World Championships in Ostersund, Sweden. Eric is very grateful for the support and training he has received from coaches Bill Meyer, Gregg Pattison, and others.



When Eric isn't training he enjoys spending time with friends, biking, hiking, and other outdoor activities. After high school he plans to continue pursuing his biathlon dreams by training year-round with either a biathlon club or the Vermont National Guard. Eric is thankful for the opportunities he has had so far as a biathlete and he is hopeful to continue to positively represent Minnesota and the US in biathlon. Eric's parents are Jim and Christine Anderson.

## 2025 MINNESOTA MASTER SKIERS

### Patti Harvieux

Patti's journey into Nordic skiing is one of passion, perseverance, and community, making her a true ambassador for the sport. Growing up in Oklahoma, winter sports weren't part of Patti's childhood. She moved to Minnesota at 10 and later became a competitive runner at the University of Minnesota, continuing marathons into her 30s. When running took a toll on her body, she sought a new way to stay active.

After moving to Duluth 30 years ago, Patti bought a pair of touring skis from Ski Hut and took to the trails, essentially running on skis! When her daughter joined KidSki, she was introduced to Nordic skiing. Encouraged by mentors like Robin Downs, she quickly fell in love with the sport. That passion led her to take over KidSki and help found the Duluth Cross Country Ski Club (DXC), expanding opportunities for skiers of all ages.

Patti's dedication has evolved from learning to skiing competitively. Her marquee event is the American Birkebeiner, where she races in the elite women's wave. She recalls her best race as a Pre-Birkie, where everything clicked, and she found herself skiing among competitors she had long admired.

Beyond racing, Patti gives back by coaching at Duluth East High School, fostering a love for the sport among young athletes. Locally, she can often be found on her home trails at Lester-Amity or tackling the Grand Avenue Nordic Ski Center's demanding 'hamster wheel' loop. The Spirit-Magnay Loop is another favorite, offering technical challenge and beauty.

For Patti, skiing is about more than personal achievement—it's about community. She believes organizations like DXC and MNSA play a crucial role in preserving and expanding access to skiing, building infrastructure, and fostering skier connections. As she turns 60 this year, Patti remains as dedicated as ever, continuing to train, race, and inspire. Her journey from a latecomer to an influential community leader and competitor is a testament to her drive and the power of perseverance.



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### Adrian Watt

Adrian was born on December 29, 1947 in Omaha, NE. Soon afterwards, his family moved to Northern Minnesota and settled in the Duluth area.

Adrian received his first pair of skis when he was 8 years old, and back then skis were not specific. He used the same skis for cross-country, jumping, and downhill. After getting his new skis, Adrian skied everywhere: across the countryside, over jumps, and down creeks.

When Adrian was about 10, he started skiing at Chester Bowl in Duluth, where there was a ski jump. The state high school cross country ski championships were also held there on a 5 km loop. In 1964, the jumping and cross-country State Championships were held at Chester Bowl. Adrian jumped in the morning, winning the Minnesota high school title, then raced cross country in the afternoon. He went on to win two US Junior National titles.

Adrian was a member of the US Ski Jumping team from 1965 through 1972 and won the US championship in 1969 with a hill-record jump of 251 feet in Brattleboro, Vermont. He set a North American record of 337 feet during the 1968 US Olympic trials in Iron Mountain, Michigan. Adrian was also a member of the 1968 Winter Olympic Ski Team in Grenoble, France. Adrian skied the cross country race courses after competing as a ski jumper at many iconic venues, including Holmenkollen, Norway; Lahti, Finland; and Falun, Sweden.

After Adrian's ski jumping career, he was encouraged by his friends, George Hovland and Rick Scott, to ski the American Birkebeiner. Adrian started skiing the Birkie in its third year and has been skiing every year since, except for 2002, when he was working as Course Chief for the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, UT. This year will be Adrian's 48th Birkie, which is part of his resume of 65 marathons, including marathons in Traverse City, MI and West Yellowstone, MT.

When the Snowflake Nordic Center opened in Duluth in 1990, Adrian helped to coach the kid's ski program. He also waxed skis for the Duluth East XC ski team. Adrian's son, Andre, carries on the family dedication to skiing as a representative for Salomon Nordic.



# Minnesota Nordic Ski Association

Having formed in 2001 as a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and advancing the sport of Cross Country/Nordic skiing in Minnesota, the Minnesota Nordic Ski Association (MNSA) is now in its 24<sup>th</sup> year of operation. MNSA's founding and primary focus throughout its history is to serve as the liaison organization between the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Grant-In-Aid (GIA) Ski Pass Program and ski clubs, trail organizations, cities, counties, and state parks that rely on GIA funding to maintain, improve, and groom the 93 public ski trails in the ski pass system. MNSA has had numerous accomplishments over the years that have led to the improvement and enhancement of the Ski GIA program.

