

## Sanders remains a staple of area skiing on and off the trails

By **TRISHA NAIL**  
Sentinel Staff

**D**UBLIN — When skiers take to the trails at the Dublin School's Nordic Center ski area this winter, a friendly face will await them, ever present to ensure their paths are pristine from fallen trees or rainwater later in the season.

### MONADNOCK PROFILE

That face is none other than Steve Sanders, who's been grooming the trails of the Nordic Center area for the past six of its eight years in operation. He's a Dublin native, and after 24 years carving out a career at the Telluride Ski Resort in Telluride, Colo., he returned to his hometown to live near aging family and gain a greater appreciation for his roots.

"Ski grooming is a way to prepare a snow surface for optimal skiing conditions," said Sanders, 54. "In New England, as we all know, it rains, it freezes and it thaws whereas in Colorado, you're on a much more stable platform for snow conditions. But, it's still skier traffic and humidity that all play a part in changing the snow condition on a daily basis."

The Dublin School is an independent college-preparatory boarding and day school that was established in 1935 and enrolls 170 students, according to its website. Skiing has featured on school grounds for many years, but Nordic Center Director Lisa Bates said the institution developed



Photos by HANNAH SCHROEDER / Sentinel Staff

Steve Sanders of Dublin stands between two of the electric snowmakers at the Dublin School's Nordic Center on Thursday morning. Sanders, in his sixth year with the school, has a long history with snow grooming in Telluride, Colo., and hadn't made snow himself until coming to the Dublin School. While it has been a learning curve, he said he now knows the full scope of "how much hard work it takes to maintain the infrastructure."

the center for Nordic skiing eight years ago. She said school head Brad Bates, her husband, collaborated with Michael Lehmann, the son of school founders Paul and Nancy Lehmann, and other stakeholders to formally designate land on school property for recreational and athletic skiing.

In addition to grooming, Sanders makes snow for a roughly 3 kilometer loop of trails at the Nordic Center through use of a 1 million-gallon pond.

He said he got his

beginnings in ski grooming at the former Temple Mountain Ski Area as a teen in 1984 to hit the slopes without paying admission fees and to hang out with friends.

Sanders comes from a musical family, with musician parents Holly and Richard, who worked as the department head for the ConVal School District's music program. Sanders played trumpet and was in band in high school, but it was at the Temple Mountain Ski Area where he

discovered his greater passion for skiing and snow maintenance.

He graduated from ConVal Regional High School in Peterborough in 1987, and by the early 1990s he and friends decided to venture west at the end of a ski season, moving cross-country to the Rocky Mountains.

"When I was younger, neighbors of ours in Peterborough were from the southwest area of Colorado, and they kept saying, 'If you can get out, come on out, stay with us and you'll see what it's about,'" Sanders said.

He applied for a job at Telluride Ski Resort and was quickly accepted.

The more rugged terrain of the ski areas there presented new challenges to Sanders in ski grooming, as he noted there's more consideration for avalanches and building rows of snow on ridges for jumps. He also saw larger amounts of snow made in snowmaking than he was used to seeing at Temple Mountain.

His years at Telluride also exposed him to the evolving world of snowboarding. He had learned about the sport at Temple Mountain before moving to Colorado, but Sanders said it was while he was in the Rockies that resorts developed areas specifically for snowboarders.

"I was able to compete as a snowboarder in national-level races in the mid-to-late 1990s, which was truly an opportunity I would've never had if I hadn't stepped out and went out there," he said.

As snowboarding has more formally developed, Sanders said skiing also has become close to the experience of alpine snowboarding, or freecarving, where snowboarders make use of existing skiing infrastructure as their track. He said he's largely retired from snowboarding due to its progression as a sport and the investment needed for additional equipment.

"I take my old [snowboarding] equipment out a couple times a year just to refresh my memory and see if I can still turn," he said.

While talking to The Sentinel at the Nordic Center on Thursday, Sanders reminisced about his opportunities at Telluride, where he said he was always within a five-minute walk of the chairlifts while living with a friend, John Roth. Sanders said Roth is an active skier in his 80s and has a wealth of knowledge about the sport and hobby, having moved to the Telluride area, where he still lives, in the 1970s.

And ski grooming is a job that's taught Sanders "every square inch of the mountain," too, earning him favor

among his younger sister and her husband when the two lived in Boulder, Colo., just a few hours from Sanders, as well as his parents, who also continue to ski.

