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in state tournament
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CLOQUET NATIVE MAKES GREAT LEAP FORWARD



Cloquet's Aidan Ripp is headed to the Junior World Ski Championships in Germany next week, where he will compete in Nordic combined, a sport that combines ski jumping with cross country skiing. In this photo, he is jumping on plastic in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. Ripp says plastic is almost easier to jump on, because it makes for a consistent medium and experience. *Contributed photo by Karl Denney*

Skier Ripp set to compete at Worlds

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After graduating from high school last May, Cloquet's Aidan Ripp hit "Pause" on academics to pursue his dream of becoming a top competitor in the world of Nordic combined. He gave himself a year, spending part of the summer and early fall jumping and skiing on plastic in Europe and places such as Utah and Colorado. Since the snow arrived, he's been across the States practicing and competing in his chosen sport.

It paid off. Earlier this month, USA Nordic named Ripp as a member of the 2020 Junior World Championship Team. Ripp was one of four male Nordic combined athletes named to the team, which includes a total of 17 male and female athletes.

Ripp said they leave Monday for Austria, where they will



Cloquet's Aidan Ripp stands atop a hay bale podium after taking first place at the Silver Mine Invitational in Eau Claire, Wisconsin in January. *Contributed photo*

practice for a week before the Junior World Ski Championships in Oberwiesenthal, Germany held Feb. 28-March 8.

According to the international

ski federation website, the competition in Germany "will feature the best young athletes" in cross country skiing, ski jumping and Nordic combined. The U.S. team will compete in a total of nine medal events.

Ripp has come a long way since he was a light-as-air youngster flying off the ski jumps at Cloquet's Pine Valley, one of only four places in the state with functioning ski jumps. But there are lots of young kids still jumping and skiing at Pine Valley who will be rooting for a hometown hero.

Pat Marciniak wasn't surprised to see Ripp go this far. In fact, Marciniak said he wouldn't be surprised to see Ripp compete at the Olympics someday.

The longtime Cloquet Ski Club coach (who co-coaches with Aidan's father, Ken) Marciniak tells a story about the first time kindergartner Aidan wiped out on

the 10-meter jump.

"It was the first day he put jumping skis on for the 10," Marciniak said. "He was doing OK, then he wiped out. He was so angry that he fell, he just kept going and going: take a jump, grab the tow rope, jump again, until he felt good about his jumping. I just knew then, 'Wow, this kid will go as far as he wants to,' to have that determination at that age."

Although Ripp said he had distant dreams of competing in the big leagues as a child, he didn't get serious about the idea until he got a little older and started traveling to different jumping clubs around the Midwest, starting up the road in Coleraine, then on to jumps and competitions in the Twin Cities and beyond.

In the beginning, Ripp said he didn't even realize there were other clubs.

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'Apple tree guy' learns to innovate

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When Dustin Anderson wanted to improve his small vineyard in Carlton, he called the company that had sold him his grapevines. What happened next is why he is known as "The Apple Tree Guy" and not "The Wine Guy."

Anderson had purchased a couple of apple trees from this same vendor and they were doing well, but the grapevines were not. The company suggested he plant more apple trees, but had a 100-tree minimum purchase policy.

"Oh yeah, I can put in 100 trees," the hardworking Anderson told them, with no idea of what he was getting himself into.

That was when his usual sense of optimism met reality. As he began planting his new apple trees, Anderson started having second thoughts about planting 100.

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Dustin Anderson started out with a vineyard in rural Carlton but now sells apple trees and solar panels. *Timothy Soden-Groves / Pine Knot News*



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Tree guy ...

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“You know what that is? That’s a lot of work,” Anderson said. “The trees showed up and I couldn’t deal with it.”

So, after he had planted about two dozen trees, he decided to sell the rest. “I put them on Craigslist and sold most of them within a week,” Anderson recalled.

He’d made a couple hundred bucks profit and the people who bought his leftover trees seemed to be happy about both the price of the trees and the quality. So, Anderson decided to try it again the following spring. But when he called his tree vendor back, they told him they really didn’t want to deal with orders for just 100 trees.

Once again, Anderson placed ads online. This time he took orders for fruit trees, with half the money down and the rest due when the trees were picked up from him. Some of the people who had purchased trees from him the previous year became repeat customers. Many also told their friends of Anderson’s great fruit trees at really good prices.

Anderson sold 700 trees that year.

Growing business

The news was getting around by word of mouth about Anderson’s fruit trees. It wasn’t long before someone casually referred to him as “that guy selling apple trees, you know, the apple tree guy,” Anderson said.

