

# STANDING SIDeways

## Smugglers' new Burton Riglet Park engages a new generation of young snowboarders

By Jeff Spring

This winter, Smugglers' Notch Resort partnered with Vermont's Burton Snowboards to debut a brand new terrain park for young children. Positioned at the top of Sir Henry's Learning Hill, this Riglet Park is named after Burton's innovative riglet reel, mounted on a beginner's snowboard to allow instructors to pull and guide new learners on the snow. With multiple features and a Treehouse with balance boards and a practice lift chair, the park expands and progresses Smugglers' Snow Sport University's ability to teach 3-5 year olds how to snowboard successfully. But with the creation of a new program naturally come questions. How does the park fit into Snow Sport University's mission of engaging children in snowsports? What will be added to the day-to-day lesson content? How will the Treehouse be used as a teaching tool? Where did this idea come from in the first place? We start at the beginning to take a comprehensive look at the heart of the Riglet Park.

### Why We Teach

Successful methods of engaging kids in nature aren't always easy to find, but it's why we teach. Not only is it important to be an expert at what you're teaching, but one must know how to break down barriers, how to lead a child past any nervousness and open up a space where connection and understanding is possible. It would be great if kids could head outdoors Calvin & Hobbes style, to return hours later, dirty, exhausted, and happy to have learned something new either about themselves, the world around them, or their connection to it.

However, as many parents know, in today's world, it doesn't always happen that way. That's why we dedicate ourselves in Snow Sport University to finding ways to engage and excite our students. We've always believed that whether you want your child to ski or ride, we have the ability to get them excited, and improving faster than anywhere else. The winter presents even more challenges when it comes to outdoor exploration. Cold temperatures and unpredictable weather can make it tough to get children to want to be outside. So, many times we need that "in-between" step that draws kids into an outdoor experience.

### Nurturing the Connection

Smugglers' Notch is in the business of finding that "in-between" step. As one of the nation's premier family resorts, Smuggs continually strives to find creative ways to actively engage kids in natural settings. In the winter, it's what we do best. Snowboarding is an activity that has that "in-between" step built in: the mountain is surrounded by nature but also easily accessible, with terrain that any age or level student can be comfortable and challenged on. That diversity of terrain is one of the great assets of our mountain.

While Smuggs has found and employed numerous teaching tools and styles to best engage our students, we never stop searching for new ways to connect. Creativity is a necessity when working with kids. Early childhood is a time where so much becomes ingrained in all of us, with many of our adult behaviors and values developing and influenced at a young age. Often times, the earlier something can become normalized, enjoyed, and loved, the larger the role it will have in our lives. Through the years we've seen that transpire in our Snow Sport University, watching students return year after year, building on a passion that was cemented early in their lives.

Snowboarding is one of the easiest and most fun ways for kids to establish that passion and give it room to develop and grow. We have always taken the stand that kids as young as three can be taught to ski and ride successfully, but in order to find success, that belief has needed to be met with commitment and creativity. By partnering with Burton Snowboards, one of the all time most visionary companies in the industry, we're able to nurture that belief, invest in it, and quite literally, build on it.

### Where It All Started

And build we did. There now sits the premiere learn to ride center in the Northeast for young children at the top of our beginner slope. Every feature that was created for the park is in some way a learning tool. It is certainly a thrilling result for the folks who had the vision, created the plan, and followed through. But Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither was the Riglet Park. Here's the short story on how we got here.

In 2002, Smugglers' Notch introduced its Discovery Dynamos Snowboard Camp, a program focused on teaching four and five-year-olds to snowboard with the best methods available. Combining fantastic learning terrain with small group

sizes and professional instruction, the Snowboard Camp found success and has subsequently grown. As the program evolved, it became clear that like its alpine counterpart, the Discovery Snowboard program had the ability to expand its reach to include three-year-olds. While Smuggs always had an open door policy for three-year-old riders, it was during the 2009-2010 season that we began to make the effort to actively encourage parents to get even their littlest riders on snow early.

