

SHREDDING POW

GJHS' Rocky Mountain high

by marie calkins



Grand Junction High School only has one club that has desperate kids up and out of bed at 4 a.m. on a school day in hopes of being a member.

GJHS' Ski and Board Club was established in 2011 and has become the school's most popular, boasting nearly 130 members for the 2023-24 season

The club was started by GJHS social studies teacher Justin Whiteford, counselor Dustin Giesenhagen, and English teacher Steve Brown.

"In other schools I worked at, they always had ski clubs because I lived in Wyoming, but we're in Colorado so I thought we had to have one... I spoke with Brown and Whiteford, 'cause they'd been wanting to do one as well. We got it going," said Giesenhagen.

Since 2011, the club has grown in size and in popularity. While the goal for this year's season was an 80 member capacity, the amount of interest made this goal hard to maintain.

"The problem we have is, so many kids are committed. How do you turn a kid away that shows up at 4 or 5 in the morning? So we raised the capacity to 120," said Whiteford.

The club's officers are senior Evan Pipkin, and juniors Finn Sharp, Izabella Barney, Hannah Burton, Lia Bunnell, and Adam Pramenko.

"Officers and upper classmen provide structure and leadership. Brown and I lay the foundation but they lay the tone, they set the track," said Whiteford.

"It's fun being able to kind of shape a club. You get to do what you want. You can choose how you want it to be ran...I like being able to make changes where you see a change needing to be made," said Burton.

"You have to set a good example for everyone," said Pramenko.

"You have to be looking out for everyone," Burton responded.

The club goes on several trips throughout the season, as well as the benefit of discounted Powderhorn Ski resort passes. They have multiple overnight trips including a trip to Western Colorado University where

they ski at Monarch Mountain Ski Resort and Crested Butte Mountain Resort.

"At Western they have a competition called the Rail Jam. There's usually 500-1000 people. What was at first a joke, became Junction students first, second, and third... taking They would pat us on the head and say 'Oh yeah, your kids can compete. We don't want them to get hurt. Make sure they wear padding and helmets.' Whatever. We beat their ass," joked Whiteford.

This year, they will return to Rail Jam again February of 2024.

"We had 80 Junction kids there, and we're gonna do it again. We'll defend our title," Whiteford added.

GJHS' Ski and Board club popularity expands outside of GJHS.

"We averaged anywhere from five to 10 kids who would transfer to Junction just for the club itself," Whiteford said.

Even the idea itself gained traction throughout the valley.

"We're the best one in the valley, no doubt. We kind of established it, then Fruita [Monument High School] stole our idea," said Giesenhagen.

The club's goal is to make the slopes fun and available for all students.

"I am really glad to see all these other people get to join our club... Our goal is to make skiing and snowboarding more accessible," Sharp said.

"It's a club that we created for fun... we're about having fun," said Brown.

Despite the amount of fun the club can be, Whiteford credits its success to the structure of the club.

"We've had strict but understandable guidelines right off the bat. Kids get it and they love it. We have a lot of structure and a lot of rules in place so that kids can be safe but it has allowed kids to thrive," Whiteford said.

GJHS' Ski and Board Club's first trip will be sometime in January.



The first GJHS Ski and Board logo