

Alna snowmobilers 'keep the faith'

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Alna Snowmobile Club members Brenda Fifield, left, and Pam Hull, holding Ruby, chat as an evening at the fire station gets under way Feb. 4. SUSAN JOHNS/Wiscasset Newspaper



Alna Third Selectman Doug Baston and Linda Abbott, wife of First Selectman David Abbott, take part in the Alna Snowmobile Club's Feb. 4 potluck at the Alna Fire Station. SUSAN JOHNS/Wiscasset Newspaper



Alna Snowmobile Club President Jay Verney, holding papers, leads a business meeting Feb. 4. SUSAN JOHNS/Wiscasset Newspaper

Alna's Pam Hull held her 11-week-old golden doodle Ruby in her arms Feb. 4 while talking with fellow Alna Snowmobile Club member Brenda Fifield of Kingfield. A few yards away, members continued filing into the Alna fire station's kitchen with fare for the night's potluck.

The gathering of two dozen was bigger than a selectmen's meeting attracts, and included selectmen David Abbott and Doug Baston, both members of the decades-old club.

Road Commissioner Jeff Verney was there, along with other longtime area residents and newcomers, too.

That's why Ruthie Stone of Alna joined the club. "I'm new in town and I wanted to get to meet people," she said.

Fifield joined after her significant other, Greg Hodgkins, got her into snowmobiling. But the club is about more than grooming and riding the approximately 42 miles of trails that members have access to.

Asked what she likes about the club, Fifield said, "I think it's meeting new people and getting together and having a nice dinner." Thursday night's included mashed potatoes, pasta and dishes, bread, biscuits, cider, cupcakes and other desserts.

Most members live in Alna or neighboring towns including Wiscasset, Newcastle, Damariscotta and Whitefield.

The club won a Spirit of America award for its volunteer work. Members help at an annual Halloween event, take part in parades and, a few years ago, cleaned up an expansive illegal dump of tires and other debris off Alna's Rabbit Path Road.

Membership stands at 59, a large number for a local snowmobile club, leaders said. It tends to fluctuate with each year's snow levels. Last year, 74 people belonged. Yearly dues are \$28 for a family. About half goes to the Maine Snowmobile Association.

As for this winter's scarce snow by February, President Jay Verney said, "Everybody's still enthused. We've just got to keep the faith that maybe next winter will be better."

Like other clubs, Alna's depends on landowners letting them onto their properties. "They do a good job on the trails, and I just like to support them," landowner Frank Boudin said.

Aside from their time working on and enjoying the trails, members meet monthly from fall to spring, at 6:30 p.m. the first Thursday of the month at the fire station on Route 218. Every other meeting features the potluck. The public is welcome, as it is for the annual sledding party. This year's is Sunday, Feb. 21, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Jeff Verney's house on West Alna Road. Anyone can come sledding; helmets are suggested, Jay Verney said.

He told members at the business meeting that the club had gotten a \$4,350 grant from the state. The money comes from the snowmobile division of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and forestry's Bureau of Parks and Lands, for hours a club puts into trail work. The Alna club puts in two or three times the hours needed for the grant, leaders said.

The meeting also touched on plans to buy caution and stop signs and trail markers; and members' recent attendance of the Wiscasset Sno-Goers' open house. "They actually had good hot dogs this year," Jay Verney said.

Laughter was everywhere inside the meeting room Thursday night as people arrived, set up, mingled, and ate, and even while business was under way.

"Everybody do their snow dance, and maybe we can get a couple weeks of snowmobiling in," Jay Verney said in closing the meeting.

Several inches of snow fell the next day.

For more on the club, find it on Facebook or call Verney at 207-380-1617.