

# THE NANCY OAKES HALL WOMEN'S SCHOLARSHIP

## EMPOWERS FEMALE INSTRUCTORS TO EXCEL AS INDUSTRY LEADERS

By Katrina Brinkerhoff

**F**emale members of PSIA-AASI who wish to follow in the footsteps of former Alpine Demonstration Team member Nancy Oakes Hall now have extra education support thanks to a new scholarship program she founded before losing a

courageous battle with cancer in April 2018. The program will help women within PSIA-AASI or the broader snowsports industry.

"If you ever met her, you'd remember her. She was so bubbly and happy – she made everyone feel special," said Lorna Petersen, Oakes Hall's friend since childhood. Jennifer (Gigi) Pielsticker, Oakes Hall's sister, described her as, "A leader, a teacher, a student, a skier, an artist, a mentor, and a friend to anyone she met."

### NANCY'S PAY-IT-FORWARD APPROACH

Born and raised in Aspen, Colorado, Nancy Oakes grew up ski racing with The Aspen Valley Ski Club. She started coaching and later turned to instructing, spending time in both Aspen, Colorado, and Sun Valley, Idaho. Testament to her skill as a skier and teacher, from 1992 to 1996 she was a member of PSIA's elite Alpine Demonstration Team (now known as the Alpine Team).

Memorable experiences with the team and at events like the PSIA Women's Ski College stayed with her, inspiring her to initiate a scholarship fund to help young women foster their own footing in PSIA-

AASI. After her cancer diagnosis, she dove back into her idea. She knew how hard it was to work as an instructor, and she wanted to help women who might not be able to pursue a career as an instructor due to financial barriers. According to Petersen, "She noticed and empathized with everyone. She always wanted to help and pay it forward. One of her final wishes was to encourage women to pursue leadership opportunities, to show them that their voices matter. The Nancy Oakes Hall Women's Scholarship will honor her legacy by empowering more women to seek leadership roles in the snowsports industry."

"Nancy had the idea of the scholarship as a way to empower women," said Carol Levine, Oakes Hall's longtime friend and member of the scholarship selection committee. "She recognized and appreciated the support one gains from working with likeminded women – and she wanted to pay that opportunity forward to others. Ultimately, she wanted to get more women involved with the PSIA-AASI National Team and in leadership roles."

Having more female voices represented will help the snowsports industry grow by expanding the available resource pool for leadership roles (e.g., trainers, team members, division presidents, and resort and ski school managers), and by creating more educational content directed toward women. According to a 2017 report by Morgan Stanley, gender diversity in the workplace "can translate to increased productivity, greater innovation, better products, better decision-making, and higher employee retention and satisfaction."

One way to encourage more women to pursue leadership positions is to develop a welcoming culture that values education and certification levels in the hiring process. The scholarship shows members that PSIA-AASI is committed to gender inclusivity and removes cost barriers by awarding three educational scholarships each year. One scholarship covers attendance at PSIA-AASI's National



SCOTT MARKWITZ / PSIA-AASI ARCHIVES

Oakes Hall's skiing was described by many as "poetry in motion."

Academy, another covers attendance at the Women's Summit, and a third scholarship option helps offset expenses related to preparing for and achieving a Level I, II, or III certification or specialist credential. These three options let applicants seek the assistance most effective to help them meet their goals, depending on the leadership role they're pursuing.

### DRIVE FOR PERSONAL IMPROVEMENT

Oakes started ski racing in high school and also taught lessons with Aspen Ski School over her high school and college holiday breaks. After college, she coached ski racing at the Aspen Ski Club. It was there that she first met Mike Porter, a PSIA Alpine Demonstration Team member who went on to coach the team for many years, including the 1992-96 term that included Oakes. Recalling how caring she was with her students, Porter said, "Her ability to work with others was amazing; everyone wanted to spend time with her. Even her nonverbal communication put people at ease and made them feel comfortable; she had a tremendous talent for working with other people."