Even though he was working at a fulltime job, Anderson’s accountants began telling him that his side gig needed to become a registered business. So, through accident and opportunity, The Apple Tree Guy was born.

The third year, he sold 1,200 trees but lost his fulltime job.

Anderson was up to the challenge, and sold 4,000 fruit trees and berry plants the next year. The Apple Tree Guy has been Anderson’s fulltime business for the six seasons since then.

Over those few years, he has sold roughly 25,000 fruit trees. But in speaking with Anderson and his customers, one quickly realizes that the sale of trees — while essential — is not the most remarkable thing about Anderson’s success. He thrives on freely sharing in-depth knowledge and customer care with every sale or inquiry.

Jim Engberg bought a cabin in the Barnum area a few years ago and wanted to put in a small apple orchard. He went to Anderson and found the trees he was looking for, along with all the information he needed to successfully grow his orchard.

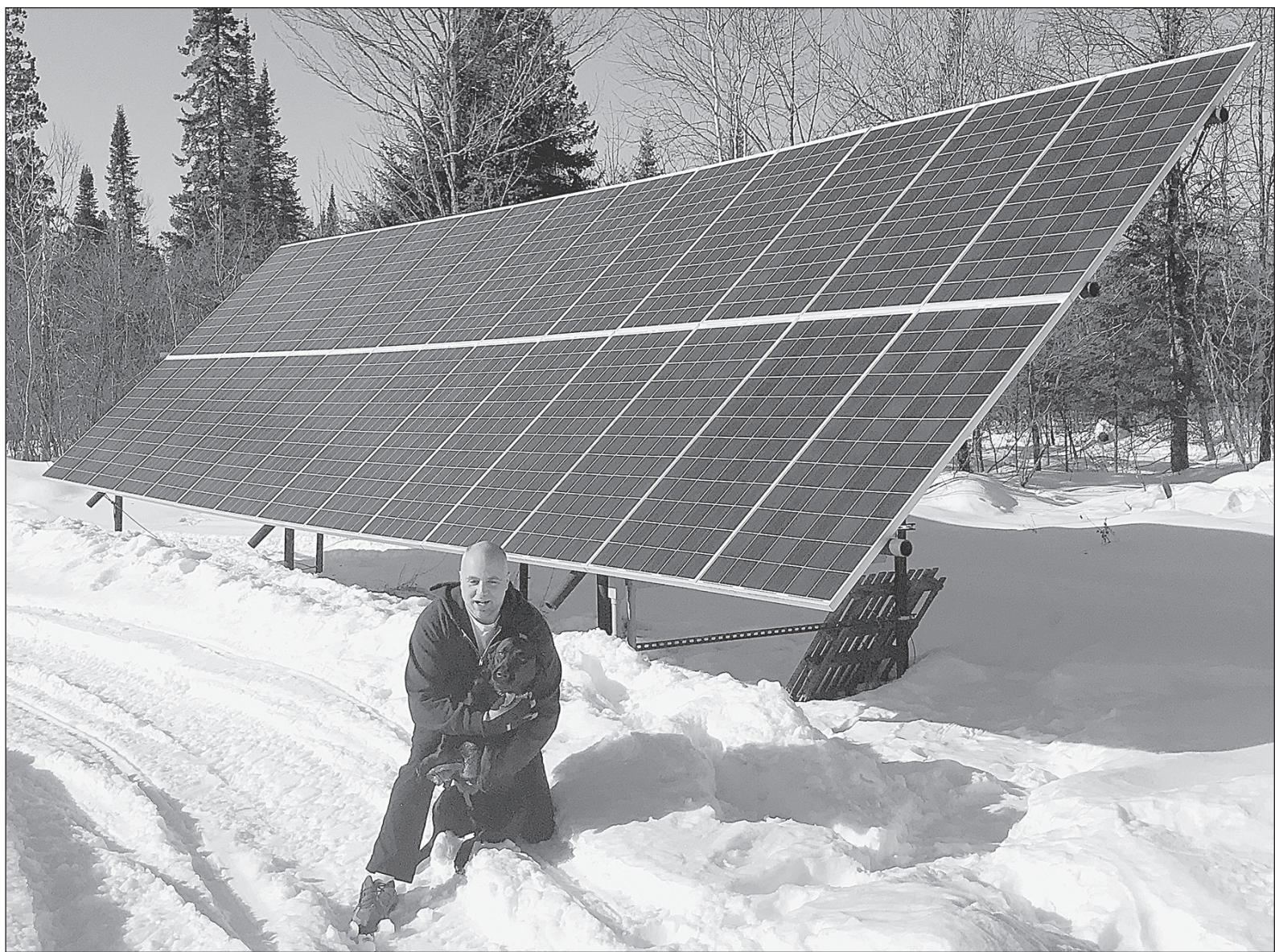
“What’s great about him is he really educates the customer,” Engberg said. “He’s got great stock, his trees are really healthy and he told me how to plant and care for them. He’s a wealth of knowledge.”

