

Coaches, students ski 24 hours

By SALLY ANN SHURMUR - Star-Tribune staff writer | Posted: Thursday, January 21, 2010 12:00 am

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To support the event, checks may be made payable to "24-Hour Ski," and taken to any Hilltop Bank location, or mailed to Hilltop National Bank, P.O. Box 2680, Casper, 82602-9925; attn.: Rosemary.

Local deployed families who need assistance will be aided by Daniella Hamilton and Arlene Wegner.

Hamilton, the local director of the Wyoming Military Family Assistance Program, has application forms available for families needing help. Wegner, a CPA, will review applications received, meet with applicants when necessary and make a recommendation to the Legion's Executive Committee, which will authorize payment.

Reasons that emergency funds might be needed could include but are not limited to rent, delinquent utility accounts or any other necessary responsibilities that families of deployed troops may have difficulty meeting, especially if there is a wage discrepancy between a civilian job they left and military pay. Money from the fund might also be used for group activities.

The way veteran teacher and coach Bob Matson sees it, skiing 24 hours straight on beautifully groomed Nordic trails is the easy part -- much easier than keeping the home fires burning while a loved one is deployed overseas.

The ninth annual 24-Hour Ski Marathon begins at daybreak today and continues until daybreak on Friday at the Casper Mountain Cross Country Trails Center.

Money pledged to this year's event will go to local families of deployed military men and women and will be distributed through The American Legion Deployed Family Assistance Fund, according to Stan Lowe, district Legion commander. According to Matson, participants will ski in memory of Casper veterans Tom Stroock and Tom Walsh, who both died since December.

"This is a very special event in memory of two men whose lives were shaped by service and community engagement," Matson said. "Knowing what they were in the community and what a legacy both left, we just thought it was the right thing to do."

Matson expects to start out solo this morning, but will be joined throughout the day by friends, students and members of the community as their time permits. "You just never know how many will be there," he said. "We have the kids ski during their normal practice time in the afternoon, and if they don't have a class, sometimes they'll come up extra. And then around midnight, there's a group that likes to come up."

Anyone wanting to ski should go to the trails center. Matson and crew come by the main area about every hour on the hour during the day, but when night falls, they lengthen their route to make the time pass a bit faster. He says the trails, maintained by the county, "are in terrific shape." Those who visit during the night often take chocolate and hot beverages, welcome treats for the night skiers.

Matson and the Casper cross country ski teams began the 24-Hour Ski for charity in 2002, and select a different local recipient each year to receive the money raised. The group uses a simple criteria: the charity must benefit children and focus on something that has been in the news recently, as with the large deployment of Wyoming servicemen and women last spring.