

Influential Women Spotlights Heidi Jo Karlsson: Director of Mountain Sports School at Giants Ridge

BIWABIK, MN, UNITED STATES, May 20, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Bringing More Than Four Decades of Expertise in Mountain Sports School Development, Instructor Training, and Community Recreation

Biwabik, Minnesota — Heidi Jo Karlsson is a seasoned mountain sports leader and Director of the Mountain Sports School and Recreation Manager at Giants Ridge, where she has built a distinguished career centered on outdoor recreation, instructor development, and community engagement. With more than 45 years of experience in the ski and outdoor recreation industry, Heidi Jo has become widely respected for her leadership in mountain sports school operations, certification training, mountain sports programming, and year-round recreational development throughout the Midwest.



A highly accomplished instructor and trainer, Heidi Jo is a PSIA/AASI Level 3 Trainer, CS2 (Children Specialist), and PMBIA Level 1 mountain bike instructor. As an active member of the Professional Ski Instructors of America-American/Association of Snowboard Instructors (PSIA-AASI Central Division). Throughout her career, she has remained passionate about elevating instructional standards, mentoring future instructors, and expanding access to mountain sports for participants of all ages and skill levels. Her expertise spans mountain sports school development, instructor certification, event management, leadership training, and recreational programming designed to create lifelong connections to outdoor activity.

Heidi Jo's journey into mountain sports began. At the same time, she was enrolled in a physical education ski course during her studies at the University of Northwestern – St. Paul, where she

studied Outdoor Recreation and Education. What began as an educational experience quickly developed into a lifelong passion and professional calling. After earning her first certification through PSIA/AASI in 1980, Heidi Jo steadily advanced through the ranks to become a Level 3 Trainer and CS2 Children Specialist, all while balancing career advancement with the responsibilities of raising two children as a single parent.

Over the decades, Heidi Jo has served in leadership and director-level roles at several respected Midwest ski destinations, including Spirit Mountain Recreation Area, Buck Hill, and Wild Mountain Taylors Falls Recreation Area. She has built a strong reputation for developing sustainable ski school programs, expanding instructor teams, strengthening certification pathways, and cultivating training cultures that continue thriving long after her tenure. Her ability to combine technical instruction with mentorship and operational leadership has made her an influential figure within the regional ski community.

At Giants Ridge, Heidi Jo has played a transformative role in expanding the mountain sports program. Under her leadership, the mountain sports instructor team grew from just eight instructors to nearly 50, significantly strengthening the resort's instructional capacity and community outreach. She also reintroduced PSIA/AASI events at Giants Ridge, creating more accessible opportunities for professional development, certification advancement, and instructor networking within the region.

Beyond winter operations, Heidi Jo remains deeply committed to promoting year-round outdoor recreation. She currently leads eight-week downhill mountain biking programs for both youth and adults, helping participants build confidence, skills, and a lasting appreciation for outdoor activity. Her work reflects a broader philosophy that outdoor recreation is not simply about sport, but about building community, resilience, confidence, and lifelong wellness.

Heidi Jo's leadership and impact have earned recognition throughout the industry, including being acknowledged among the top women in the ski industry by PSIA Central Region and being featured in the publication 32 Degrees. Heidi Jo was also awarded the Nancy Oakes Hall Scholarship, which enabled her to continue to grow her leadership and mentoring skills while connecting with industry professionals. Throughout her career, she has remained especially passionate about mentorship and increasing opportunities for women within mountain sports leadership.

Heidi Jo attributes much of her success to the mentors who shaped both her life and career. Her father first introduced her to skiing and fostered in her a lifelong love of the outdoors that continues to influence her even after his passing. She was also deeply inspired by Jeannie Thoren, a trailblazer in women's ski equipment and Hall of Fame inductee whose innovation, advocacy, and leadership motivated Heidi Jo to pursue excellence and help advance opportunities for women within the sport. In addition, her first Ski School Director at Lutsen Mountains, Renny Lovold, played a significant role in teaching her how to lead and instruct effectively. Together, these mentors helped shape her leadership philosophy, instructional style,

and long-term success within the industry.

The best career advice Heidi Jo received came through the examples set by those mentors. From her father, she learned to pursue her passions with dedication and integrity. Jeannie Thoren demonstrated the importance of confidence, innovation, and advocating for women in the sport, while Renny Lovold taught her to lead and teach with clarity, purpose, and consistency. Their influence continues to shape Heidi Jo's passion for mentorship and instructor development today.

For young women entering the ski and outdoor recreation industry, Heidi Jo's advice is simple: do not give up. She acknowledges that the field has historically been male-dominated, but firmly believes women are equally capable of excelling within the profession. She encourages young women to remain confident in their abilities, trust their instincts, and pursue opportunities without allowing others to diminish their potential.

Above all, Heidi Jo believes passion is the driving force behind long-term success. In her view, loving what you do builds resilience, confidence, and perseverance, allowing individuals to continue growing through challenges and setbacks.

Heidi Jo also recognizes several ongoing challenges facing the mountain sports industry, including recruiting and retaining qualified instructors, particularly in smaller communities with limited workforce populations. Maintaining program growth while preserving high instructional standards remains a significant focus across the industry. However, she also sees tremendous opportunity in developing stronger instructor training systems and mentorship pathways that elevate teaching quality and create clearer opportunities for advancement.

Outside of work, Heidi Jo remains deeply connected to the outdoors and to family traditions rooted in mountain sports. She enjoys skiing, biking, and kayaking on Lake Superior and finds great fulfillment in teaching her grandchildren to ski and bike. Passing her love of outdoor recreation on to future generations remains one of the most rewarding aspects of her life and career.

Through decades of leadership, mentorship, and dedication to outdoor recreation, Heidi Jo Karlsson continues to make a lasting impact on the mountain sports community while inspiring future generations of instructors, athletes, and outdoor enthusiasts.

Learn More about Heidi Jo Karlsson:

Through her Influential Women profile, <https://influentialwomen.com/connect/heidijo-karlsson>

Influential Women

Influential Women provides a platform where women from all backgrounds can connect, share

their perspectives, and create content that empowers themselves and others. Through storytelling, thought leadership, and creative expression, Influential Women amplifies voices that inspire change.

Editorial Team
Influential Women
[email us here](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/913813432>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2026 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.