

Methow Valley News

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Beijing bound

Novie McCabe named to '22 U.S. Olympics Ski Team

Methow native will compete at winter games next week

BY RICK LEWIS

Fulfilling a childhood dream, Methow Valley native Novie McCabe has been named to the U.S. cross country ski team that will compete in the Beijing Winter Olympic Games starting next week.

McCabe, a 2020 graduate of Liberty Bell High School, is at age 20 the youngest member of the U.S. team and its only representative from Washington state.

She is extending a Methow Valley tradition: Her mother, Laura McCabe, competed for the U.S. Nordic team at the 1994 Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway, and at the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan.

And, with McCabe's inclusion on the U.S. team, this is the third consecutive Winter Olympics Games in which the Methow

Valley will be represented. Siblings Sadie Maubet Bjornsen and Erik Bjornsen, who like Novie McCabe grew up in Mazama, each competed in the 2014 Olympic Winter Games in Sochi, Russia, and at the 2018 games in PyeongChang, South Korea. Valley native Brian Gregg also represented the United States Nordic team at Sochi in 2014.

What was ahead

Novie McCabe had a storied athletic career at Liberty Bell, in both of the cross country sports (running and skiing) as well as track. Her Nordic prowess made her a star at the junior nationals level, and enabled her to compete in Europe as a teenager.

After graduating from Liberty Bell, she enrolled at the University of Utah. In late 2021, she concluded four weekends of World Cup competitions with her best finish at the Tour d' Ski Hillclimb on the final day of seven consecutive races, taking seventh place. Her first World Cup points

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Photo courtesy of Danica Ready
Methow Valley native Novie McCabe, recently named to the U.S. Ski Team that will compete at the Beijing Winter Olympic Games in February, celebrated her success at the recent U.S. Super Tour meet in Sun Valley, Idaho.

Methow makes the Winter Olympics a valley tradition

BY DON NELSON

For the third consecutive Winter Olympics Games, the Methow Valley will be represented on the United States' Nordic ski team when competition begins in Beijing, China, next month.

Valley native and Liberty Bell High School graduate Novie McCabe, the daughter of Winter Olympian Laura McCabe and the late Sean McCabe, extended the Methow's streak of appearances when she was named to the U.S. team as its youngest member.

The valley's cross-generational connections to the Olympics in fact date back to the 1990s, bolstered by a consistently strong Nordic skiing program that provides excellent coaching and challenging competitive opportunities.

The McCabes

Laura McCabe skied for the U.S. Nordic team in the 1994 Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway, and at the 1998

