

Join the CLUB!



Janet Essman Franz

Janet Essman Franz is an award winning writer, television producer and fitness instructor in Vermont. She enjoys cross-country and alpine skiing with her husband and son at resorts throughout the East.

For some people, skiing is a solitary activity. They prefer navigating trails independently at their own pace and riding the chairlift alone with their thoughts. For most of us, however, skiing is a social sport. A day on the slopes is more enjoyable when you experience it with people you know. Personally, I look forward to sharing an après-ski drink and a plate of nachos with friends while we recount our mutual thrills and spills.

Thousands of snow sports enthusiasts join ski clubs to meet people to ski and snowboard with. They also join to save money on lift tickets and travel, hone their skills and visit places they might not go to on their own. But camaraderie is key.

“It gives you someone to ski with,” said Dennis Young, member and past president of the Garden State Ski Club and current Vice President of the New Jersey Ski Council. “You meet people with similar likes and interests. You may meet a spouse that way. That’s how I did it!”

Young said he had never skied a day in his life when he joined the club, but he was recently divorced and looking for a new social circle. “It’s like a second family. You’re on vacation with these people. You see them every week at meetings. You invite them to your family functions and have them over for dinner. You go to their weddings.”

Ski club members in general are passionate about the sport, and that’s why they seek each other out. That was Vic Martell’s motive for joining the Lancaster Ski Club in Pennsylvania 18 years ago. “I wanted to socialize with people who have the same interests I do. No matter when we get together we’re always having ski conversations.”

When you’re on a bus for hours with people en route to a ski area, or spending a week together at a resort, you are bound to form friendships. The atmosphere is festive and friendly. “On day and weekend trips, snacks and beverages are provided. Sometimes we show a ski movie or play games for prizes,” said Martell, now the president of Lancaster Ski Club. “We try to keep the trip light and make the time go faster.”

Maria Rocco joined the Randolph Ski Club in New Hampshire with her boyfriend so they could each have someone to ski with at their level. “We met so many people at all different levels of skiing,” she said. The Randolph Ski Club is for singles only, so when Maria and her boyfriend wed they switched their membership to the Abenaki Ski Club, a family club based in Jackson, New Hampshire. Both clubs are part of the Eastern Inter-Club Ski

League (EICSL), for which Rocco serves as president. Now her children go on club ski trips and participate in league activities. “My kids have an adoptive family.”

Joining a club that is part of a ski council often means discounts on lift tickets, trail fees and trips, said Young. The New Jersey Ski Council represents 12,000 people in 46 clubs. Each fall the council purchases lift tickets at discounted rates to member clubs. Savings are typically around 30 percent off the ticket-window price. The club runs ski buses to areas within a few hours’ drive from New Jersey, and it arranges trips out west and overseas. Many trips are to unusual and delightful destinations that people might not travel to on their own.



**Top - National Brotherhood of Skiers visit Windham Mountain
Bottom - Ski Bums of New Jersey run a bus trip to Hunter Mountain every Wednesday**

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“We took about 100 people to Japan a couple years ago,” said Young. “This year we’re going to Panorama [British Columbia] and Jackson Hole [Wyoming].”

Day trips with the Lancaster Ski Club cost an average of \$60 for a bus ride and lift ticket. The club regularly visits areas in Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine and Quebec. Thirty-two members will travel to Bariloche, Argentina, while western destinations include Montana, Idaho, Utah and Colorado. Airfare, lodging and six days of skiing at a western U.S. resort cost about \$1400 per person with the club.

“Group travel makes it more economical,” said Martell.

Many clubs also have ski houses near the slopes. Most of the 22 clubs in EICSL have a house open for use year round. Club members pay about \$350 annual membership,

The O.C. Ski Club in Albany, New York, provides free downhill and snowboard lessons each Sunday on group trips. Many of the instructors are PSIA certified. Often just having experienced skiers and snowboarders to tag along with will help improve your skills.

“I wanted to ski better, and I figured that I could with people who ski a lot,” said Martell. He skis nearly 30 days a year, including about 22 days with the club.

Ski clubs aren’t just for winter: most clubs have social activities year round. The O.C. Ski Club sponsors an organized volleyball league and pick-up games from May through September. Other get-togethers include bicycle rides, hikes, picnics and parties. Garden State Ski Club members gather for tennis, golf, rafting and cultural events. The Lancaster Ski Club’s social calendar includes



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and then use of the house is free. “The ski houses make skiing more affordable,” said Rocco.

The Garden State Ski Club house is in Pittsford, Vermont, near Rutland. Club members may purchase a share for the season, which entitles them to a specific number of days at the house. A quarter share, for example, costs \$250 and allows the member to use the house five different weekends. Their clubhouse is also available for individual days. Club membership costs \$40 per year.

Some clubs and leagues also negotiate special pricing with ski shops and hotels. For instance, EICL has agreements with vendors throughout New England for discounts on equipment, tuning, meals and lodging.

Many ski clubs and leagues have race programs, and some offer racing and recreational lessons to members.

a summer bike rally, spring dinner dance and an annual corn roast, where they also open sales for the season’s ski trips. “About 250 people attend,” said Martell. “We also gather informally at happy hours at local pubs for a drink and a bite to eat.”

Community support is important to some clubs. The Lancaster Ski Club raises funds for Special Olympics and hosts ski trips for special needs children. The National Brotherhood of Skiers provides lessons, trips and financial support to minority athletes.

While most members support their clubs’ social missions, they join to further their own, personal recreation. “The biggest advantage is meeting so many people,” said Maria. “It’s so much fun, there are so many activities. Even if you don’t know anyone at first, you will feel comfortable.” ❄️