Despite seeing success from the Discovery program, it remained clear in the eyes of the snowboarding program supervisory staff that the basic movements and styles of learning were inherently more difficult for snowboard kids than for skier kids, especially when it came time to introduce sliding down a slope. Long time snowboarding supervisor Mike Chait explains: "With skiing, the ability to put the

wedge on to control turns is a great way to introduce a child to sliding forwards down the hill. With snowboarding, kids have less of an ability to use and control their edges early on. They either have their board flat heading down the hill or they have it on a little bit of an edge moving across the hill. That can be some of the most challenging parts about snowboarding for a child that age." Indeed, keeping speed in check and staying in control are two of the most difficult aspects of learning to snowboard, especially for three to five year olds. This difficulty combined with the fear of losing control makes this one of the most challenging problems when it comes to teaching young 'uns how to ride. It's a challenge that was begging for some creativity. In step Mike Chait and Burton's Jeff Boliba.

As the Global Resort Director for Burton, Jeff Boliba has made some inspired progress when it comes to



# ROCKIN' RON THE FRIENDLY PIRATE

"GIVE ME  
AN RRR!"

The Friendly  
Pirate CD

At only \$9.99 - It's a deal,  
it's a steal - it's PIRACY!

Rockin' Ron the Friendly Pirate's CD is on sale at  
the Country Store and 3 Mountain Outfitters!

See the Friendly Pirate at the Morse Mountain Grille  
on Mondays 5 pm-8 pm & Fridays 8 am-10 am.

[www.rockinronthefriendlypirate.com](http://www.rockinronthefriendlypirate.com)

The ENTERTAINMENT  
BUNDLE from

Make'M  
Wireless



Smugglers Notch

Exclusive Wireless Internet Provider

At home, if you're not receiving  
**Premium Services AT Wholesale Prices,**  
you'll love our Entertainment Bundle

155+ Digital channels (Total Choice)  
High speed, wireless internet  
Commercial reliability and security

Make'M Wireless  
Acton, MA 01720

1-866-605-6555  
[www.makemwireless.com](http://www.makemwireless.com)

Riglet Park continued ...

teaching kids how to ride snowboards. Having young kids himself, Boliba recognizes that "there is a second generation of snowboarders that have kids and want nothing more than to share their passion with their kids." Being a dad has given Jeff the insight to know that creating innovative ways to teach includes getting children excited and energized about learning in order to lay the groundwork for a passion to develop. Boliba has been growing the idea and use of riglet parks ever since he first had the idea while walking his dog.

Last season, Boliba set up a small traveling tour of riglet parks at a few spots around the state. Mike Chait went to the park that was set up for a day at another resort and that visit helped to synthesize the vision he's had for the program at Smuggs. Mike said, "Other snowboard supervisors (including long-timer Jeff Silver) and I were talking about how great it would be to have an area similar to some ideas that Burton had put out, and we branched out from there. We met with Jeff Boliba and he expressed how excited he was that we have such an awesome children's program at Smuggs and how much he'd like to work together." Boliba echoes that "the snow sports school here (at Smuggs) gives kids an amazing experience." In joining forces with Burton, Smuggs now has a Riglet Park and Treehouse that is the first of its kind in the East and a tool that will enrich the already solid Discovery Snowboard program at Smuggs. But wait ... how's this thing work?

## What is the Riglet Park?

The Riglet Park is a mini version of a terrain park that is set up on a mostly flat surface. Instead of using a slope to gain speed to ride over different features, the kids will be on progressive new technology called riglet boards, a big element of the Burton Learn to Ride system. These boards have a "Riglet Reel" affixed to the nose of the board. The reel extends and retracts enabling instructors to guide students' boards over the features smoothly and naturally, but at a pace that the kids are ready for. As Chait describes it, use of the reel gives kids the ability to move around; to experience varying terrain underfoot without having to worry about speed control.

The park surrounds the Treehouse and helps to fuse the relationship between the child's body and the boards. "With terrain like this," Chait explains, "they don't necessarily have to be engaging an edge, tilting the board on edge, and pressing out turns, so much as getting used to centering their weight on the board, moving the board around underneath their center of weight and having fun." Chait says, "As soon as they associate the fun with the board, then it will be a lot easier for them to build the skills necessary to put the board on edge as well as develop the muscle memory that's needed."