Personal touch

Other customers also like it that he is a local resource for them.

Hermantown’s Samya Peterson grows a variety of fruit from plants purchased through The Apple Tree Guy.

“I’ve been buying trees from



Dustin Anderson enjoys a recent winter afternoon with his dog, Odie. Anderson said that his 7,000-watt solar panel array is “feeding the grid today and making my meter go backwards.” *Timothy Soden-Groves/Pine Knot News*

him for at least five years,” she said. “The trees are wonderful, and his prices are great. I like buying local.

“He’s very generous and has a wonderful personality with the client,” she said. “You get a personal touch.”

In addition to the 22 varieties of apples listed for sale on The Apple Tree Guy’s website, online customers will also find plums, cherries, pears, apricots, blueberries, jostaberries, honeyberries and more. There are also classes available on planting, pruning and pest management.

Springtime is a busy time of year for Anderson. His operation reaches a frenetic peak on “Tree Weekend” in May when 400 or 500 of his customers show up from as far away as Michigan and Montana to pick up trees and plants. But — with a happy and hardworking staff of about 20 temporary employees, family and friends to help out — the annual weekend event has been a success.

“The trees arrive with bare roots by the semi truckload. We put them in that building with 100,000 pounds of ice to keep them cool until the customers come,” Anderson said, pointing to what appeared to be a large garage.

Immediately after Tree Weekend, Anderson’s crew gets busy potting the remaining unsold trees and plants. After posting ads online in several targeted cities, Anderson loads up his potted trees and hits the road. “I’ve got a trailer and I drive that thing around the state. I go to Rochester, Mankato, Brainerd, Hibbing — I circle the state,” he said.

Going solar

Anderson loves to think outside the box and find innovative ways to do things.

He showed off a large pile of compost on his property.



A cedar waxwing perches in a flowering apple tree on a spring day in the Bartosh family orchard in Wisconsin. Trees in the orchard were purchased from The Apple Tree Guy in Carlton.

Contributed photo by Jackie Bartosh

“It’s 156 degrees in the middle of that pile,” Anderson said. “Last year I moved a third of the pile over by the garage. When I rebuilt the pile, I coiled 300 feet of black poly pipe in there, then pumped antifreeze through it to my garage and heated it for the winter.”

Behind Anderson’s home stands a large solar panel array.

“I put up solar a few years ago and was making 7,000, 8,000 watts of power, which is feeding the grid today and making my meter go backwards. It was not that hard to do,” he said. “Our electric bills are usually about zero. Last month we paid about \$20.”

Last fall Anderson looked into adding more panels to bring his capacity to 44,000 watts. He called his solar panel vendor that had some blemished panels it was willing to sell him at a great price if he could purchase a minimum of 100 panels. Anderson needed about 90 panels for his project, so that was fine. He would just sell the leftover panels.

Does this sound familiar?

The response to his online ad was huge. “I had people wanting 30 of them,” Anderson said. He called the vendor back and told them: “Hold on. I gotta buy another hundred.” He was told he could do that, but he could get an even better price if he purchased 200 panels.

All told, Anderson bought and sold 500 solar panels last fall, and his newest business was born: The Solar Panel Guy.

Jackie Bartosh and her husband live off the grid in Wisconsin, having installed 3,000 watts of solar panels a few years ago for power, as well as a wind turbine for their floor heating system. She also has an orchard, buying fruit trees from The Apple Tree Guy for at least five years.

Bartosh was interested in making her sustainable power solution more robust.

“It was late October (2019) and I saw these solar panels on Facebook Marketplace. The price was fantastic, about 50 cents a watt,” she said.

When she discovered that The Solar Panel Guy and The Apple Tree Guy were one and the same, Bartosh knew she had found a trustworthy source.

“We installed our first set of panels, so we knew how to install these,” Bartosh said. They bought 12 panels to produce an additional 4,000-plus watts, bringing their total solar capacity to more than 7,000 watts.

Bartosh told both a friend and an in-law about The Solar Panel Guy, and each of them also purchased solar panels from Anderson.

“He seems to be an avenue for anybody to get into sustainability,” Bartosh said.

As for Anderson, apple tree and solar panel guy extraordinaire, he loves his work and sharing what he’s learned with others.

“I love talking, even if it’s not about apple trees (or solar panels), and people come back because of that,” he said.