

# National Ski Council Federation

## Skiing News from Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) -- Last summer, 27 people from Northeast Ohio went skiing together in Valle Nevado, Chile, where the Southern Hemisphere resort was in the throes of winter.

"We're standing there in our ski boots, jumping up and down, going, 'It's August! This is too cool!'" recalled Anne Houdek, who took the trip with other members of the Cleveland Metro Ski Council.

The Cleveland group is part of the National Ski Council Federation, which represents 300,000 skiers and 28 regional councils. But interestingly, some of the federation's most active skiers are flatlanders, city-dwellers and beachgoers who live far from snow and slopes.

"Because we don't have mountains, we have to be organized in order to go and get the best dollar and buying power for our ski trips," said Michelle Moskowitz, president of the Florida Ski Council, which is one of the federation's biggest regional groups, with 16 member clubs from Pensacola to Miami.

The Florida clubs' marketing includes an ad that asks, "Where do we ski in Florida?" The answer is, "Anywhere you want," said Moskowitz.

In January, the Florida council will head to Heavenly, a ski resort in Lake Tahoe. Trips planned for 2009 include Snowmass, Colo., Cortina, Italy; Nagano, Japan, and Whistler in British Columbia, Canada, a year before the Winter Olympics are held there. In the past, Florida clubs have gone everywhere from St. Moritz, Switzerland, to Bariloche, Argentina, which, like Valle Nevado, Chile, offers skiing in August.

"There are skiers who in the summertime have a pent-up demand," said Patrick Rothe, a sales manager with Ski.com, which books group trips for the Florida council and other ski clubs. "By August, they really want to go skiing before our winter starts again."

Rothe said the interest in exotic ski destinations is being driven in part by more aggressive marketing by resorts in places like South America and New Zealand, and partly because there are more international flights available, so trips are easier to plan.

Popular domestic resorts include Aspen, Vail and Steamboat in Colorado; Jackson Hole, Wyo.; Big Sky, Mont.; Park City and Deer Valley, Utah, according to Rothe.

The Alps and Canadian resorts are also perennials, but with the U.S. dollar so weak, there is less interest among ski clubs than in past years in European and Canadian destinations,

according to Paul Webber, whose company, PRW Travel Shows, brings resort representatives together with ski clubs in the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest.

But Webber notes an important trend taking place. Ski clubs these days are doing less skiing.

"It used to be on a seven-day trip, people would ski five or six days. Now I see more of a trend of four or five days of skiing, with other vacation and sightseeing activities like dog-sled rides, snowshoe outings, cross-country skiing, and snowmobile trips in Jackson Hole and Yellowstone," he said.

Keith Fanta, vice president of the National Ski Council Federation and a member of a Chicago-area club, said clubs are also doing more trips that have nothing to do with snow.

"I know of clubs that have gone to Costa Rica to the rainforest, and others that have gone to South Africa and Vietnam," he said. "A number of our clubs from Chicago will go skiing in New Zealand and then stop at a warm-weather destination (such as a Pacific island) on the way back."

Webber agreed, saying that clubs are becoming more like "year-round sports clubs. Some clubs go up to Colorado in the summer for whitewater rafting, hiking, horseback riding and fishing."

The Cleveland Metro Ski Council plans a Thanksgiving 2008 cruise out of New Orleans, and Florida clubs do everything from sailing to restaurant and theater nights to fundraising for charities like the Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Program.

But local ski trips are still the main focus for many clubs. In Ohio, for example, outings to small nearby slopes like Alpine Valley in Chesterland, and Boston Mills-Brandywine, in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, allow people to "learn how to ski and get their ski legs," Houdek said. When they're ready for bigger challenges, they might join a bus trip to Western New York to a resort like Holiday Valley, and then progress to bigger, better-known mountains like Vail or Aspen.

Not only do the group trips offer discounted rates, but there's a social aspect. "You're with a lot of people that you know," Houdek said, "and that's what makes it more fun."