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Ranch begins winter events

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LAKE LUZERNE -- The ski season kicked off in Lake Luzerne on Saturday.

But it wasn't the first day for a fancy resort or an Olympic training facility.

Saturday was the first day for 29 youngsters to ski, snowboard and enjoy the winter weather at the Double H Hole in the Woods Ranch.

The facility is a retreat for developmentally disabled and terminally ill children. In the winter, the ranch is the home to two ski slopes to help the children hone their skills.

Saturday was also the naming of the primary ski slope after Walter and Anne Robb, a Schenectady couple who have donated more than \$1 million to the facility over the years.

The gentle snow-covered slope is now called "Robb Run."

They've been very, very generous to the community as a whole," said Max Yurenda, the CEO of the ranch.

Over the years, the Robbs have made buying new equipment possible -- such as the recent purchase of a snow groomer. They also help sponsor multiple ski students each year.

This season, camp officials hope to have at least 30 students each weekend.

"The only negative thing I heard today was when lunch was called, the kids said, 'Do we have to?' " Yurenda said.

For many of the students who participate at the Double H Ranch, it's a special moment for them to step out onto the ski slope and experience the sensation of flying.

"For some of these kids it's their seventh year of skiing," Yurenda said. "It's really the feeling of being out there that they love."

Yurenda sat comfortably in the retreat's new ski lodge which opened last year. By 3 p.m., most of the students had finished skiing for the day and were darting about the room. Some still pestered adults to go out one last time despite the rapidly setting mid-winter sun.

Maggie Kinney, a Hoosick Falls resident, brought her sons Luke and Quinn to the opening weekend. Luke, 9, has autism.

Coming to the ranch gives Luke help with skiing and makes him feel welcome, Kinney said.

"He gets the understanding and the support," she said.

Many parents come to the ranch because their children need the social outlet, Kinney said.

"They say he doesn't have any friends," she said. "Well, now he does."