Oakes' involvement with PSIA began in the mid 1980s when Tim Petrick, an Alpine Demonstration Team Member (1976-88) who ran the Aspen Ski Club, introduced her to the association and showed everyone that, as Oakes once said, "being in ski school was actually cool!" After instructing in Aspen, she moved to Sun Valley, Idaho, in the early 1990s and continued instructing. There, she met other female leaders, including Carol Levine who would become a lifelong friend.



JENNIFER (GIGI) PIELSTICKER

Oakes embroidered her own hats in high school. She later designed sweaters and hats for such brands as Demetre.



PSIA-AASI ARCHIVES

PSIA Alpine Demonstration Team, circa 1995. Top row (left to right): Shawn Smith, Coach Mike Porter, Dave Manneter, Jay Evans, Bob Barnes, Dave Merriam, and Nancy Oakes. Bottom row (left to right): Dee Byrne, Harold Harb, Brian Maquire, Greg Moss, and Scott Mathers.

Levine was a two-term member of the PSIA Alpine Demonstration Team (1980-88) and Oakes expressed interest in trying out for a coveted spot. Naturally, they struck up a working friendship. Levine recalls, “We enjoyed the same things; helping people,

problem solving, and producing educational content for ski instruction. She was so passionate about teaching, and she had a remarkable drive – she always said that she wanted to be the best version of herself.”

Oakes made the team for the 1992-

1996 term. Porter recalled that she was quiet during tryouts, but that was one of her strengths, observing others and asking questions to find ways to improve. “She didn’t talk the most; her words were chosen carefully,” he said. “She communicated efficiently and concisely to inspire her students and get results. Porter said Oakes was challenged by making an indoor presentation during tryouts, but didn’t let this get her down. “She was driven by personal improvement, and how this could help others be stronger skiers and kinder people.”

During her time on the team she traveled to Nozawa Onsen, Japan, for Interski. Later calling it “the trip of a lifetime,” Oakes was thrilled to meet such a diverse group of people from around the world – who were all as passionate about skiing as she was. She also said she skied the deepest powder of her life.

### PASSION FOR TEACHING

The 1990s was a transformative time for PSIA-AASI. Snowboarders had just joined the team, and there was an emphasis on individualized skiing and riding technique. Oakes’ beautiful and graceful skiing was described by many as “poetry in motion.” According to Porter,

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JENNIFER (GIGI) PIELSTICKER

Oakes Hall received a Master of Fine Arts Degree from Kendall College of Art and Design in Grand Rapids, Michigan and was a master in residence at the Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Snowmass Village, Colorado.

“She was a really gifted skier; she had a good feel for the snow and her line and would ski efficiently. She was also a great leader.”

Oakes attributed her leadership skills to attending events like National Academy and the Women’s Ski College, where she worked as a clinic leader. Organized by Levine as well as two other former Alpine Demonstration Team members – Dee Byrne and Mermer Blakeslee – the Women’s Ski College gave attendees top-notch education on teaching, challenged them technically, and also offered a supportive and inclusive environment for participants to take risks and explore more freely. The event transformed into what is now the Women’s Summit.

Oakes Hall took a hiatus from fulltime ski instruction when she moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan, with her husband Jay and step-daughter Heather, but she didn’t take a break from teaching. While in Michigan, she earned a Master of Fine Arts Degree from Kendall College of Art and Design and began teaching art. Her propensity for teaching transferred from coaching and instructing into the creative arts, but skiing was always on her mind and she enjoyed the days she skied Boyne Mountain.

Oakes Hall would visit Aspen over the winter holidays, and then her trips became more frequent. She reconnected with Levine and Byrne, and decided she wanted to become a PSIA-AASI trainer and examiner. In 2011 Oakes Hall returned as a part-time ski instructor to the Aspen Ski and Snowboard School. There, she continued to develop new educational programing.

