

# Cert Events for **WOMEN OF COLOR** Help Break Down Barriers

By Katrina Brinkerhoff, PSIA-AASI Communications Specialist

**L**earning to ski or ride can be an intimidating experience. It's even harder when you don't see other participants who look like you, or instructors who share similar backgrounds or experiences.

VIEW VIDEO



Watch this video recap of Women of Winter events.



MICHELI OLIVER

PSIA-AASI's partnership with Women of Winter focuses on making snowsports more welcoming and inclusive.

That, unfortunately, is all too common an experience for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and other marginalized groups, said Adrianna Dong, who participated in a certification event at New York's Windham Mountain, coordinated by the Women of Winter organization in collaboration with PSIA-AASI. As an education association, PSIA-AASI is committed to making snowsports more welcoming to everyone, and among the initiatives it's undertaken is a partnership with Women of Winter, a grassroots organization created in 2018 to help empower women in snowsports.

PSIA-AASI and Women of Winter agreed that one way to begin their collaboration was to provide educational opportunities to people who identify as Black, Indigenous, and Women of Color (BIWOC). The logic is simple. Offer scholarships to welcoming and inclusive events that encourage participants to bring their authentic selves, without reservations or fear of judgment. The structure allows for an optimal learning experience so the women can focus on their skiing, snowboarding, and teaching skills – and gain the confidence to share what they learn with other BIWOC and girls in their communities. The goal is to create a more diverse snowsports community that grows exponentially each year.

“Black, Indigenous, and Women of Color are the most under-represented demographic in snowsports,” said Women of Winter Founder Chris Walch. “By actively working to diversify snowsports, we are saying to everyone, ‘You belong here; you are welcome here.’”

Together, PSIA-AASI and Women of Women hosted five instructor certification events around the country during the 2021-22 season. Participants – selected through a scholarship program – attended at no cost, received gear from Official Suppliers, and had the



### LEARN MORE ABOUT WOMEN OF WINTER

Women of Winter is committed to breaking down barriers and supporting women in snowsports. Learn more about Women of Winter, including partnership opportunities, at [womenofwinter.net](https://womenofwinter.net).



opportunity to earn their Level I certification to teach skiing or snowboarding. The events were designed to promote learning, and participants left with an understanding of PSIA-AASI's fundamentals while building a support network of individuals committed to helping others in their communities learn to ski and ride.

### CREATING A SPACE FOR LEARNING

PSIA-AASI's teaching skills and people skills convey that a successful learning environment starts with helping students feel comfortable, listened to, and supported. Former PSIA-AASI Chief Executive Officer Nicholas Herrin, who helped initiate the partnership with Women of Winter, said the five educational events were designed to foster community so participants could feel welcomed and included on the hill. The training events were also created to train participants with the skills to feel confident taking their Level I assessment. Group size was capped at six to ensure a more personalized experience, and all participants identified as BIWOC.

The events took place at Big Sky Resort in Montana, Eldora Mountain Resort in Colorado, Hyland Hills Ski Area in Minnesota, and Windham Mountain in New York. Each event kicked off with a two-day clinic to help participants learn how to teach either skiing or snowboarding, with an emphasis on the fundamental people skills, teaching skills, and technical skills represented by PSIA-AASI's Learning Connection<sup>SM</sup> Model. Participants then took part in their discipline's Level I assessment to determine if they could teach to PSIA-AASI's Level I standards. If they met PSIA-AASI's Level I standards, they received their Level I certification at the end of the event.

## MEET THE PARTICIPANTS



**ADRIANNA DONG** is a captain in the United States Air Force and an E-3 AWACS pilot, a runner, and a skier. Now stationed at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska, she spends her free time teaching other airmen and women how to ski, and volunteers as a ski instructor with Challenge Alaska, an adaptive ski and snowboard school.



**AMANDA CRUZ** – a former pre-law student turned instructor – teaches both yoga and snowboarding, including a women's-specific program. She is focused on helping break down barriers that women and racial minorities encounter in outdoor spaces, so they can enjoy active, adventurous lifestyles.



