



**BY BOB WILLIAMS**

**NEWJERSEYNEWSROOM.COM**

**SKIING AND SNOWBOARDING**

WARWICK, N.Y. – A dozen or so families from Our lady of Good Counsel Church on Staten Island wanted to spend the Martin Luther King school holiday this week skiing. So Cyd Downing piped up and suggested they visit Mt. Peter, a smallish pint-sized ski area nestled alongside Route 17A here in Warwick, a few miles from New Jersey.

The families, many with two, three or four excited children, arrived here early and headed straight to the ski school. Like a growing number of other families – and even adults -- from the tri-state area, they knew that ski and snowboard lessons for beginners here at Mt. Peter are absolutely, positively free!

With a summit elevation of only 1,250 ft. and a vertical drop of a mere 450 ft., Mt. Peter ( [www.mtpeter.com](http://www.mtpeter.com) ) continues to draw a steady stream of beginner skiers and snowboarders. Fact is, Mt. Peter, now in its 76th year, is the oldest operating ski area in New York State, and one of the few remaining family operated ski areas in the country. It was opened in 1936 by Macy's department store to show off and sell its ski clothing.

Don and Gail Sampson, and their daughters Aimee and Rebecca, have owned and operated Mt. Peter since 1970.

In the trade, this relatively small ski area, with a sole focus on giving youngsters their first taste of skiing and snowboarding, is known as a feeder mountain.

“I suggested we come here to Mt. Peter because I know they offer free lessons,” said Downing, who was accompanied by her husband, Rich, and 11-year-old son Robert. “With the economy the way it is, each family in our group saved a lot of money by not having to pay for initial lessons. And Mt. Peter is small enough so the kids can go off on their own. They can’t get lost because every trail leads back to the base lodge.”

Mt. Peter has 11 ski trails, spread over 60 skiable acres, ranging from beginner to expert, serviced by three double-chairlifts. It features a terrain park for snowboarders and a variety of school racing programs. The area provides 100 percent snowmaking, and it remains open for night skiing.



“The best way to describe us is that we are a family resort where your kids learn how to ski,” says Rob Gallo, the mountain school director since 2003 who’s been at Mt. Peter for the past 20 years. “Once we get you down the hill we’ll keep you.”

Gallo goes on to say that free ski and snowboard lessons for beginners is Mt. Peter’s chief marketing tool. The mountain school (it’s not called a ski school any more because instructors also teach snowboarding) offers free lessons on weekends and holidays to first-time skiers and snowboarders age five and older, he says. Free lessons are usually given at 10 a.m., noon and 2 p.m.

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“We provide private lessons for children and for adults, too,” Gallo adds. In fact, he says, the school gave private lessons to about 100 skiers and snowboarders on the Martin Luther King holiday.

“In the 75 years since Mt. Peter opened, many things in the ski industry have changed,” says Carol Fauerbach, Mt. Peter’s marketing director. “A snowplow is now called a wedge, skis have gotten shorter and they have names such as parabolic and shaped and, of course, snowboarding has emerged.”



She adds that “one thing that has not changed is the strong family atmosphere and sense of comfort that Mt. Peter has created. Season after season, year after year, we see adults toting their children to ski or snowboard for the first time, and we find that they had learned to ski here at Mt. Peter when they were children. Numerous times, at countless locations throughout the country, our employees have met folks whose ears perk up at the mention of Mt. Peter. Some reminiscing always follows an excited ‘Hey, I learned to ski there!’”

Fauerbach says that “while the ski business is always changing, one thing will remain the same. Whether you’ve been a customer for years, or are a first-timer, coming to Mt. Peter is now, and

will forever be, like coming home.”

## **SHORT SCHUSSES –**

This Saturday, Jan. 21, it's the Big Air Contest at **Pats Peak** in Henniker, N.H. There will be snowboarder and skier divisions, with more than \$1,000 in prizes.

### **The New England Ski Museum**

in Franconia, N.H., is offering \$3,000 in grants to support individuals and organizations that will help the museum's mission to preserve the history of skiing and winter sports. For more information:

[www.skimuseum.org](http://www.skimuseum.org)

. Today through Sunday (Jan. 19-22), you won't want to miss the 49th running of the

### **Amsoil World Championship Snowmobile Derby**

on the Eagle River in Wausau, Wisc., the official Snowmobile Capital of the World. Known as the Grand Daddy of all snowmobile races, the four-day event could draw up to 30,000 participants and spectators.

## **SKI CONDITIONS**

[www.snocountry.com/index.php/ski-reports-by-region/northeast-snow-conditions](http://www.snocountry.com/index.php/ski-reports-by-region/northeast-snow-conditions)

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