
#RideAnotherDay



Chauncy and Kelli Johnson hold a photo of their daughter Elise, the inspiration for NSAA's new safety initiative. Photo by Active Interest Media.

INDUSTRY LAUNCHES A POWERFUL NEW SAFETY INITIATIVE

You would be hard-pressed to find a family more passionate about skiing and snowboarding than Kelli and Chauncy Johnson.

The Johnsons, who live in northern Wyoming with their four children, have built their lives around the sport. In fact, you could say they owe their marriage to it in large part, having had their first ski experience together during a fifth-grade ski day at Antelope Butte.

Kelli says she knew she was going to marry Chauncy when they 12 years old. They remained friends through high school. In her senior year, Kelli took a job as a ski instructor at Antelope Butte and Chauncy continued to snowboard there. When they both went to Utah State, they intentionally selected their class schedules so they would have at least a couple days off during the school week just to ski and board along the Wasatch Range. After getting married in 2001, they relocated to Wyoming for Chauncy's job. By 2010, they had three young children, and Kelli and Chauncy committed themselves to teaching them to ski at early ages.

As much as the sport had blessed Kelli and Chauncy and provided them so much joy, it also resulted in one of the most heart-wrenching ski accidents ever.

CHRISTMAS EVE 2010

On Christmas Eve Day 2010, the Johnson family took their children—Elise, 5, Milli, 3, and Logan, 4 months—to their local hill, Hogadon ski area outside Casper. With 600 feet of vertical, Hogadon is a family-oriented ski hill spread out over 60 acres, with 27 trails, one double chairlift, and a magic carpet for beginners. It's one of the few upside-down ski areas in the country, with the lift at the base of the mountain, and the lodge and other facilities at the summit.

Chauncy painfully remembers that day before Christmas, which had always been his favorite day of the year. Kelli had gone with Elise to ski down a run, leaving Chauncy with their

other two children. What happened next would forever, and profoundly, change the lives of two families.

For Kelli, she only remembers small portions of that afternoon, and thankfully, she does not remember the instant when a speeding snowboarder violently collided with her and Elise. The snowboarder was a 23-year-old local man who frequently visited Hogadon.

"I remember going up the chairlift with [Elise], and we were discussing which run we wanted to go on," Kelli recalled during a recent interview with Colorado Public Radio (CPR) about the incident. "I remember starting out that run with her... she actually was doing so well that I was actually having her follow me," she said, noting that as a former ski instructor she was helping Elise transition from snow plowing to making turns. "I only remember that I stopped to help Elise get her ski back on. I remember up to that point, but I never saw the snowboarder coming, I never looked up to see him. . . . I think it all happened so fast."

The collision killed Elise and the snowboarder, and left Kelli with a severe brain injury and paralyzed arm. It was an unprecedented tragedy: No one in the ski industry could recall a skier-skier collision resulting in the death of two people.

For Chauncy, the memories were especially profound. During the CPR interview he vividly recalled the first news of the accident from a ski patroller. "I was told that there was a terrible collision, and that three were down," he said, pausing and reflecting back to that excruciating moment. "And they said only one had a pulse."

Both the snowboarder and Elise died instantly—the snowboarder from blunt chest trauma, and Elise from a broken neck. Chauncy knew the blow must have been especially violent and sudden. "Someone gave me Elise's shattered helmet," he recalled. "Those moments are forever imprinted on my mind and my heart. I live with those memories really every single day." ▶

As a result of the collision, Kelli was thrown a considerable distance. Her head brutally impacted with the hard snowpack, causing a severe traumatic brain injury from the whiplash effect and a fractured C-1 vertebrae, resulting in a degree of paralysis. She was in a coma for hours that day, then was in an induced coma for weeks afterward.

In a way, it is a small blessing that Kelli does not remember anything about the collision. But when she awoke from her coma weeks later at Craig Hospital in Denver, Kelli learned that she had missed not only Christmas, but also the funeral and burial of her first-born daughter, and her family's process of grieving.

Kelli says that although she suffered extensive physical injuries, Chauncy endured the deepest emotional injuries. Imagine the pain of having to come home on Christmas Eve, with two small children awaiting Santa Claus and the joys of family and the holiday season—and your wife clinging to life in intensive care. Imagine the grief of making arrangements for your child's funeral. *Why did this have to happen on my favorite day of the year, while doing my favorite thing (skiing)?*, Chauncy remembers thinking.

