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## Water-skiing for all

*Skiforall Foundation's adaptive-water-sports program brings smiles, memories*

By Bob Taylor

Kevin Hopkins grinned ear-to-ear after water skiing last Saturday for the first time in 32 years — since suffering a spinal-chord injury at age 16. “It brought back all the memories. It was great,” Hopkins said of water skiing using adaptive equipment on Lake Sammamish. Hopkins, 52, was one of 30 participants in the nonprofit Skiforall Foundation’s free adaptive-water-sports demonstration at Lake Sammamish State Park. Skiforall provides outdoor recreational programs for people with physical and cognitive disabilities, a program that started in 1979 with 35 participants learning to ski at Snoqualmie Summit.



Kayla Wheeler, 7, of Lynnwood \By Stacy Goodman

Last year, more than 500 volunteers worked with 1,716 participants. The program is best known for winter-season instruction in snowboarding, snowshoeing and cross-country and downhill skiing. But Skiforall also offers summer activities — cycling, hiking, rock climbing, camping, river rafting and canoeing. The latter three activities will be presented in a free demonstration starting at 9:30 a.m. July 10 in North Bend. Skiforall holds free demo days so people with disabilities can try the equipment before signing up for the programs, which do cost participants. Last Saturday’s event brought out people of all ages with a variety of disabilities and experience. Kayla Wheeler, 7, of Lynnwood was one of several who used a sit-down water ski. While Kayla, who was born with no legs and one arm, is well known for her tenacity on the snow slopes, she had a blast water-skiing. John Stevenson, Skiforall training director and program manager, asked Kayla following her water-ski turn, “What’s the good word?” Kayla responded enthusiastically, “I want to go again! I want to go again!” Her father, Dean Wheeler, was beaming with pride. “I know what I have to build for her now,” he said. Stevenson made sure the ski was adapted to each participant, and two boats of volunteers. For safety purposes, two boats always trail a skier in case there is a problem. “There is always someone ready to jump in the water to help a person if there’s an emergency,” said Barry Long of Woodinville. Long, a paraplegic from a motorcycle accident 13 years ago, helps teach adaptive water skiing. “When you see people coming in smiling, that’s what it’s all about. That’s why I do this,” Long said. Jeff Morris, 43 of Seattle, was hoping to get another opportunity to ski, too. “I used to be real good at water-skiing before I got hurt,” said Morris, who broke his back in a sky-diving accident. “This was an absolute blast,” Morris said. “I will have a high for days. This is the most fun I’ve had in a long time.” Margaret Higashiyama, 11, of Sammamish, went for a tube ride. She, too, had a big grin the entire time. B.G. Miller, a sixth-grader from LaConner, came with his father, Timothy. “This is just a fantastic program,” Timothy said. “Through Skiforall, B.G. has been able to go hiking, skiing, camping and do a lot of things that aren’t available in some communities.” Stevenson, who joined Skiforall 10 years ago as a volunteer ski instructor, was pleased with the turnout. “It has been a highly successful day,” he said. Equally pleased was executive director Ed Bronsdon. “When you see this event you realize that this is really is ski for all and not just some,” Bronsdon said. “I just love days like this.”