

SHAWNEE STUDENT PATROL ACHIEVES SUCCESS

Doug Wall has helped resurrect the Student Patrol at Shawnee Peak

BY CANDACE HORGAN

It's often said that the best way to win someone's allegiance is to get them when they are young. Several ski resorts have taken that to heart in their efforts to attract the next generation of ski patrollers through the development of young adult patrol programs at their hills.

At Shawnee Peak in Bridgton, Maine, a youth patrol program that was once disorganized and floundering has grown under the leadership of Doug Wall, a retired high school teacher. Wall has run the Shawnee Student Patrol for five years, and several of the young adults he brought into the fold have gone on to become adult patrollers on the hill.

According to Wall, Shawnee's previous program attracted one or two kids each season that were interested in patrolling. Often, the kids would come in by themselves, and there was no outreach or communication to get them more integrated with the program.

"I saw a number of kids go through that program and drop out," explained Wall. "I thought it would be a smart thing to start something up."

Wall already had a host of contacts at the local schools, which was important in gaining the schools' permission, and trust, to give presentations to the students.

"I had contacts with all the schools, so they knew who I was," Wall said. "That was key; they knew if I was coming to ask to speak to kids that it would be something worthwhile."

In his first year, Wall recruited six kids from the local high school. The following year, he recruited 12 students from two schools, and in his third year, he recruited nine students from three different schools. Wall firmly believes that proactive recruiting is important to the success of a student patrol.

"Active recruiting is where it's at," he said. "I think any mountain or patrol should be recruiting, either through the local schools, or ski programs like racing programs at the mountain. If you don't recruit, people aren't going to show up and want to ski with a bunch of 50-year-olds."

As part of Shawnee's program, the candidates spend 10 days and 10 nights shadowing adult patrollers and learning from them. The following year, they have to take an OEC class.

"Primarily, it's a look-and-see time for them," Wall said. "In the last 3-to-4 sessions, we work in some sled time. I figure it's like another carrot to get the kids interested. They have a vest they wear that identifies them as student patrollers. They were really excited about that."

Alissa Leonard came onto the student patrol when she was 15, after talking to a patroller on the chairlift who told her about the

program. For Leonard, one of the best parts about joining the program was doing something she loves with other people who enjoy it.

"Every Tuesday night, we would come in; I'm a snowboarder, so I would go with a snowboard patroller and work on my riding skills, like turns and control," she said.



All photos by Jesse Cottingham Photography.

“On Saturday days, we would come in and learn how the mountain works, seeing the ‘ins and outs.’ We learned how to open, close, and check trails. We also trained on other skills, like rope handling and some basic medical skills. We got to see more of what being an alpine patroller means.”

For Leonard, the support she received from her fellow students and the adult patrollers at Shawnee helped her confidence in learning the material in her OEC class.

“I didn’t feel intimidated; maybe a little bit, because it’s a huge responsibility at 16 years old, but it definitely was comforting to have all the support from everybody because all the patrollers were there,” she explained. “It wasn’t just, ‘Here’s the book.’ I think that’s what made it good, having a lot of support.”

The student patrollers at Shawnee can assist with medical incidents, but never run the scene as the lead. In their second year, they start practicing with toboggans, and as seniors, they can bring toboggans

to accident scenes, but they cannot transport an injured guest until they turn 18.

“It was nice because we got to announce ourselves as student patrol; we let the patients know we were there to assist and we really got to help,” said Leonard. “I think one of the first things I got to do was a sling and swathe. It was exciting, because after learning and practicing my skills, I was able to apply them on the hill.”

Wall found that having to assist and teach OEC to the student patrol proved a boon to the adult patrollers at Shawnee as well.

“One of the benefits to our patrol is that every Saturday, the kids do OEC training in the morning,” Wall said. “Last year, I had 20 kids and three or four people in the patrol who help conduct the clinic. The regular patrollers have been more aware of upping their skills; when the students are around, they are honing in on the way to do things.”

The 2009/2010 season was the first year Wall had what he calls “alumni” student patrollers. Two returned as paid

patrollers, and three more returned as volunteers, including Leonard, who found herself mentoring new student patrol candidates, helping with toboggan training and OEC.

“Because of my work and school schedule, I couldn’t always be there on the nights and days that the student patrol was there, but I definitely saw the students and got to interact with them and see them go through the same process I went through,” she said enthusiastically. “I also got to help with a student patrol clinic they held at Shawnee. It was nice to be there as a snowboard patroller, because there are several other snowboard students now. (As a student patroller) I got a lot of one-on-one training and small group training with experienced patrollers. Watching others learn in front of you and being able to help each other out and see what each person is doing right and wrong definitely helped a lot. I would like to give back and help when I can, just like others who were there and still are there for me.” +

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