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SUNSET SKI

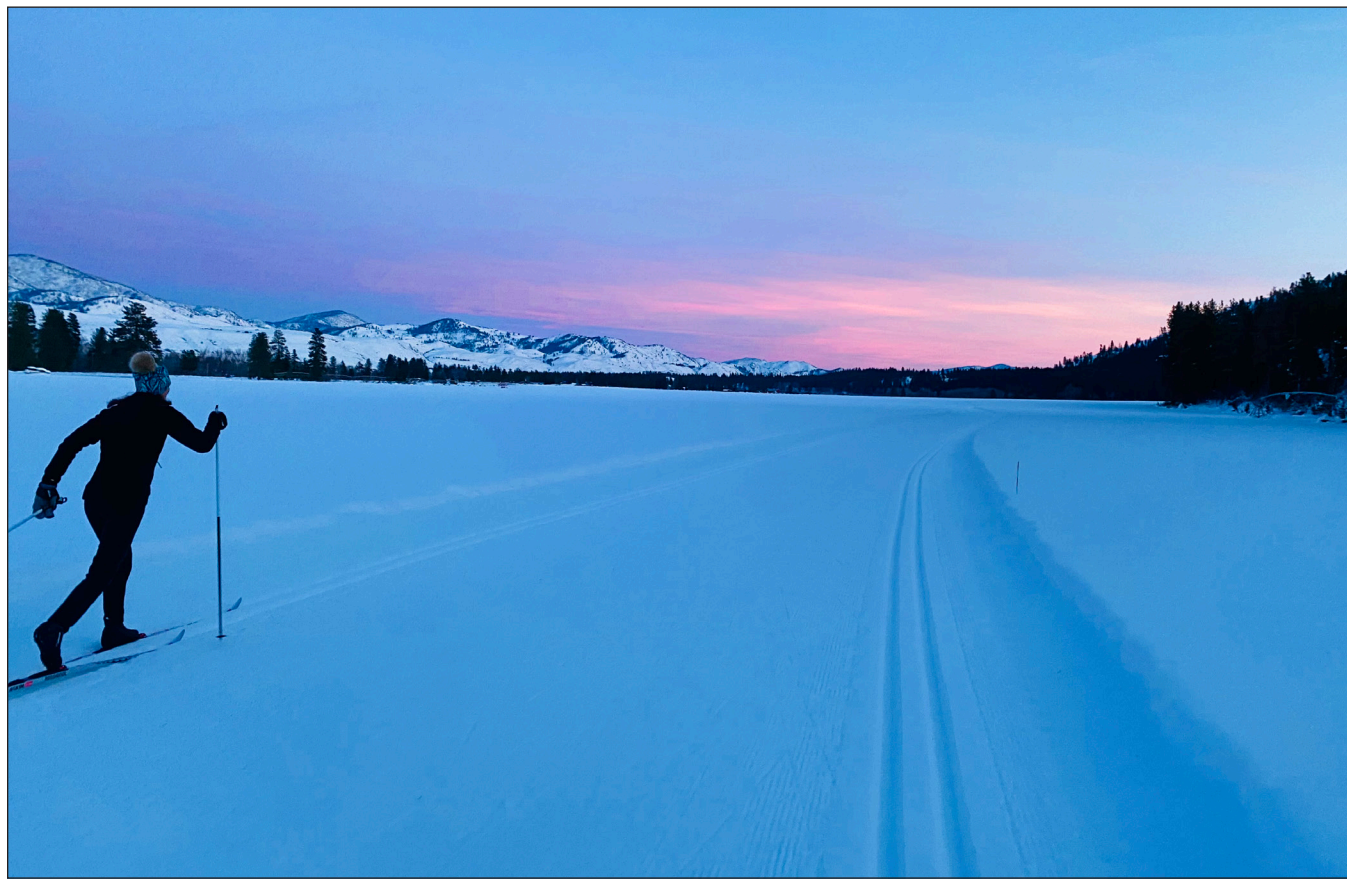


Photo by Ashley Lodato

A solitary skier chased the day's dying light on a valley trail last weekend.

Sarah Brown named TwispWorks ED

BY NATALIE JOHNSON

A little more than three months after taking on the role of interim executive director at TwispWorks, Sarah Brown has been named the nonprofit's permanent executive director, the organization announced earlier this month.

At first, Brown wasn't planning on staying in the role in the long term, but wanted to help TwispWorks transition after the retirement of former Executive Director Don Linertz.

"As I got deeper and deeper into the interim position and realized just how much poten-

tial there is for collaboration across the valley and the region and the state ... It was irresistible to me," she told the Methow Valley News recently. "I really like working in collaboration with other organizations."

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Sarah Brown

County copes with yet another record COVID-19 surge

BY MARCY STAMPER

The onslaught of COVID cases that Okanogan County Public Health officials were bracing for has arrived, with new cases shattering all records.

"Omicron has hit us, and it's hit us fast and furious," Okanogan County Health Officer James Wallace said last week.

While that's putting pressure on health care providers – and on everyone in the community, as schools and businesses scramble to ensure they have enough workers to remain open – researchers have learned so much about COVID that we know how to deal with this, Wallace said.

That includes familiar precautions – masking, ideally layering two masks or using an N95 mask; washing your hands frequently; and staying home if you have symptoms, even just a runny nose, according to Washington Department of Health (DOH) Chief Science Officer Tao Kwan-Gett.

Okanogan County is seeing its highest case rates by far in the two years of the pandemic, with the rate per 100,000 over 14 days at 1,693 per 100,000. The previous high was in September and October 2021, when the Delta variant pushed the rate above 1,000. As recently as the end of December, the rate was just 150

SCHOOL DISTRICT PODCASTS OFFER CLEAR INFO ON COVID

BY MARCY STAMPER

Confused by COVID and changing guidelines? Want to know the best way to protect yourself, your family and your community?

A new series of weekly podcasts from the Methow Valley School District – created by experts in explaining complex topics to young people – distills the complexity of the disease and changing guidelines in just 10 minutes a week.

See **PODCASTS**, A2

per 100,000, which shows how quickly Omicron has spread.

In five days, as of Jan. 22, Okanogan County Public Health reported 389 new COVID cases, with counts on three of those days topping 100. Fifty-three of those cases were in the Methow Valley, with 26 in Twisp and 22 in Winthrop, plus one each in Mazama and Methow and three

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ADDRESS LABEL

THURS.	FRI.	SAT.	SUN.	MON.	TUES.
Jan. 27	Jan. 28	Jan. 29	Jan. 30	Jan. 31	Feb. 1
28°	28°	29°	33°	34°	34°
15°	19°	21°	23°	16°	14°
Partly cloudy	Cloudy	Sunny	Snow possible	Cloudy	Snow possible

WEATHER DATA BASED ON ACCUWEATHER.COM FORECAST FOR TWISP

INSIDE ...

