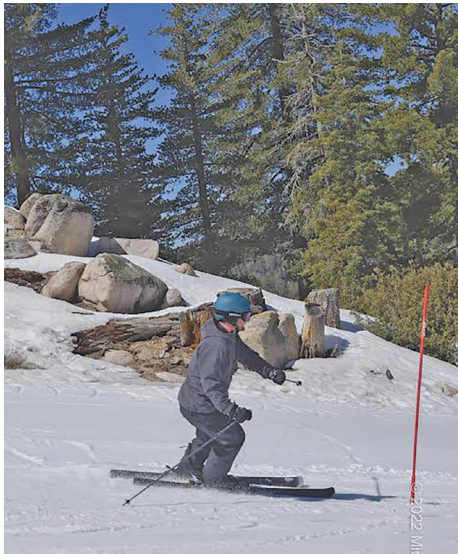


# Rim Special Athletes hosts veterans at Snow Valley

By **RHEA-FRANCES TETLEY**  
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Returning home from being in a battle zone can be difficult and may have long lasting impacts, especially if injured or disabled. During the winter, the Rim Special Athletes program offers some of those veterans an opportunity at a special ski program, where the veterans can have a confidence-building experience, despite any previous injuries, amputations or disabilities.

Several times each season, the veterans from the San Diego's V.A. Health Care and Rehabilitation program travel to Snow Valley where the Adaptive Ski and



**Slalom skiing involves skiing between poles or gates downhill and is a competition event in the Olympics. It was exciting for the adaptive skiers in the veterans group to try this at Snow Valley.**

Snowboard Program brings veterans to learn to ski. While learning to ski, they have the opportunity to learn new skills that support their treatment goals. They first attend ski clinics in San Diego and then come to the Snow Valley to practice those skills.

The program brought visually impaired skiers, those suffering from PTSD, single and double amputees, using their prosthetic legs, and other non-obvious military-related disabilities to the mountain earlier this month.

One of their skiers who attended is a prosthetic limb designer for the veterans hospital. He has attended previously and loves to ski but comes up to Snow Valley to be sure the prosthetics he designs are effective for such activity and that the veterans have confidence while using them. He is quite motivating and understands the



**These veterans, accompanied by Jack Cooperman, president of Rim Special Athletes, got the opportunity to ski at Snow Valley.**  
(Photos by Rhea-Frances Tetley)

challenges an amputee faces, as he has worn two prosthetic legs himself since he was 6 years old.

He brings his ski boots ready with his prosthetic feet and legs already in them, so he can attach them quickly and help others because, as he said, "The ankles don't bend so well and they are difficult to get into the boots, so I just change legs." He spent some time helping a new skier put his prosthetic leg into his ski boot and cushioning his limb, apparently successfully as the skier said he felt no pain after the first run.

At first that new skier lacked confidence; however, he was sure it would hurt his limb and doubtful about his ability to ski, nor was he even sure he wanted to be there and was positive he would not be returning the next time. But, by the end of the day, after successfully shushing down Slide Peak, he was changing plans and absolutely attending the next Snow Valley ski session on March 14. He was ecstatic over the success he felt that day; the confidence was evident in his face and there was a total change in his entire demeanor.

On March 14, Snow Valley blocked off a run on the mountain where top adaptive ski instructor Randy Patterson set up a slalom course with gates like the athletes saw at the Olympic games last month and then timed them down the course. This challenge appealed to the vet skiers for whom, at the last moment after lunch on the first visit, it was decided to set up small a course to test

their new skills for skiers and snowboarders. On the second visit, the slalom competition was a part of the plan.

The male and female veterans who attend these sessions have a variety of reasons for being in the program, including having qualifying disabilities, such as orthopedic amputation, visual impairments, head injury, traumatic brain injuries, certain neurological problems and other disabilities. Each has independent goals but enjoyed the ski therapy and the weather was excellent.

Snow Valley was happy to see the group come and enjoy the thrilling sport of skiing. The Rim Special Athletes were involved and paid for half of their lift tickets, from previous fundraising, but did not need to supply the bi-skis and mono-skis this session, since all the veterans were very ambulatory.

RSA has instructors who had been through their adaptive athlete trainings and did very well helping the veterans there thrive, while carving and shushing down the slopes. Everyone seems to have had a wonderful, exciting day.

Jack Cooperman, president of RSA, said about the San Diego vet program, "I feel fortunate that Snow Valley and RSA are small enough to be able to sponsor the 10 athletes at the Snow Valley Resort today. This program is all about empowering them with self-confidence and conditioning their bodies; it not about their disabilities. It is wonderful to see them open up with this confidence-building experience, which can

be a life changing experience for them. This group size of 10 fits our program; we can afford to pay a share of their tickets and have enough instructors."

This program enables the vets to be in control of their bodies, while proudly enjoying the day outdoors. The day and memories of the day can be a life-changing event for these vets.

Even the middle-aged bus driver, who had never skied, got on skis alongside the vets and learned to ski and became an intermediate skier that day.

The San Diego Veteran's Recreation Therapy program director, Heather Cargill, was thrilled with the success each skier was experiencing and was looking forward to returning soon, hoping the snow holds to enable all those who want to ski get onto the slopes.

For more information about Snow Valley, current weather conditions, hours, temperatures and runs that are open, see their website <https://Snow-Valley.com/> or email them at [svinfo@snow-valley.com](mailto:svinfo@snow-valley.com).

Snow Valley has 32 trails, over 240 acres and 13 ski lifts, including one six-person high-speed lift, six double-chair lifts, five triple-chair lifts and one conveyer. The vertical from the top is 1,041 feet. This year, they have received or blown over 150 inches of snow for their runs. For more information, call (909) 867-2751. They are open daily, weather permitting, while the snow is present.