

## Double H Ranch Dedicates Lift for Special Skiers

By Paul Post

SPECIAL TO THE LAKE GEORGE MIRROR

Smiles abound at the Double H Ranch this winter, where kids and instructors are benefiting from a modern new ski slope conveyor lift. The apparatus whisks children up the hill, giving them more runs per day so they can improve their skills and make the most of each fun outing.

The \$100,000 lift, with an Adirondack-style wooden covering, is nicknamed "Mary's Way" in honor of Double H benefactor Mary Ryan who funded the addition along with volunteer instructors in the ranch's Winter Adaptive Sports

Program.

"This is great," said program Director Frank Martinez. "In years past we had to help kids walk up the hill, which was tiring for students and instructors. This is so much easier. Plus, most ski resort beginner areas have conveyors like this. So by learning how to use this one, kids can have more positive experiences at other mountains, like Gore."

The conveyor is for beginners and children who can't ride the regular chairlift that goes to the top of the slope.

The mission of the Double H Ranch is to provide specialized programs and year-round support for children with a life-threatening con-

dition and their families. This is the winter program's 15<sup>th</sup> season, which is held each weekend from January through March. The new conveyor was officially dedicated with much fanfare on Saturday, Jan. 5, the 2013 season's first day.

"There was such a need for this," said Linda Smith, a Double H development official. "We try to serve 25 children for each ski day. Our goal is to give each child three to five ski days during the winter season."

The conveyor was first installed last year at a slightly different location on the hill, which didn't fit the program's needs. In preparation for this winter, it was moved to the left side of the slope with a handsome new wooden covering.

Students, with help from instructors, step onto the moving conveyor that moves them along effortlessly. They get off about halfway up the hill, which is less intimidating both physically and mentally — especially for beginners — than going all the way to the top.

The Double H winter program is the only private, free program of its kind in the Northeast. It gives participants an opportunity to learn a life-long skill with equipment provided. With 170 volunteer instructors, the program encompasses alpine skiing, snowboarding and snowshoeing lessons. Cross-country ski trails are also available. Volunteers raised money through a "Give Our Kids a Lift" appeal that included individual and corporate donors. The project was completed with help from outside contractors



and in-house labor.

Some students are visually impaired, are missing a limb or have a serious medical condition. Thanks to a specially engineered, automated bi-ski, 13-year-old Peter Frolish of Saratoga Springs can ski all the way down the hill on his own, despite having muscular dystrophy.

The sled-type equipment has a joystick that allows him to carve turns in the snow, both left and right. "So he's fully independent," instructor Ed Linville said. "That's incredible."

The custom-made device was developed by students at Clarkson University as a senior engineering project. "We rebuilt the electronics

so that it could be fully software programmable for performance," Linville said. "We're still trying to perfect it. This is the world's only automated bi-ski."

Thanks to equipment such as this, the new conveyor and Double H's large team of dedicated volunteers, kids who normally couldn't enjoy winter sports now have a chance to learn them, the same as anyone else. The ranch also hosts five winter "Family Sleepover

*Instructors Jim Hayes, of Ballston Spa, and Colleen Halse, of Lake George (right) help visually impaired skier Tyler Bailey, of Minerva. The new "Mary's Way" conveyor lift is in rear.*