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 CLASSIFIEDS B2-B3
 COMMUNITY B5
 VALLEY LIFE B6

TWISPPWORKS

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Linnertz retired in October after leading TwispWorks for six years. When he announced his retirement, Linnertz said he was proud to be leaving the organization in a good position to grow in the future. Under his leadership, TwispWorks became financially self-sufficient, allowing it to secure its deed from donors that purchased the property from the U.S. Forest Service.

"I feel such a sense of peace," he told the Methow Valley News in April. "The organization has grown so much in the last six years. ... It just feels like it's at a high place and I think it can go even higher and I'm excited for the next person to be able to bring it there."

Now that the work to develop TwispWorks into a self-sustaining organization is complete, Brown is looking forward to expanding its work on economic and cultural development in the community. "The economy in the Methow is only limited by our imagination," she said. "We have a lot of potential here for growing the economy."

During the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders and summer 2021 fires, TwispWorks gave out emergency grants to area businesses. TwispWorks also runs the Methow Investment Network, which allows people to invest in a loan program for small businesses. Brown is also excited about working on projects such as the Valley's housing crisis and working with groups like Resilient Methow to help the valley adapt to climate change.

Strategic planning
Brown is working with the TwispWorks board now on strategic planning, specifically updating its master plan.

"I feel very fortunate to have found a position in the Methow that suits my skills so well and allows me to be working toward helping the community solve its problems," she said. "It's pretty dreamy. ... I feel really lucky and excited."

Brown has lived in the Methow Valley full time since 1998, and she and husband, Brian Fisher, are raising their two children here.

From 2017-2018, Brown studied rural social innovation in Hungary on a Fulbright fellowship and she completed her master's degree in public administration at Cornell University from 2019-2020. She has owned and operated a small family farm out of Carlton, and has served on the boards of local and regional nonprofit organizations, including Room One and the Methow Housing Trust.

"I am eternally curious and I'm an optimist," she said. "I really encourage people to reach out if they want to connect about economic and cultural vitality or just the state of the Methow in general."

NOVIE

From Page A1

came two weeks earlier when she placed 28th in a 10K Classic race at Davos, Switzerland, on Dec. 12.

McCabe returned home to the U.S. in time to represent the University of Utah at the Montana State University Invitational at Sun Valley two weeks ago. That meet also doubled as a U.S. Super Tour meet. McCabe placed third in the Super Tour overall standings, took second in the College Invitational in the 5K freestyle, and won the 10K classic race.

McCabe was given an indication of what might be ahead for her when she was directed by the U.S. Ski and Snowboard team in December, during her World Cup tour, to purchase refundable airline tickets for Jan. 18 from Salt Lake City to Italy, and to have her bags packed and ready.

Then, late Monday afternoon (Jan. 17), she got the word, according to her mother: "She sent me a text Monday evening saying, 'I made the team!' It was all so quick," Laura McCabe said. "She is in Italy at the pre-camp and left Tuesday morning after she heard the news on Monday night. Woosh."

Novie is training this week in the Alps of north central Italy, near Livigno, in the Lombardy Region, north of Milan. She will be traveling to Beijing this coming Saturday (Jan. 29).

Community support

Sean McCabe, Laura's husband and father to Novie and her younger sister, Dashe, passed away in November 2009, when Novie was 7 years old and Dashe 3, succumbing to cancer of the thyroid at the age of 46. Also an avid runner and skier, he was a well-loved artist and teacher.



Photo courtesy of Danica Ready

Novie McCabe, right, performed well in recent competition at Sun Valley, Idaho, just before being named to the U.S. Olympics team.

After his passing, Laura raised the two girls as a single mom, with the spirit of Sean always serving as an inspiration.

"Raising my two girls as a single mom, this community was hugely impactful and supportive," Laura McCabe said. "I wouldn't have wanted to go about this task in any other place or community, for this I am forever grateful."

Mimicking mom's breathing pattern while riding on her back while Laura was skiing the trails around Mazama, riding her bike with mom and sister into Pearlygin Lake State Park, hiking down the hill to the lake for a swim and then back up, or hiking the trails of the Methow Valley

and surrounding Cascade Mountains — all were part of Novie's early start in the fitness and fastness culture.

It also became apparent early that Novie was dreaming of big things. In third grade, teacher Cathy Oliver gave her pupils a writing assignment that asked them to identify what they wanted to do when they grew up. Novie's answer was short: She claimed she wanted to ski in the Olympics. Pretty much everything she did from that point forward has been directed that way.