**CATHERINE JÄGER** is co-founder of POC Nordic, a group that leads cross country ski clinics and provides gear for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. She is passionate about giving more BIPOC access to winter sports and educating everyone about the history of indigenous lands.



**TINA PARRISH** wants to share her passion for snowboarding with everyone, particularly those from underrepresented communities. She teaches snowboarding part-time in PSIA-AASI's Northwest Region.

Laura Jarriel



Alpine Level I instructors show off their newly earned certifications at Hyland Hills Ski Area in Bloomington, Minnesota.

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Participants at the certification event at Montana's Big Sky Resort enjoyed perfect conditions in which to hone their technique.

### THE WOMEN-SPECIFIC EVENTS SUPPORTED PARTICIPANTS

As for why women-specific events are valuable, Dong explained that it creates a more welcoming and supportive learning environment. "In my military career, I'm often the only woman in the room, so I sometimes forget the benefits of working in a group of all women," she said. "The atmosphere of the Women of Winter certification event put me at ease. I felt comfortable interacting and engaging with others in a non-competitive environment. It let us learn without judgment. Everyone helped each other."

### PSIA-AASI'S COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

PSIA-AASI is committed to making snowsports a more welcoming, equitable, and inclusive space – so everyone can enjoy the thrill of gliding on snow. Use this code to learn more about PSIA-AASI's DEI efforts.



Tina Parrish, who taught snowboarding at Crystal Mountain in Washington before participating in a Women of Winter event at Montana's Big Sky Resort, said, "Skills are necessary of course, but it's your ability to create a welcoming environment that will make or break someone's experience, which influences whether they'll want to return to the sport or not." The same concept applies to certification assessments, and the Women of Winter event created a welcoming environment for her to learn and develop her teaching skills. "I felt confident to try new things," said Parrish. "The support of the other women really made the event for me."

Amanda Cruz, who worked as a snowboard instructor at Eldora in Colorado, knew she wanted to earn her Level I certification, so the Women of Winter event at her home mountain was a perfect opportunity. "I wanted to be prepared for when I took my assessment," she said, "so when I learned about the scholarship, the notion of studying and going through my assessment with other women of color appealed to me." She said teaching and riding can often feel like a homogenized boy's club and added, "I know what it's like – based upon my personal on-snow experience – to feel pressure from others that I somehow don't measure up, all because I'm a woman."

Cruz said of the event, "Even though we were strangers, I could be myself. I could share my personal experiences and listen to other's experiences in turn without fear of judgment, belittlement, or retali-



IAN TOMASCH

Katie White, a member of the Northern Rocky Mountain Region education staff, offers technical pointers at the event at New York's Windham Mountain.

ation.” Continuing, “As an Indigenous mixed-race woman, I can honestly say the event was the first time in my snowsports career where I felt completely seen, heard, and encouraged.”

“The group was so supportive, and the environment was focused on learning,” said Catherine Jäger, a cross country instructor and alpine skier who participated in the Big Sky event. “It was a space where we were all aware of what it means to be a person of color. As a group, we all understood the value of listening. We wanted to help others feel comfortable and give everyone a sense of security.”

Comfort was key for Parrish as well, who explained that since all the participants felt comfortable, it was easier to focus on learning and advancing their teaching skills, people skills, and technical skills. “It was beneficial to go through the formal education process and learn more about the snowboard fundamentals so I could be a better teacher to my students,” she said. “I gained an appreciation for continuing education and discovered there is so much more to learn. It opened a door for me and increased my love of teaching.”

Parrish continued, “Events like the Women of Winter events matter because it’s important to see yourself represented so you can be your true authentic self without judgment. So you don’t have a sense of imposter syndrome and the feeling that you don’t belong.”

### SHARING IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

After the events wrapped up, the participants were eager to continue their work serving as role models and helping others in their communities learn how to ski and ride.

