

GWEN ALLARD (Mendon, Vt.)

A pioneering snowsports educator, Gwen Allard spent a half century focusing on helping others learn how to ski, with a particular focus on adaptive. She was one of the first to embrace adaptive education and went on to become a well-respected leader within the Professional Ski Instructors of America (PSIA) and American Association of Snowboard Instructors (AASI) for her innovative teaching methodology and the ability to effectively communicate it to students. Along the way, she was a model of perseverance in rallying the entire ski industry around adaptive sport.

The hallmark of her impact on snowsports was that of a visionary who dreamed big then brought people together to make things happen. Her career was multi-faceted, but her primary contributions came in the field of adaptive sport, where her tireless promotion of the discipline and development of programs and standards created a greater awareness and acceptance of the discipline within the snowsports community.

Growing up in Schenectady, N.Y., she gained an early passion for the outdoors from her father. She was influenced early on by Frederica Anderson, a female role model who taught skiing at nearby Maple Ski Ridge for over a half-century. In 1964, Anderson invited Allard to start teaching herself, igniting a lifelong passion.

By the '70s, Allard began to focus her interest more towards adaptive, seeking mentorship from Bruce Gavett, an early pioneer in the field. In the mid-70s she founded the Gore Mountain Adaptive Program, one of the earlier adaptive-specific programs in the country.

As she began her engagement with adaptive sport, she realized that the development of standardized, professional teaching methods was vital. She carried that vision across her entire career. After earning her PSIA Level 3 in 1974, she then went on to become executive director of PSIA-Eastern in 1975, where she also founded the PSIA-E Foundation.

Her lifetime of methodic educational protocols came to the fore with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. With her knowledge, she was able to provide strong counsel to the teaching and resort industry on how to best manage new protocols to truly provide a great experience for adaptive snowsports enthusiasts.

In an era when risk awareness was growing, collaborated with Werner Schuster to develop the first significant safety manual for the National Ski Areas Association. As environmental awareness was becoming more predominant within the industry, she brought together leaders from PSIA, National Ski Patrol, Snowsports Industries America and the Adaptive Sports Foundation to develop educational materials.

One of her most noted accomplishments was the development of the Adaptive Sports Foundation at New York's Ski Windham. Starting with a fledgling program in 1983, she grew it to become an epicenter for adaptive sport. In 2005, the foundation opened the Gwen Allard Adaptive Sports Center which continued to grow and now features its own chairlift.

In the 1980s she also began working with Disabled Sports USA (now Move United), leading to PSIA/AASI recognition of adaptive sport. By 1987, PSIA/AASI and its divisions were training and certifying adaptive teachers.

One of her crowning achievements was the innovation of the Double H Ranch in New York. She had been invited in 1997 by ranch visionaries Charlie Woods and Paul Newman to investigate how they might make use of an abandoned ski area on their property. Calling on her industry network, Allard generated hundreds of thousands of dollars in donated equipment, put together a staff and volunteer team to make the ranch a thriving success for adaptive sport, opening in 1998.

Double H Ranch was the proving ground for a PSIA-AASI program that ultimately reached 70 organizations nationwide impacting over 10,000 adaptive instructors and 20,000 adaptive students.

To further showcase the advancements in adaptive education in America, she pushed for the addition of an adaptive skier onto the U.S. Demo Team for the 1991 Interski Congress held in St. Anton, Austria. Diana Golden, who would go on to become a Hall of Famer, wowed the audience and set the stage for adaptive participants on future Interski teams.

In recognition of her contributions to the adaptive community in New York state, Allard was honored by President George W. Bush, Governor George Pataki and Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Disabled Sports USA in 1999 honored her with its Jim Winthers Award for volunteerism. In 2001 she was named to the Adaptive Sports Hall of Fame. A year later, she was recognized by PSIA-AASI with its Educational Excellence Award, one of its highest honors.