

Hastings Snowshoe Hustle sets hearts and feet racing]



By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The snow was flying and people's spirits were soaring at the Hastings Snowshoe Hustle at Cedar Ridge Camp in McArthurs Mills on March 4 from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Organized by Hastings Destination Trails Inc., with assistance from the Ontario Trails Council and Cedar Ridge Camp, 67 people came out to this winter fun day that featured snowshoe races and activities for the whole family. Cathy Trimble from HDTI, Grayson Burke from Cedar Ridge Camp, Patrick Connor from the Ontario Trails Council, Lisa Smith from HDTI and Carrie McKenzie from the Carlow Mayo Public Library comment on this event.

The Hastings Snowshoe Hustle was held at Camp Cedar Ridge on March 4 from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. The sponsors were Bancroft Foodland (www.foodland.ca/stores/foodland-bancroft/), Dion Snowshoes (www.dionnevitrek.com), St. John's Ambulance (www.sja.ca), Mack Attack Outdoors (www.mackattackoutdoors.com), Physio North (www.physionorth.ca) and Bancroft General Mercantile (www.facebook.com/bancroftgeneralmercantile/).

Trimble told Bancroft This Week on March 2 this was the first year a Snowshoe Canada sanctioned snowshoe race had been held in Hastings County, and that the local officials present were also trained by Snowshoe Canada. The day featured a one-kilometre family fun run and a 4.5 kilometre and nine-kilometre Snowshoe Canada sanctioned snowshoe races. Trimble said there would also be a craft program for the kids in the lodge.

"There's going to be skating, tobogganing, campfires with smores and lunch will be provided. There's going to be tonnes for people to be able to do," she says.

Burke is director and co-founder of Cedar Ridge Camp. Opened in 2006, it is a traditional summer camp for children aged seven to 16 years of age, and its 150 acres on Wannamaker Lake also offer a year-round outdoor education and group retreat centre. He told Bancroft This Week on March 2 that this is the first time they have hosted a snowshoe race.

"We are thrilled to be hosting the Hasting Snowshoe Hustle. We typically host schools and private groups, so we are excited to open our doors to the local community and racers from across Ontario. We are expecting a good turnout of racers and volunteers," he says.

McKenzie is the CEO and head librarian with the Carlow Mayo Public Library, who told Bancroft This Week on March 2 that Trimble reached out to them to see if they would be interested in hosting the crafts and games so that parents would have time to get

lunch and have a break that day.

“We are super excited to see what all is going to happen. We have several craft options for the kids, including build your own recycled snowshoes, a snowshoe hare craft, colouring, mazes and snow fun activities. The ice gems are freezing in the freezer as we speak!” she says.

Even a winter storm the night before the Snowshoe Hustle could not bury the excitement of the attendees at Cedar Ridge Camp the morning of the event. David Brown and Jillian Anderson were doing the 4.5-kilometre race, but said they'd more likely be “walking with enthusiasm.” Brown thought it was amazing.

“I got invited down here from Pembroke and I'm looking at this [Cedar Ridge Camp], going, “this is a real gem,” he says.

Connor is the executive director of the Ontario Trails Council, and he says they worked with HDTI to bring this event to fruition, which evolved out of planning work they did with the Ontario Highlands Trails Organization.

“We came together, we got a grant from the OHTO to develop a paddling development plan for the region. And then that got us involved with Cedar Ridge Camp. They came onboard because we needed some canoes and we needed some paddlers. We made a YouTube video of us paddling up near Slabtown on the lower Madawaska [River]. It's really quite beautiful and it just showcases the opportunity people have that community events like this bring people together,” he says.

Connor explains that by getting involved with Cedar Ridge Camp, there was discussion on what other non-motorized things they could do and let the community know about the myriad opportunities available to them.

“We had some discussions with Snowshoe Canada, did a planning committee for this event and went back to Snowshoe Canada and asked if they would sanction a race in our area, get some racers out so they can actually experience [a race and other amenities in our area]” he says.

Lisa Smith is a member of the HDTI planning committee that brought the Snowshoe Hustle together in the past several weeks. The other committee members were; Stefanski (board member), Burke, David Robinson (Snowshoe Canada), Bernie Hogan (consultant, snowshoe champion and elite athlete), Don Stoneman (groomer) and Carey McMaster (Traicon-project consultant). Smith said that normally an event like this would take a full year of planning.

“So the fact that this group was this incredible to do it and the community has been this incredible. That's what HDTI is all about; helping communities do these types of things, stepping back and letting them continue to own it,” she says.

Dora Yateman, chair of HDTI and a member of the Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini Algonquin First Nation, performed a smudging ceremony before the races began. Carlow Mayo Mayor Randy Wallace welcomed everyone and wished them a great day and a great race, and Connor recited the land acknowledgement. Carl Stefanski, on the planning committee with Smith, conveyed the regrets of MPP Ric Bresee and MP Shelby Kramp-Neuman and wished everyone luck with their races on their behalf. After that, Burke explained the race course and the day's activities, and then everyone headed down to the starting line.

The race results were as follows; Sebastian and Brent came in first in the one-kilometre family fun run, which wasn't timed by Snowshoe Canada. Of the timed races, Rob and Patricia Metzger came in first in the 4.5-kilometre race, and Ian Ploss came in first in the nine-kilometre race, although since he was the only snowshoer in that race, it was a foregone conclusion. Second and third place prizes for the 4.5-kilometre race were also awarded to Kevin Murphy and Jillian Anderson and David Brown and Pamela Campbell respectively and participant medals were also distributed to all racers.

Burke told Bancroft This Week on March 6 that despite the challenging snowfall, the Hastings Snowshoe Hustle was a huge success and it was great to see the number of young families the event attracted.

?Our plan was to start an annual snowshoe race in Hastings County with two main goals; to attract tourism to showcase the incredible beauty of our region and to provide an opportunity for local families to have fun and introduce the to the sport of snowshoe racing,? he says.

Burke says that at the end of the day, they had 67 people attend the event, but unfortunately, 26 runners were unable to attend due to the snowstorm. He also said that the feedback from the participants was very positive and they are looking forward to running the event again in 2024.

?Fingers crossed we don't get a snowstorm the night before,? he says. ?My back has just recovered from all the shoveling.?