With the help of Dave Van Houten and his company Snow Park Management, the Treehouse went up this fall and compliments the park's features to complete the new

learning environment. Made of locally harvested spruce, the Treehouse sports many features, including two ramps, one coming off the front and one off of the side. The ramps are part of the learning experience as well. They are affixed to the Tree House at a low angle and have a controlled run-out, giving instructors a non-intimidating way to introduce students to sliding with gravity and a fantastic tool to deal with students' nervousness.

As many parents know, kids sometimes have short attention spans and need to change it up or be redirected. Jeff Boliba is two steps ahead as usual. Vew Do progression balance boards are stationed inside the Treehouse to serve as another tool to help students work on their balance. Kids can take the riglet board off and try this fun activity that teaches balance and muscle memory. While standing on the board, they can practice tilting and pivoting the board under their bodies while pressuring one side or the other with their feet.

With color and style, the park looks like great fun and can be spotted easily from a distance. This fits in with Boliba's overall vision for a learning center. "Any time you have areas that are animated, interactive, and that involve terrain, kids flourish," he explains. The area will provide them with dynamic experiences that show how much fun it is to be outside in the winter time.

The last piece of the puzzle comes in different sizes: Burton's comprehensive array of Learn to Ride boards, boots, and bindings work perfectly with the new learning center and are sized to fit any child. Smugglers' equipment technicians in the 3 Mountain Equipment rental shop are professionally trained to set visitors up with the right gear.

### Where It's All Going

All of the pieces fit together to create something truly special at the top of Sir Henry's that will be available to young riders for years to come. Not only will the Riglet Park and Treehouse serve as an inspiration to many children to get on a board for the first time, it gives Smugglers' instructors the tools to help connect kids to the world around them in a new way. While we all relish helping to infuse a new passion in kids' lives, the real magic will happen once our little riders start growing up. It will be fun to see a new generation of Smuggs riders eventually come into their own. Snow Sport University director Harley Johnson sums it up, "We have found a great opportunity partnering with Burton to create a positive and fun learning environment for our young snowboarders. We are always looking for ways to make learning fun and this new park is all about the fun."

*Jeff Spring is the operations director for Smugglers' Snow Sport University and Summer Fun University. He has ten years' worth of experience in outdoor education.*

## LAKE AQUARIUM AND SCIENCE CENTER



**70 LIVE SPECIES**

**100 interactives**  
with daily live animal feedings and demonstrations, plus new and changing exhibits.

On the Burlington Waterfront



**OPEN NOW**  
only at ECHO, through Jan. 8, 2012

**GROSSOLOGY**  
The (Impolite) Science of the Human Body

Sponsored by Vermont Children's Hospital

**OPENS JANUARY, 21 2012**  
**SEASONS OF CHANGE**  
Explore the impact of climate change in New England — from extreme weather patterns to the recent flooding of Lake Champlain.



**eCHO** LAKE AQUARIUM AND SCIENCE CENTER  
LEAHY CENTER FOR LAKE CHAMPLAIN

BURLINGTON, VERMONT • ECHOVERMONT.ORG • 877.324.6386



Facebook: ECHO Lake Aquarium & Science Center  
Twitter: @ECHOvt

Sugar SNAP at the ECHO Cafe

## ESSEX SHOPPES & CINEMA FACTORY OUTLETS



UNDER ARMOUR

Essex Cinemas  
**T-Rex**  
THEATRE REAL EXTREME  
real D 3D

THE Essex  
VERMONT'S CULINARY RESORT & SPA

www.essexshoppes.com    www.essexcinemas.com    www.vtculinaryresort.com



POLO RALPH LAUREN FACTORY STORE    BROOKS BROTHERS FACTORY STORE    ORVIS OUTLET    phoenix BOOKS

Famous Footwear outlet    Rustico's RESTAURANT    GYMBOREE OUTLET    Sweet Clover Market local organic produce

BCBG    oshKosh    Reebok    carter's®

Directions from Smuggs: Rt. 108 (Mountain Road) to Rt. 15, Turn left on Rt. 15 And follow for approximately 20 minutes to the town of Essex. Look for a large Essex Shoppes & Cinema's sign on the left and turn on to Essex Way the shopping center will be on your right.

21 Essex Way, Essex Junction, VT | www.essexshoppes.com | 802.878.2851