But it was a "tug of being gone so long" from his parents, who've been lifelong Monadnock Region residents, that motivated him to come back to Dublin. They were the ones who originally put him on skis at a young age, he noted.

"We didn't go on big, extravagant ski trips, but we've skied a lot locally and made the best of having such nice areas around us to ski at," Sanders said.

He described his first winter back in the region at the Nordic Center in 2016 as the toughest he's faced on the job. The school had not yet implemented the snowmaking system now in place, he explained, and rainfall later in the season melted snow, creating problem spots.

"Having the snowmaking system added to this, it's reduced the stress load in terms of having your reliable ski surface ready for people when they want to ski pretty much most of the winter," he said. "There was a very small snowmaking system on our campus for our alpine hill, which we still use, but there were a few snowmaking hydrants on the upper soccer field to give the kids some training area."

On average, Sanders has found that the ski season in New Hampshire usually is from early December to the end of March based on snowmaking viability, though for the past few years he said the school has managed to extend it until

mid-April.

His job doesn't have the typical "nine-to-five" schedule, he said, and is contingent on temperature, humidity and whether snow or rainstorms come in. Snowmaking also takes up a good portion of his time in addition to grooming, he noted.

"It's not just a matter of starting up the [snowmaking] machine and just driving and parking it," he said. "There's the fueling, there's maintenance issues that have to be addressed on a daily basis, there's warm-up time, there's occasional tree damage out there on the trails that has to be addressed."

And when not grooming trails during the winter, odds are Sanders is on skis. For many of his 24 years at Telluride, he said he typically spent 120 to 130 days per season going downhill. Once peak skiing season wrapped up, he visited the deserts of the southwest to go mountain biking each year and then took a trip to New England.

"Once back here, believe it or not, I'd put skis back on and go backcountry skiing up on Mount Washington," Sanders said. "That's been a true annual event for me ever since I was a teenager."

In the off season, Sanders still works for the Dublin School, as a member of its buildings and grounds department, focused on upkeep of playing fields, tennis courts and continuing to keep the trails in shape for their anticipated winter use.

He said his bucket list for skiing destinations most prominently includes Chamonix, France, as well as the Chic-Choc Mountains in the Maritimes region of Québec.

"It looks like some spectacular East Coast skiing; you may need a guide but it's wide open and because it's so far north it goes right down to the water," he said of the Chic-Chocs.

He said he still takes trips to Telluride — "not enough," he interjected — and is also interested in someday trying to navigate the slopes of ski areas in Jackson Hole, Wyo.

Lisa Bates, the Nordic Center's director, said without Sanders, the center might not be the success it is among regional children. She said the ski area invites not just students from the Dublin School but other institutions within an hour-and-a-half radius for ski training and races each winter.

"They all know Steve, and he loves to see them out there," Bates said. "... He's really a big part of having races be able to be held here."

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Steve Sanders

### AT A GLANCE: STEVE SANDERS

**Age:** 54  
**Hometown:** Dublin, where he grew up; lived in Telluride, Colo., for 24 years and returned to the Monadnock Region in 2016  
**Family:** Parents Richard and Holly Sanders, of Dublin; sisters Bethany Leahy and Kimberly Marcum  
**Occupation:** Ski trail groomer and snowmaker at the Dublin School's Nordic Center ski area in the winter; member of the school's buildings and grounds department in the spring, summer and fall  
**Hobbies:** Skiing, tennis, mountain biking, attending small-scale outdoor concerts, formerly snowboarding  
**Snowboarding achievements:** Placed second in alpine disciplines on a snowboard in the U.S. Amateur Snowboard Association for two consecutive years; qualified for

the 1997 U.S. Open Snowboarding Championships in Stratton, Vt.  
**Question:** Do you have a favorite mountain area or any trails you're partial toward from your years of skiing?  
**Answer:** "It's Mount Washington in general, and I guess to pinpoint one chute I like the most there is called Dodge's Drop, which is on the periphery of Tuckerman Ravine. It's truly one of the most challenging, steep chutes I've ever skied East or West. Out in Colorado, ... we had a lot of hike-to-terrain skiing, so you could actually ride the lifts up to their highest point and then hike to the top of a 13,000-foot mountain called Palmyra Peak. [It was] some very challenging skiing and just very memorable runs of powder and challenging myself to these conditions."



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