

San Diego veterans enjoy Snow Valley

By **RHEA-FRANCES TETLEY**
Staff Writer

Snow Valley has a mountain full of snow and it will be the destination for the San Diego disabled veterans several times this season.

The veterans from the San Diego's V.A. Health Care and Rehabilitation program will travel to Snow Valley again this season, where the adaptive ski and 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. These veterans first attend ski clinics in San Diego to learn the basics of skiing and to understand how their special abilities can be modified and then come to Snow Valley to practice those skills.

Each winter, the Rim Special Athletes (RSA) program at Snow Valley offers these veterans and other adaptive athletes an opportunity to participate in a special ski program, where they can have a confidence-building experience, despite any previous injuries, amputations or abilities. Rim Special Athletes has adaptive equipment to enable almost anyone, despite the disability or amputation or prosthetic, to be able to get out on the slopes and ski. RSA offers mono-skis, bi-skis and instructors who know how to enable the skiers to enjoy the slopes.

Snow Valley was happy to see the San Diego veterans group come and enjoy the thrilling sport of skiing. Rim Special Athletes paid for half of their lift tickets, from previous fundraising activities.

RSA supplied one mono-ski this session and the veteran spent the day learning how to control the ski. Even some amputees were up on snowboards this session, since most of the veterans were very ambulatory. Some put their prosthetic feet into ski boots and others use other adaptive equipment. RSA has instructors who had been through their adaptive athlete trainings and did very well helping the veterans thrive, while carving and shushing down the slopes. Everyone seemed to have a wonderful and exciting day.

Part of the ski therapy the skiing provides for the veterans is social. This group had 11 vets and chaperones attend. The San Diego vets will be skiing and snowboarding on alternate Mondays during the winter season, returning on Feb. 13, Feb. 27 and March 13; if the snow continues, dates will be added. The veterans' bus has chains installed on it so it can come up the hill, even when the roads are covered with snow.

Rim Special Athletes, through Snow Valley, offers special lessons to all of those needing adaptive lessons and equipment, when lessons are scheduled in advance through Snow Valley. Last week, 11-year-old visually impaired Cral and his family, who had lessons last year with RSA, returned for another day on the slopes. His instructor, Tammy, took him on the same runs the veterans had used a



The San Diego veterans on their first ski trip of the season to Snow Valley. (Photos by Rhea-Frances Tetley)



Jake on the mono-ski with instructor Keith at Snow Valley.

few days prior and the entire family had a lot of fun on the slopes. On Thursday, instructor Jackie took a bi-ski student up the mountain and was doing well with the riggers by the end of the day. RSA enables almost anyone who has the desire to have the ability to ski.

Veteran Jake was learning how to operate the mono-ski with instructor

Keith D'Avignon, who fitted him into it. It requires great upper body strength to operate the riggers to control the mono-ski. Jake had been practicing for the mono-ski in San Diego on flat ground, but only took about an hour on the snow slope under Keith's instruction to be controlling the sled-like sit-down ski device. Jake had grown up in Big Bear and was an avid

skier all his life and is expecting to be skiing with style again soon, despite his leg amputation.

RSA President Jack Cooperman said, "The mono-ski takes more ability and significant upper body strength to control it successfully."

John Moore is the RSA chaperone for the veterans this season. 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 with additional skiers next week.

For more information about Snow Valley – current weather conditions, hours, temperatures and runs that are open – visit their website, www.Snow-Valley.com, or email them at svinfo@snow-valley.com.

Snow Valley is the oldest continually operating ski resort in Southern California and has just been purchased by Alterra Mountain Company. The new owner promises they will continue to deliver excellent skiing experiences for snow enthusiasts. They plan no changes this season and are currently hiring.

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.

Snow Valley is located east of Running Springs at 35100 Highway 18. For more information, call (909) 867-2751. They are open daily, weather permitting, while the snow is present.