Dong shared that most BIWOC she knows are afraid to try snowsports for the first time simply because it’s unfamiliar to them, and they don’t see many other people who look like them skiing and riding. She said, “Seeing people who share similar experiences as you can help you feel more comfortable exploring new spaces.” This resonated for Parrish too. “It’s important to have teachers who look like you, who share your set of experiences,” she said, explaining that this is why she teaches. “I want to serve as a role model for other Women of Color.”

## THANK YOU, PARTNERS & SPONSORS

PSIA-AASI Official Suppliers were among the partners and sponsors Women of Winter collaborated with to support scholarship recipients by providing funding and high-quality gear.



**"IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE TEACHERS WHO LOOK LIKE YOU, WHO SHARE YOUR SET OF EXPERIENCES."**

— TINA PARRISH

The events gave participants the opportunity to make new friends and network.



COURTESY OF WOMEN OF WINTER



### SUPPORT THE PSIA-AASI EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Do you want to support others' education journeys and help inspire the next generation of skiers and riders? Consider giving a gift to the Education Foundation to support PSIA-AASI scholarships. Use this code to learn more.



In addition to continuing to help other military members learn to ski, Dong is excited to apply the skills she learned to her volunteer efforts with Challenge Alaska, an organization that uses adaptive sports and therapeutic recreation to help individuals living with disabilities. "It's great to have the training of how to teach skiing. It's a lot of pressure to teach a beginner a sport you love. What if they

A large advertisement for Giro snow helmets. The background is a snowy mountain scene. On the left, a person in an orange jacket and helmet is partially visible. On the right, a woman in a purple jacket and helmet is smiling. The Giro logo is in the top right corner. The text "LIVE FOR THIS" is written in large, bold, blue letters across the middle. On the right side, vertical text reads "THE NEW TOR AND TENAYA HELMETS". At the bottom left, there are logos for the Professional Ski Instructors of America and the National Association of Snowboard Instructors, along with a QR code. At the bottom center, text reads "VISIT THESNOWPROS.ORG TO ACCESS GIRO PRO OFFERS FOR PSIA-AASI MEMBERS."/>

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don't have fun?" she said. "Now I can teach others the ropes, who can go on to help others learn to ski."

Jäger, who has co-taught cross country clinics for People of Color for the past two seasons, will continue volunteering with the program she co-created. She said the Women of Winter events strengthened her leadership skills and encouraged her to continue teaching. "The training and certification event opened a door to a BIWOC community of skiers and riders I didn't know existed," she said, "and I'm inspired to continue my work helping others learn to ski."

Parrish instructs because she loves teaching and wants to serve as a mentor for other BIWOC and girls. She wants to break down the intimidation many people feel to try snowsports or teach snowsports. "You don't need to be an expert to teach," she said. "If you think you can't do something, with the training and support of others, and learning the skills and fundamentals, you'll realize you're capable of so much more."

Cruz is also looking forward to using her certification to continue teaching others how to advance their riding, as well as promote progressive DEI conversations. "I want to serve as an example to follow, and to show young Black, Indigenous, and Girls of Color that they have a place in snowsports. The event, and passing my Level I certification, helped elevate my voice. It gave me a sense of validity to pass along to others."

## HOW TO APPLY

- ▶ Visit the scholarship page by using this code.
- ▶ Apply by, or before, 11:59 p.m. Mountain Time on October 31, 2022.
- ▶ Questions? Email [memberservices@thesnowpros.org](mailto:memberservices@thesnowpros.org)



## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In addition to achieving their Level I certification, many participants spent time discussing ways to help make snowsports more inclusive. "The events were so much more than a certification. We built a community," said Cruz. "We developed our teaching skills on snow and spent meals discussing DEI and how to break down the barriers People of Color experience when trying snowsports." She said, "Black, Indigenous, and People of Color belong in snowsports. We're here, and will stay here, to inspire the next generation of skiers and riders."

Many of the event participants have stayed in-touch. They make plans to ski and ride together, or brainstorm teaching scenarios and DEI ideas. Jäger said, "We built a community to lean on and support one another. It's fantastic. And the Level I certification is the icing on the cake." **32**

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