It is a testament to his strength and character that in the midst of all of this calamity and heartache, he nevertheless had the compassion and thoughtfulness to send flowers to the grieving family of the snowboarder.

GIVING MEANING TO LOSS

After coming out of her coma, Kelli remained hospitalized for weeks, with months of slow and painstaking physical therapy still ahead. She had to relearn how to walk, and how to eat and swallow. Although initially Kelli experienced some paralysis, miraculously she regained much of the use of her body over the course of intense rehabilitation at Craig Hospital. Today, she still suffers from partial paralysis, but she has increasing movement along her right side and arm, which she still cannot fully raise above her head. Her recovery was so astonishing, Craig Hospital honored Kelli with its prestigious 2017 Inspiration Award to celebrate and recognize her rehabilitation efforts, and for working to prevent such accidents from happening to other families.

This leads to the reason why NSAA is sharing the Johnsons' story. To honor their daughter and create a meaningful legacy on her behalf, they are partnering with NSAA to launch the powerful safety campaign

#RideAnotherDay, intended to elevate the conversation about responsible skiing and riding behavior.

"My hope is to truly get this message out there to others," Kelli said. "If anyone just hears this message even once, they will hopefully change how they act and conduct themselves out on the mountain." The Johnsons' dream is that the safety campaign will help transform the culture on the mountain, and have a trickle-down effect for younger people.

Tim Hendrickson, senior vice president with the Willis MountainGuard insurance program, knows first-hand how such tragedies impact families. As a former ski patroller and risk manager at the Canyons ski resort in Utah, and then as a claims adjuster for MountainGuard, Hendrickson has often worked with families that suffered catastrophic injuries or fatalities.

"Thankfully these incidents are incredibly rare, but when they happen, grieving families say, understandably, that they just don't want to see something like this happen to anyone else's child, and they mean that with genuine sincerity," Hendrickson said. "But with the Johnson family, they took this pledge to heart, and put their full backing behind doing all they can to highlight the need to change behavior—even if it means telling their story to anyone who listens, reliving, time and time again, the incredible pain and heartache from that Christmas Eve. It's astonishing how willing they are to put themselves through that moment, in an effort to substantively change the sport they love."

And Hendrickson should know: He worked closely with the Johnson family in processing their claim against the ski area. "No amount of money could possibly compensate for the loss of their daughter Elise, but they committed themselves to do anything they could that would raise awareness and lead to real, positive change in our industry," he said.

The Johnson family generously offered—voluntarily, on their *own* initiative—to donate a sizeable amount of money to create a safety initiative with NSAA to compel people to confront the consequences of reckless skiing.

EMBRACING #RIDEANOTHERDAY

To be sure, the never-ending challenge of recognizing the importance of emphasizing safety—while also acknowledging the risky nature of the sport overall—is a delicate balancing act.

As an industry, we need to make sure we do not overdramatize the relative dangers of the sport. Clearly, we need to grow the sport, and develop young skiers and ▶

snowboarders into lifetimers without undue concern that turns many away from the sport. There is, after all, an unfair and uninformed perception of the comparative risks in the sport, despite the fact that scientific studies confirm that skiing and snowboarding are remarkably safe (and in the last decade alone are becoming even more safe), especially compared to other similar recreation activities, including boating and kayaking, swimming, bicycling, and snowmobiling.

At the same time, we recognize the need for ongoing guest education for all manner of safety issues and challenges: avalanches, lift safety, tree wells and snow immersions, terrain parks, helmets, and especially speed control and reckless skiing. Neither our guests nor the media may fully acknowledge or even recognize the great lengths to which ski areas go to help ensure a safe experience and educate guests on safety. But as we know, safety is a *shared obligation*. To a very large extent, skiers and snowboarders control their own actions, and more than anything else, it is their individual judgment, control, and respect for others that largely dictates mountain safety (as well as their own safety). Accordingly, the #RideAnotherDay initiative is an important complement to our ski areas' individual efforts promoting safety.

