

Jimmie Heuga Nomination

Tom Peirce

Nominated by:
Mike Sanford

The **United States Adaptive Recreation Center** (USARC) was founded in 1983 (as California Handicapped Skiers) to ensure access to skiing is available to people with all types of disabilities. USARC believes people are empowered when they undertake and succeed at challenging outdoor recreation. Creating awareness throughout the community, USARC earned a national and international reputation as a model program in adaptive outdoor recreation.

Tom Peirce has been affiliated with USARC since the winter of 1988-1989, during which he served as one of numerous volunteers with the then-pilot program of the California Handicapped Skiers. He joined the program as a part-time instructor doing what most ski industry people do: doing something he loved. Over the next several winters Tom's perspective on what was important in life changed and he chose to pursue a course of study that had so intimately affected him. His Bachelor's degree in Therapeutic Recreation Administration was then followed by his relocation to Big Bear Lake.



During Tom's nearly 20-year tenure with the USARC, he has seen the expansion of a fledgling test program serving approximately 25 students during eight winter days to a year-round program providing over 2,500 adaptive recreation lessons annually to 1,000 people with disabilities, be they cognitive or physical, including a new sector of participants, the "Wounded Warriors" from the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. His roles evolved from volunteer to seasonal staff instructor, then to a year-round program director and ultimately, the role of Executive Director. His belief that people are a company's best asset is manifest in his pride in the relationships with volunteers he has cultivated over the years. Numerous program "graduates" have gone on to train with or join the U.S. Disabled Ski Team and/or become volunteers in the program. In collaboration with several colleagues Tom co-authored the first comprehensive instruction manual that became the standard for all adaptive ski programs. He added a downhill off-road wheelchair program, and he continues to ponder the possibility of adaptive windsurfing instruction. Tom has traveled locally, nationally and internationally to promote adaptive teaching and the significance of therapeutic recreation, as well as the USARC fundraising events like the Peak to Peak Pedal (Big Bear Lake to Mammoth) and ARCFest (for teams of skiers.)

Tom insists he simply has a unique job, his accomplishments should be regarded as the result of a collaboration between countless people and entities. Much like the skipper of an America's Cup boat who simply steers the wheel, he recognizes the indispensability of his navigators, tacticians, grinders, trimmers and countless sponsors back on shore, all critical to victory.