

1973-2023 Wostawea Time Capsule Story

“Wostawea Folklore: The Story of Squirt the Skiing Turtle”

Story shared by Toon Pronk

I think what makes our club so much fun is the focus on people, including getting to know each other and getting through winter spending time outdoors with other like-minded people. Squirt's story is a people story. It started about five years ago when Jolane Sorge, a regular with our Forestry Complex cross-country skiing noon-hour gang, suggested we should have a mascot, since we were like a team. I did a bit of research and discovered that most ski club mascots are polar bears, arctic hares, foxes, snowy owls, etc. I was thinking about ptarmigans because they fit into the landscape well, but trying to find a stuffed ptarmigan seemed impossible.

Shelley and I have a bag full of small 'stuffies' that we use for various games with Bunnies and Jackrabbits. I looked through those and Squirt (of Finding Nemo fame) jumped out to me because of his Wostawea colors. And he would be unique – not a typical ski club mascot. We had a lot of cold days that winter, so Jolane knitted him a hat. If we forgot Squirt at the lab, members of the gang would ask, “Where's Squirt today?” Squirt started coming with me (or Shelley) to Wostawea lessons on Saturday mornings, so many of our young skiers will recognize him, as well as others who have joined in Pronk family ski adventures. But Squirt's biggest trip came when Allison Patrick went to Thunder Bay for the Sleeping Giant loppet. We got him travel documents and off he went with Allison. They successfully completed the challenge.

Squirt's motto is borrowed from Terry LeBlanc, coach extraordinaire, whose philosophy of cross-country skiing is “Ski fast, but if you can't ski fast, ski slow.” In 2020, COVID happened and our granddaughters, Violet and Winnie from Toronto, luckily for us got stuck in Fredericton because of their March Break. We had a lot of time to fill. The girls had some ideas: “Squirt should have his own skis”; “I can pull him along if he can't keep up”; “His belly will get cold on the snow.” So now he has skis, ski clothing, mitts for all 4 legs, and several other wardrobe improvements. He comes on many outings, including to the Lone Pine Café.

Squirt is not soliciting a paid position as the official Wostawea mascot at this time, but he does think a club as large and successful as ours needs to have a mascot. Something to think about!

And he's branching out and being noticed by others!