"I want to raise the level of awareness of the importance of safety and respect for others out on the mountain," Kelli Johnson told a packed audience of resort operators at the Intermountain Ski Areas Association conference in June at Grand Targhee Resort, Wyo. When someone in the audience asked about Chauncy's perception of mountain safety prior to that fateful afternoon when he lost his daughter, he said he felt there was often an air of "lawlessness" at some ski areas he

visited, where some guests acted recklessly, ignoring the potential consequences of their behavior.

#RideAnotherDay is the Johnsons' attempt to change that. While some may not understand how they can still embrace skiing and boarding despite the tragedy of losing their daughter, Chauncy puts it in perspective. "[I have the opportunity to] have my daughter's memory live on with me," he explained during the CPR interview. "My last memories of being with Elise were on the ski slopes, and while it was extremely difficult for me to start [snowboarding] again, those experiences sort of help me

commune with my daughter. In addition to that, we have other [four] young children that ask us, 'When are we going skiing again?' So, I want to raise my other kids with the opportunity to do the same thing that we love, and not raise them in a scenario where they're in fear of skiing or they're in fear of other things."

In fact, it took Chauncy one full year to the day before he got the courage to go back out on the mountain. On Christmas Eve 2011, he returned to his passion of snowboarding, this time at Beaver Mountain. "It was very difficult for me..." Chauncy tearfully told the audience at the ISAA conference. "... but luckily, there was 10 inches of fresh

snow," he added, providing a well-timed comedic relief in an otherwise painful conversation.

In their appearances speaking to audiences of ski operators, both Kelli and Chauncy stress that more needs to be done to police the growing problem of reckless skiing/boarding and disregard for others out on the mountain.

"I know that many ski patrollers feel their main obligation is to provide medical care and transport for injured guests on the mountain, and they do an amazing job in that role," Kelli told a session at the NSAA ▶

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TIM HENDRICKSON, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT,
WILLIS MOUNTAINGUARD

**SHE WAS 5.
YOU WERE DOING 50.**



Elise Johnson was just learning to ski when an out-of-control 23 year-old struck and killed her.

Learn more at nsaa.org/collisions.
And remember — safe skiing saves lives.

**#RIDE
ANOTHER
DAY**



National Convention in May in Scottsdale, Ariz. “But it’s long overdue that we change the culture of the sport to emphasize more of a role where ski patrol concentrates on policing such conduct. It may be a thankless, unenviable task, but as my family knows first-hand, it’s a particularly important part of their job.”

And she is right. In fact, it is the role of any medical professional—ski patrol included—to emphasize not just the treatment of the injury, but also to take substantive steps *to prevent* such injuries from occurring in the first place. But this goes beyond just our dedicated ski patrollers.

Prevention requires everyone to police such reckless behavior, including our lift attendants, ski instructors, mountain hosts, race coaches, even employees on their days off. Simply put, if you see something, say something.

COMPONENTS OF THE CAMPAIGN

The #RideAnotherDay campaign provides ski areas the perfect opportunity to emphasize the importance of improving our mountain safety culture. The campaign features a video and print component to give areas maximum flexibility to use these tools as they see fit.

In the video, Kelli and Chauncy share their story, with important safety reminders from NSAA at the end (www.nsa.org/safety-programs/collisions).

The video was the brainchild of Jonathan Dorn, Andrew Mairs, and Bryan Nanista, the creative forces behind the #RideAnotherDay campaign. They are partners with Catapult Marketing, a separate arm of Boulder, Colo.-based Active Interest Media, which also includes *SKI* magazine, Warren Miller films, and other outdoor industry publications.

The Catapult team also created separate artwork for posters and other publications. The arresting visual of a solitary, empty snow angel made by a small child

after a fresh snowfall—with the tagline “She was 5. You were going 50”—dramatically conveys the tragedy of a life cut short as the result of reckless behavior.

“The image of a childless snow angel is instantly recognizable, but for all its simplicity it is a compelling reminder of the urgency of mountain safety for everyone,” said Earl Saline, NSAA’s director of education programming, who is the leading the effort with Catapult Marketing and the Johnsons to launch the campaign. “I cannot think of a more effective visual representation of the immediacy of our message.”

“I want this campaign to actually *empower* all employees at ski areas, so that everyone plays a role in mountain safety and policing reckless skiing. I want the campaign to create a new generation of more respectful and more conscientious skiers and riders.”

