

New league makes skiing fun

by Joyce Weaver
for The Times

Three-time Olympian Lynn Galanes and her clan know what it means to take skiing seriously.

But their competitive successes are built on a childhood full of snow play, thrills on hills and the wonders of touring through the Alaskan winter landscape.

Next week she'll begin coaching Anchorage youngsters in the brand-new Anchorage Junior Nordic League. Lynn means to see to it that fun is a big part of the kids' early skiing experience. Even if it means getting silly sometimes.

"I have always enjoyed it. But I think for the kids, we're really going to have to make it fun. And funny."

So, parents, don't be too surprised if, a few weeks from now, you find your offspring playing soccer on skis. Or taking a mystery tour through the dark woods, instead of just going round and round the too-

familiar lighted ski trail.

For the most part, though, kids and their super-qualified coaches will concentrate on improving skills, building stamina and skiing faster.

The new league makes its debut with a 7 p.m. Monday signup meeting at the Russian Jack Chalet. Information and entry forms have been distributed to the elementary and junior high schools and are available in local sports shops.

At the session Monday, parents and youngsters will meet the coaches and be instructed where and when to meet for their first practice — most likely a dryland one — the very next day. The program will take advantage of three of the local lighted trails by basing the teams there.

Head coach for the citywide program will be another three-time Olympian, Jim Galanes, who retired recently from the U.S. Ski Team. He is a native of

Vermont. His own West Anchorage area team will be based at Kincaid Park.

At Russian Jack Springs Park, responsibility for a team will be shared by local product Karen Jeske, who attended Montana State University, and Julie Green, a native of Maine who graduated from Middlebury College in Vermont.

Lynn will lead the Hillside Park squad. Assistant coaches are waiting in the wings, ready to go to work with the various teams if signups are sufficient to warrant more paid, expert help. In addition, parents and siblings will be helping at the practices.

When Lynn and siblings Paige, John and Bill Spencer were growing up on a Kenai Peninsula homestead, skiing was what four isolated kids did together in the winter. They skied on their own, they practiced on the Alpine hill in Soldotna and for a big family outing, they traveled to Johnson Pass or Summit Lake. They wore baggy old

clothes, skied on heavy old wood skis with stiff bindings and boots and had a wonderful time.

The junior Spencers' family ethic, Lynn asserts, was to be "tough." No wimps, no sissies allowed. John was especially "hard-core", Lynn recalls. And she herself would labor all day on a slalom hill, skiing it over and over again to perfect a turn.

As a teen-ager she joined the Alpine racing program at Alyeska. It wasn't till the 12th grade that she gave cross country ski racing a try and she was a whiz immediately. That year, she took second place at junior nationals in Vermont.

"I didn't know how to ski, but I was really tough," she says with a grin.

Perhaps too tough. That's what she thinks as she looks back now on more than a decade of full-time training, World Cup and Olympic competition.

Even for a child, there's a