

THE ASPEN TIMES

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Turkey and turns on Thanksgiving

New SkiCo CEO credits team for hitting Thanksgiving opening goal at Aspen, Snowmass

Sarah Girgis
The Aspen Times

After much community fretting and nail-biting, the Aspen Skiing Co. announced Tuesday that the lifts will start turning on Aspen Mountain and Snowmass on Thanksgiving Day after all.

"Those of us that have been here have noticed unseasonably warm temperatures mixed in with snowfall over the last few weeks, and we have been nervous too," said SkiCo CEO Geoff Buchheiser on Tuesday via telephone while atop Aspen Mountain checking out conditions. "But it's a credit to our team of snowmakers taking advantage of those cold pockets that we will be able to open on Thursday as planned."

Thanksgiving Day will see Aspen Mountain open 41 acres of terrain on the upper slopes. The runs include Dipsy Doodle, Deer Park, Silver Bell, and Tortilla Flats, which will be accessible via the Ajax Express chairlift.

The Silver Queen Gondola will be open for uploading and



TAMARA SUSA/COURTESY PHOTO

OPENING, A10 Aspen Mountain and Snowmass will open for the season on Thursday.

Aspen activist raising funds for Afghani women's clinic

For two decades, Paula Nirschel has devoted herself to helping Muslim women gain higher education

Lynda Edwards
The Aspen Times

Aspen's Paula Nirschel was in Kabul the year that the United Nations Security Council declared Afghanistan a "failed state." That year, 2006, saw a spike in the number of car bombs targeting

female activists. Some Afghani feminists were gunned down in their workplaces, the U.N. reported. But death usually came with a knock on the door of a woman's home in the middle of the night.

Nirschel had traveled to Afghanistan to meet and interview young women on behalf of her

nonprofit called Educate Afghan Women, an initiative that found U.S. college scholarships for Afghani females.

At 3 a.m., there was a knock on her door.

She mustered the courage

FUNDS, A8



COURTESY PHOTO

Paula Nirschel (in pale blue) was invited by then-First Lady Laura Bush to a luncheon for wives of world leaders including Vladimir Putin's then-spouse.

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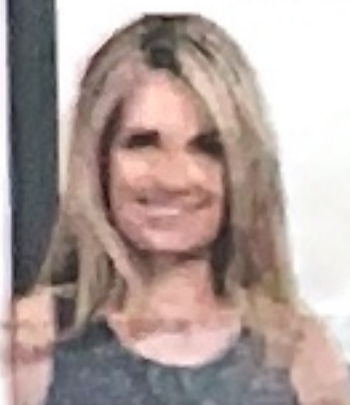


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to open the door. She found a teenage girl and her brother waiting for her. The girl carried her transcripts filled with outstanding grades from her refugee camp school just over the border in Pakistan. The siblings had walked more than 435 miles from Afghanistan's violent Helmand Province "over the mountains, through the desert so she could apply to go to college," Nirschel said. "I read her transcripts and promised her that I would help."

She asked that The Aspen Times refer to the young woman as "Miriam" to protect her family in Afghanistan from extremists opposed to women's education.

Miriam won a scholarship, despite her father's initial fear that the family would be targeted for violence by extremists. Now, Miriam is trying to finish medical school while she and Nirschel try to raise funds to build a five-room clinic staffed entirely by females.

A FIGHT FOR EDUCATION

The two women view their goal as literally life and death. The Taliban has banned women from being treated by male doctors or health care workers. The Taliban has also banned females from high school and college education so no new female midwives, nurses or doctors are being trained.

Female health care providers who remain in Afghanistan cannot go to or from work unless

accompanied by a male relative, a logistical complication that forced many of the scarce female-run clinics to close. And it can keep women who desperately need medical care at home.

"When no male relative is available to accompany them — or if they cannot afford to pay for transport for two people — this can prevent women from seeking care," according to Doctors without Borders 2023 report on Afghanistan health care.

This is just the latest project for Nirschel, who for two decades has devoted herself to helping Muslim women in Afghanistan gain higher education. In 2001, she founded the nonprofit The Initiative to Educate Afghan Women, which gave more than 55 Afghani women U.S. college scholarships. America's ambassador to Afghanistan helped interview some of the applicants. But Nirschel also traveled to the war-shattered country to meet the girls herself. Word-of-mouth praise that prompts donors to visit AFAW.org and fundraising luncheons and dinners are the main ways she raises money.

A PERSONAL MISSION

Nirschel still has mementos from luncheons she was invited to by then-First Lady Laura Bush when the 2004 G8 summit was held in Sea Island, Georgia. The world's most powerful leaders attended the economic conference. Laura invited their wives — including Vladimir

FUNDS2, A9



COURTESY PHOTO

Paula Nirschel hosted an Aspen fundraising dinner featuring Afghani dishes. The invitees were Roaring Fork Valley health care professionals who learned about plans for a women's clinic in Helmand Province. Nirschel let a male guest try on the burqas that the Taliban now demands all Afghani women wear outside their homes.