CHAUNCY JOHNSON

It was actually Chauncy Johnson who came up with the campaign’s title, noted Saline. “When we got a big group together from Catapult, NSAA, and the Johnson family, it was Chauncy himself who said the goal of their concept was to make sure everyone could come back, again and again, to enjoy what snowsports have to offer,” Saline recalled. “He said he wanted everyone to ‘ride another day.’ We all immediately said, ‘That’s it! That’s brilliant!’”

NSAA will provide some #RideAnotherDay posters as part of the pre-season safety materials sent to member resorts each fall. To help spread the message, ski areas may add their own logos

to the artwork, and use the materials for posters and in other applications—with their social media, as part of their safety information on websites, in printed resort publications in hotel rooms, and as posters hanging in ski patrol shacks and other employee gathering areas.

Saline says he expects that NSP volunteers and ambassadors will work with school groups, libraries, coffee shops, local ski rental shops, and other businesses to post the images around mountain communities. ▶

Ski areas should include the video (there is also a closed-caption version) as an important part of their employee orientation in the fall, before the season opens, and to prompt extended conversations throughout the resort for a renewed effort to discourage recklessness and promote overall safety. Off-duty employees account for about 7 percent of all skier/boarder visits nationally, a sizable number of people who can elevate the conversation at resorts with friends, guests, and families, especially with younger skiers/boarders. This cultural shift must become ingrained, it must begin early, and it must be reinforced often.

“I want this campaign to actually *empower* all employees at ski areas, so that everyone plays a role in mountain safety and policing reckless skiing,” Chauncy emphasized. “I want the campaign to create a new generation of more respectful and more conscientious skiers and riders.”

The video should play an important role at ski patrol refreshers too—both for professional and volunteer patrollers. As well, when pulling passes from reckless riders, ski patrollers could require them to watch the Johnson family video before getting their ski privileges back. This would reinforce that their reckless conduct may have serious, life-altering consequences. And ski areas should include their race teams, clubs, and academies in this important conversation. Our athletes are influential leaders on the mountain, and studies have repeatedly shown in other sports that peer-to-peer influence when it comes to safety and behavior—as opposed to lecturing or other forms perceived as scolding—is a more effective way to change behavior.

The video should also be used with school groups, particularly in local mountain communities, as ski patrol and safety ambassadors reach out to teenagers (especially young males, who are notorious risk-takers), to stress both the thrill and fun of skiing and boarding as well as the importance of safety and controlling their speeds.

“I don’t know that to this point that there’s been a specific campaign that actually brings to light the reality of what happens when things [like our accident] go wrong,” Chauncy said during the CPR interview. He emphasized that he wanted the campaign “to be able to get people’s attention and help them look at this little girl, my daughter, the young man that was riding a snowboard, [that] this could be their brother, it could be their daughter, it could be their sister, it could be their mom,” Chauncy said. “In that light, it just resonates at a different level.”

If the Johnson family’s efforts can raise awareness, change behavior, and prevent someone else’s family or parent from such suffering, they have demonstrated they are more than willing to re-examine that day over and over again.

HOPE & CHANGE

An important underlying element of the #RideAnotherDay initiative is in providing the Johnson family some deeply needed catharsis and an opportunity to continue their healing process. To tell their story—no matter how painful it may be to repeatedly relive such a horrific experience—is a form of therapy in and of itself.

If the family’s efforts can raise awareness, change behavior, and prevent someone else’s family or

parent from such suffering, they have demonstrated they are more than willing to re-examine that day over and over again. And Chauncy emphasizes that their donation and their involvement in the campaign is not only to honor his wife and lost daughter, but also to honor the life of the snowboarder. (The Johnsons repeatedly stress that they carry absolutely no ill-will toward the snowboarder, who paid the ultimate price for his actions.)

The family’s willingness to underwrite most of the cost of the safety initiative reinforces their resiliency, strength, and most importantly, their passion for what this sport means to them.

“At the end of the day, skiing really is about family,” Chauncy said, underscoring in one short sentence the biggest selling point that the ski industry has for promoting one of the most enduring pleasures of the sport. “Families that play together, stay together. *That’s* why we are doing this.” ■