All in

Besides her mom, Novie benefitted from the guidance of Methow Valley Nordic Team

coach Leslie Hall, a three-time Olympian herself, who believes deeply that Novie McCabe has an unlimited horizon.

"Since she was quite young she has put her all into ski racing," said Hall. "There have been many bumps in the road but she has come through all of them stronger and stronger. I have an abundance of faith that Novie will do great things in ski racing."

In junior high, McCabe won almost everything she entered, on trail, track or snow, and that continued into her high school years. Her junior high track and field coach, Thome George, said of Novie's early effort and work ethic: "Yep, I got my once-in-a-lifetime athlete in my first two years. She was the operative definition of a prodigy. There's good, there's very good and then there's great."

McCabe led the Liberty Bell Mountain girls' cross country running team to three straight state 1B/2B State Championships in 2016-18, winning the individual title by significant margins all three years.

Across the board, her coaches are all on the same page. Sarah Brooks watched her own daughter, Keeley, grow up with Novie running and skiing, and served as their high school running coach.

"One of the things I loved the most about coaching Novie in cross country running in high school is that she was the best teammate," Brooks said. "While she was focused on her own racing, she also was always aware of how the team was doing and who was having a good day or who needed a little pick up. The whole U.S. Ski Team is so lucky to have Novie McCabe as their teammate."

More in store

Hall and Sadie Maubet Bjorn-

sen think bigger things might be in store for McCabe. Bjornsen, checking in from her home in Alaska, said that she had an opportunity to spend some time, prior to retiring from competitive skiing, with McCabe the past couple of years in the U.S. Ski program.

"It has been a pleasure to get to cross over being a teammate with her a few years, and getting the opportunity to work with her a little bit as a coach last summer," Bjornsen said. "She is one heck of a talented human, and will go far with her calm, collected spirit."

Hall believes the trip to Beijing is merely one more step in the young skier's journey.

"When Jessie Diggins and Kikkan Randall won a gold medal in PyeongChang in 2018 in the team sprint, my sister-in-law [Suzanne King, also an Olympian] said, 'Now it is never going to be quite as exciting when an American wins a medal in Nordic skiing because it has already been done,'" Hall said.

Hall's take? "It will be way more exciting when Novie wins a gold medal!"

At the youthful age of 20, that might not happen for McCabe this year. But, it probably wouldn't be prudent to bet against her, either.

FOLLOWING NOVIE

Novie McCabe is entered as an alternate for the 7.5K-by-7.5K skiathlon on day one of the games, Feb. 5. McCabe's main event comes in the 10K classic race on Feb. 10. She is also slated as an alternate in the 30K skiathlon on Sunday, Feb. 20, the closing event of the Beijing Games.

TRADITION

From Page A1

Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan. Novie McCabe began making her mark in national and international competition as a teenager while still in high school.

The Halls

Leslie Hall, longtime coach of the Methow Valley Nordic Team until her retirement last year, represented the United States at Calgary, Canada, in 1988, at Albertville, France, in 1992, and at Lillehammer in 1994, where she was Laura McCabe's teammate.

Hall and her husband, Alex, moved to Methow Valley in 1996 on the advice of Laura McCabe. Alex Hall's sister, Suzanne Hall King, competed for the U.S. Nordic team at Lillehammer in 1994 and at Nagano in 1998.

The Bjornsens

Sadie and Erik Bjornsen, the sister-and-brother Nordic skiing stars who grew up in Mazama, each competed in the 2014 Olympic Winter Games in Sochi, Russia, and at the 2018 games in PyeongChang, South Korea. The siblings' Nordic ski-



Methow Valley News file photos

Above: Laura McCabe, left, Leslie Hall and Kikkan Randall, all former members of the U.S. Winter Olympics team, at the 2020 Ski to the Sun Marathon. Right: Brian Gregg skied for the U.S. team at the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia.

ing coaches included Leslie Hall and Laura McCabe, and Mazama resident Scott Johnston, a former World Cup skier.

Erik Bjornsen is now co-owner of Winthrop Mountain Sports. Sadie Bjornsen lives in Anchorage, Alaska.

The Greggs

Valley native Brian Gregg represented the United States Nordic team at Sochi, Russia, in 2014. His wife, Caitlin Gregg, was on the U.S. team at Vancouver, Canada, in 2010. They now live in Minnesota.

And a few others

Casey Smith, co-owner of BCS Livestock near Winthrop, was a near-miss at making the U.S. biathlon team in 2014. Methow native Kelsey Dickinson, a college standout and veteran of the international circuit, barely missed making the biathlon team that is going to China next month. Sam Naney, who took over as coach of the Methow Valley Nordic Team from Leslie Hall, was an elite-level skier at the national level, accumulating several top-10 finishes on the U.S. pro circuit.



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