## DRIVE TO HELP OTHERS

Oakes Hall remained involved with the Aspen Ski School until the time of her passing in April 2018. After starting chemo therapy, she visited the ski school with Petersen. “We showed up right after all the ski pros had just returned to the locker room at the end of the day, and, upon hearing that Nancy was outside, everyone hurried out to the Gondola Plaza with their ski boots still on to say hello,” recalled Petersen. “Everyone knows the first thing instructors do is take off their boots at the end of a long day, and Nancy said, ‘I must be better than I thought!’ with a smile.”

Her sister Gigi recalled that she would slave for hours to plan her clinic presentations, and added “That’s why this scholarship was so special to Nancy’s heart, because she gained so much personally from working as an instructor and teaching others. She was able to see the small technicalities – it would drive me crazy when she would talk about the edging of a ski by a quarter degree, but she loved it. She could watch others ski, spot something, and communicate back to them how they could improve. She wanted to share.”

Even in her final days Oakes Hall never lost her passion for learning and teaching others. Levine recalls the last day they spent together, when Oakes Hall insisted they discuss the scholarship and a skiing concept called hitching the hip, which she was excited about developing into a teaching progression to present at a clinic. At a time when she was more comfortable sitting or lying on a bed, Oakes Hall not only talked about ski movements, she stood up to demonstrate them. They weren’t on snow, Levine said, but it didn’t matter; they enjoyed the moment talking about skiing skills and demonstrating them on a flat carpet. “We both knew it was probably the last time we would see one another,” said Levine, “but we put that aside. Nancy wanted to express her passion.”

## SCHOLARSHIP WILL HONOR NANCY’S LEGACY

In late September, Oakes Hall’s family and friends gathered atop Aspen Mountain to celebrate her life. “It was special to connect with so many people and hear stories about how she has positively affected so many people in her life,” said PSIA-AASI CEO (and former Alpine Team member) Nicholas Herrin. “You really saw the impact she left on individuals and the ski community. Her thoughtfulness and kindness were apparent.”

The Nancy Oakes Hall Women’s Scholarship will honor her legacy by helping other women continue their PSIA-AASI education and grow professionally. Aleisha Padilla Seubert, PSIA-AASI education development specialist and a member, with Levine and others, of the scholarship selection committee, said the scholarships will be awarded to female members who demonstrate a commitment to enhance their teaching, skiing, and service skills. Selected recipients, said Levine, should demonstrate Oakes Hall’s qualities of working hard to improve, commitment to helping others, and humility.

“Nancy was involved in creating the scholarship and outlining its process,” added Lorna Petersen. “She saw a gap and wanted to leave an impact, and I think it is everything that she wanted. The Nancy Oakes Hall Women’s Scholarship truly lets her pay it forward.”

**Katrina Brinkerhoff** is PSIA-AASI’s public relations specialist, helping promote education programs and content for the benefit of association members, the industry, and the media. She is a former alpine instructor for Vail Resorts Ski and Snowboard School in Colorado. **Email:** [kbrinkerhoff@thesnowpros.org](mailto:kbrinkerhoff@thesnowpros.org)

**VIEW VIDEO**




[tiny.cc/lucx0y](https://tiny.cc/lucx0y)

Watch this video tribute to learn more about Nancy Oakes Hall and the scholarship fund she founded.

**APPLY FOR SCHOLARSHIPS BY DEC. 15 OR FEB. 15**

For more information about the Nancy Oakes Hall Women’s Scholarship, visit [thesnowpros.org/scholarships](https://thesnowpros.org/scholarships). Application are Due Saturday, December 15, 2018, for the Women’s Summit; Friday, February 15, 2019, for National Academy; and Friday, February 15, 2019 for a specific certification/specialist track. Please note that for the 2019-20 season, all deadlines applications will be due on November 1, 2019.

To view a video of Nancy Oakes Hall’s Celebration of Life Service please visit [tiny.cc/a7dx0y](https://tiny.cc/a7dx0y)