In 2006 MNSA established the annual Minnesota Nordic Skiing Lifetime Award to recognize individuals who have contributed significantly to the advancement of Nordic skiing in Minnesota. In 2017 the award categories, Minnesota Based Biathlon High Achievers and Minnesota Master Skier were added. In 2024 MNSA added the Minnesota Nordic Skiing Ski Community Excellence as an award category. Individuals, ski clubs, trail and race organizations, and ski retail interests are invited to join MNSA to help further the advancement of Nordic skiing in Minnesota.

***MNSA wishes to acknowledge and thank the generous donations from the following:***

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe • Geri Nelson • Solbakken Resort • Cascade Lodge  
ABR Trails • Severt's Woods Mapleworks and the Ursa Minor Cabin

## **Current Ski Club / Ski Organization Membership in MNSA**

- Bemidji Area X-C Ski Club
- Brainerd Ski Club
- Duluth Cross-Country Ski Club
- Itascatur Club, Park Rapids
- Lake Country Nordic Ski Association, Cass County
- Nordic Ski Club-Central MN, St. Cloud
- Norpine Trail Association, Lutsen
- North Star Ski Touring Club
- Northern Lights Nordic Ski Club, Grand Rapids
- Sugarbush Trail Association, Tofta
- Vasaloppet USA

## **Current Nordic Ski Business Membership in MNSA**

- Leaning Barn Farm
- Hidden Valley Hideaway
- Revolution Bike & Ski

## **Current MNSA Board**

Tolly Vollen  
Bruce Slinkman  
Deb Diggins  
Neil Franz  
Ken Jorgenson  
Greg Fangel  
Bob O'Hara  
Greg "Boomer" Moritko  
Arne Stefferud  
Kent Montgomery  
Brita Sailer  
Nicholas Culp  
Chip Treen  
Emily Ranta

## ***Sponsoring Member Organizations:***

Duluth XC Ski Club  
Maplelag Resort  
11 Wildflower Lane

***Thank you for your extra support of MNSA's mission!***

## Claire Wilson

### Keynote Presentation for 2025 Minnesota Nordic Skiing Lifetime Achievement Awards Program



Claire Wilson is a Louisiana native who fell in love with snow the day she read her first Little House on the Prairie book. She was introduced to cross country skiing in her first year at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine and she quickly fell deeply in love with the sport. She skied for Bowdoin and after graduation made the decision to move to Minneapolis, based largely on the fact that she could continue skiing there.

Claire spent her early years in the Twin Cities volunteering for the City of Lakes Loppet until she eventually became the organization's first paid employee. Her experience in those early days of the Loppet exposed her to the vast network of cross country ski enthusiasts in Minnesota and she spent many years organizing the Loppet, racing in citizen races across the state, and training with other local skiers. In her early years at the Loppet she started the year-round Get Outside Programs which would later become Loppet Adventures.

Claire eventually left the Loppet to pursue a career in nonprofit management and public policy. She spent three decades working in leadership positions across various sectors including the Loft Literary Center, the Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State, and the Minnesota Association of Community Mental Health Programs. She then was tapped to serve as a political appointee in the Minnesota Department of Human Services under both Governor Dayton and Governor Waltz. She was thrilled to return home to the Loppet in 2020 as Executive Director. She led the organization through a period of growth that included an expanded focus on DEI initiatives, increased membership, and additional nature-based outdoor and art activities.

One of Claire's greatest challenges, and greatest successes, in her Executive Director role, came with the decision to host the 2024 Stifel Loppet Cup. Although Canada had hosted a number of Cross Country World Cup races in the prior decade, none had been held in the United States since 2001. Claire's belief in the inspirational value of an event of this caliber for the local and national ski community, and for the citizens of Minnesota, held up through financial pressures, melting snow, and many logistical challenges to produce one of the most memorable weekends in Minnesota sports history. The tens of thousands of fans who lined the Loppet Cup course were delighted with the opportunity to cheer for the best athletes in the world including home town favorite, Jessie Diggins! At the conclusion of the race weekend, the International Ski Federation stated that this joyful and well-run event should be a model for future World Cup race weekends!

Claire now lives in Washington D.C. with her partner, their teen-age daughter, two-cats and a one-eyed Shih Tzu. She misses Minnesota.

### Welcome to the Vasaloppet Nordic Center Complex

The Vasaloppet and Mora community is very proud of this facility, which was built exclusively with private donations. Construction of this three-building complex began in 1999 with the building of the Nordic Center. The Nordic Center features a wax room, changing and shower areas as well as saunas. The Center also has a small kitchen and plenty of room upstairs and downstairs for events. After that building was completed, the "Garage" building was constructed and today serves as a garage for the Vasaloppet grooming equipment during the snow season and as a social facility for Vasaloppet events. The third building of the complex is a storage and maintenance building for Vasaloppet groomers and equipment. The Nordic Center serves as the focal point of over 12 kilometers of ski trails, which also includes three kilometers of lighted trail. Snowmaking efforts cover the trail system with manufactured snow for great season-long skiing. There is currently no cost for skiers to use the Center, which is maintained through skier donations, Vasaloppet funds, and volunteer labor. Thank you for attending this afternoon and we hope to see you next winter on the trails here at the Nordic Center. -Mora Vasaloppet USA