

Achieve Tahoe Broadens Horizons for Many by Nancy O'Connell

In 1967, Jim Winthers, the director of the Soda Springs Ski School, brought a group of disabled Vietnam veterans to Boreal Ridge for the weekend in order to teach them how to ski. A World War II veteran with the famed 10th Mountain Division, Winthers knew he had to improvise because at the time adaptive gear for winter sports didn't exist. From that experience, Winthers recognized the need for a program that focused on getting people on snow, despite physical limitations. That same year, he founded the National Amputee Skiers Association.

In the early '80s, the organization then known as the Tahoe Adaptive Ski School, moved to Alpine Meadows. A name change a few years later to Achieve Tahoe reflects a much broader mission that includes people with all types of disabilities, (cognitive, sensory, and physical) and has evolved into a year-round outdoor recreation program. For more than 50 years, Achieve Tahoe, a founding chapter of MoveUnited, has been at the vanguard of adaptive sports.

"We're able to work with almost anyone with a disability, both children and adults" says Josephine Cormier, communications and program coordinator at Achieve Tahoe. "Our focus is on health, building confidence and independence. These experiences have a huge long-lasting impact on our students, and we see that carry over into other aspects of their lives." Achieve Tahoe's motto reflects the impact adaptive sports can have on participants. "If I can do this, I can do anything" really speaks to the life skills the program teaches.

Achieve Tahoe is the longest running adaptive sports program in the country. To keep their services

as affordable as possible, the organization, which only has 10 full-time staff members, relies on more than 200 volunteers and fund raising. Their major event, the Ability Challenge, is set for March 26, with fundraising starting in mid-February.

"This is our annual fundraiser and it's the biggest event of the year," Cormier says. "Last year was virtual but this year is back to an in-person event, with students, volunteers, and community members raising money. What's a little different about this event, is that it taps into peer-to-peer fundraising - allowing participants to tap into their individual networks. What's really fun about the Ability Challenge is having all of these people out

Photo courtesy AT



Achieve Tahoe instructors help a participant navigate the slopes.

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'If I can do this, I can do anything'
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on the mountain and having fun. And it's a great way to expose people to who we are and what we do."

To participate in the Ability Challenge, one can go to achievetahoe.org and create a fundraising page. Set a fundraising goal to reach by March 26.. Send your page link and a statement on

why you're raising money for Achieve Tahoe to all your family and friends. You will need to raise at least \$500 per person to join the Ability Challenge. The culminat-

ing celebration on March 26 will be held at Achieve Tahoe's Program Center at Alpine Meadows and includes an all-day lift ticket, catered lunch and snacks, inclusive on-hill challenges and activities

and a costume contest. In addition, all participants will be entered in a large raffle for prizes.

Currently, there is a huge demand for Achieve Tahoe services, and they currently have a waiting list. They are always looking for volunteers who are interested in teaching. The application can be found online at achievetahoe.org under the Volunteer/How to Apply tab. Volunteers need to be at least 16 years old and able to confidently ski down blue runs and willing to commit to 10 days in the first year, which includes training. For more information, visit achievetahoe.org or email info@achievetahoe.org.