

West Hartford

Sports

Ski racer starts charitable endeavor

by Mark Jahne

Samantha Udolf is a competitive skier from Kingswood-Oxford School who is combining a quest for the finish line with a new charity to help sick children. Founded in June, her endeavor is dedicated to improving the daily lives of children who are current-

ly living and rehabilitating at the Ronald McDonald House in Springfield, Mass.

"This all started when she was looking to volunteer her time," said her father, Robert, of the West Hartford real estate company Udolf Properties. "The Ronald McDonald House in Springfield is fairly unique because it's one of five in the country that are funded independently. So all the money donated there stays there. Most of their money comes from grassroots fundraising efforts."

Her web site, launched this summer, is part of the fund-raising push the family has titled "Sam's Race For A Place."

The site was designed by the Dornenburg Group, an advertising and marketing company that is aiding her efforts. The family also made sure to get the endorsement of the United States Ski Association and the Vermont Alpine Association; both groups have officially backed

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Samantha's fund-raising efforts.

She's already raised \$13,480 for the nonprofit group, and that number is sure to increase after her newly made brochures are mailed to area homes this month. The family plans to send about 5,000 of those requests for help.

She raised \$600 solely due to her entrepreneurial spirit; Samantha recently sold sweatshirts she had printed for an annual ski competition and turned over all the proceeds to the charity.

More than 8,000 families have made the Ronald McDonald House of Springfield their temporary home for families of sick children since it was created in 1991. Its annual budget is approximately \$275,000.

Samantha made the USSA Junior Olympics cut for the past two ski seasons. Among other plaudits, she added to her impressive sports resume the 2008 Berkshire Women's Ski League championship crown in both giant slalom and slalom categories. She earned those honors this past March in Waterville Valley, New Hampshire.

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"Slalom is my favorite event and the one I excel at," she said. "In my first run, I came in at 15 overall, competing against more than 100 skiers from all over the East Coast." To win the Berkshire title, she beat high school aged opponents at Ski Sundown in New Hartford. "That was a huge win for me. It was very exciting," she said. The victory was not too surprising for a young talent who made the varsity ski squad at Kingswood-Oxford as a sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grader.

Her sister Claudia, 13, plays tennis competitively, and brother Dylan, 10, is an avid snowboarder ranked eighth in the country in his age group. Samantha, who turns 15 in October, started skiing at age four and ski-racing at about eight years old. Their mother Danielle and father have been very encouraging of their children's interests in sports. "My dad goes to all my races with me, and both my parents are very supportive," she said. The family has a vacation home in Stratton, Vermont, that they frequent in the winter months to maximize their time on the slopes. The local ski-racing season spans from late November through early March, offering her about 20 competitions.

Samantha trains rigorously in the offseason as well. She spent two weeks this summer on a glacier in Whistler, British Columbia, and the previous two summers took trips to Europe where she was able to ski on a daily basis. In addition to skiing, she plays soccer in the fall and golf in the spring.

As proud as they are of her athletic accomplishments, the young girl's parents are even happier with her decision to support the charitable cause. Samantha also volunteers her time working with children and families at the house. "It's all about getting the word out for this group," said her father. "Not many people in this area know about the Ronald McDonald house in Springfield, so this is important. A dollar raised is a dollar used at that house."

West Hartford's
Samantha Udolf carves
the slopes this spring.
The ski racer has
started a charity to help
sick children.

— Photo courtesy of
skiracephotography.com



"It's a lot of hard work, but I love it," she said of her intensive training schedule. "It's worth putting in the effort when you're doing something that you love."

The same could be said for her work on behalf of sick children and their families. "The kids, when they're not in the hospital, are in the house," she said.

"The charity has a wish list online. The children really just enjoy people coming over who care about them, to know someone is there." **WHL**

Sam's Race for a Place benefits Ronald McDonald House. A one-day stay for a family costs \$45 — and some families need to stay for weeks. For more information or to donate, visit Samantha's web site: www.samsraceforaplace.com