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ABSF Announces Groundbreaking of New Samuel C. Johnson Family Outdoor Center

Groundbreaking Ceremony, June 9, Hwy OO Trailhead, Seeley, WI

Hayward, WI (June 8, 2018) — The American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation (ABSF) has been enhancing the quality of lives for nearly half a century. For generations, ABSF events and the award-winning Birkie Trail system have been motivating adventurous spirits to embrace an active, outdoor lifestyle. In support of providing the infrastructure, spaces, and places to keep that spirit alive, the ABSF is pleased to announce completion of the second and final phase of their *Honoring the Legacy – Ensuring the Future capital campaign*. The resulting initiatives will change the face of the Birkie Trail for participants, volunteers, visitors, and surrounding communities for years to come.

At the heart of phase two of the capital campaign is the creation of the Samuel C. Johnson Family Outdoor Center. The new 4,000 square foot facility will be located at the halfway point of the Birkie trail at the WI County Highway OO Trailhead near Seeley, WI. With an estimated 100,000+ Birkie Trail users each year, the Samuel C. Johnson Outdoor Center will provide a gateway and year-round hub for people to access and utilize the world-class trail for hiking, biking, running, skiing, and year-round events. Facility amenities will include a gathering hall, heated restrooms, changing rooms, and a waxing and bike repair room.

Groundbreaking ceremonies are slated for Saturday, June 9 at the County Highway OO Trailhead, gateway to the Birkie Trail, 3.3 miles East of Seeley, WI, with self-tours starting at 2:00pm and the official groundbreaking ceremony at 2:30pm. The public is invited to attend.

Named in memory and honor of Samuel C. Johnson, the Johnson family from Racine and Cable, WI, respectively, provided the lead gift for the structure through the Johnson Family Foundation. This is not the first philanthropic support the ABSF has received from the Johnson family over the years (SC Johnson Wax, Johnson Financial Group, Johnson Family Foundation). Johnson Financial Group (Johnson Bank) is the longest-standing Birkie event sponsor through their ongoing support of the Barnebirkie youth ski tour, while the Johnson Family Foundation and Johnson Financial Group supported the creation of the Tony Wise Museum of the American Birkebeiner, and the family was personally instrumental in assisting the ABSF with procurement of the land for the American Birkebeiner Trailhead, along with other philanthropic efforts.

“We are extremely grateful to the Samuel C. Johnson Family and the many generous donors who helped us to reach our capital campaign goals,” said Ben Popp, ABSF Executive Director. “We’re humbled by the support of the Birkie community, by their sustained belief in what we do, and are thankful we can continue to make the Birkie lifestyle dreams a reality for generations to come.”

In addition to support from the Samuel C. Johnson Family, a grant for development of the trailhead was approved through Sawyer County and with the help of County Administrator, Tom Hoff. Funding will come from the Stewardship Acquisition and Development of Local Parks Grants program and the Recreational Trails program of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). In addition, grant funding was made possible through the Huelsmann Foundation and the Judd Alexander Foundation. Funds will be received from the Johnson Family over three-years, with DNR funds acquired throughout the construction process. In addition, over 2500 individual donors from 37 states and Canada supported the second phase of the Honoring the Legacy – Ensuring the Future capital campaign.

Other key donors playing an integral role in the Samuel C. Johnson Family Outdoor Center and associated Birkie Trail infrastructure enhancements include:

- **Carlson Gathering Hall, Foyer & Classroom** - Supported by Brent Carlson, M.D., the rooms will provide gathering spaces for groups, clubs, families, and schools, before and after they embark on outdoor adventures on the Birkie Trail.
- **New Moon Ski & Bike Shop Tech Room** – Supported by New Moon Ski & Bike Shop of Hayward, WI, this tech room will enable skiers and bikers to prepare and repair their equipment for their Birkie Trail experiences.
- **Virkus Nordic Fitness Room** - Supported by Gus and Julie Virkus, this room will provide a year-round space for outdoor Birkie Trail users to learn and practice skills to encourage an active, outdoor lifestyle.
- **GymRage Outdoor Fitness Park** - Supported by Thom and Utina Malnourie, this outdoor, multi-station fitness course will adjoin the Samuel C. Johnson Family Outdoor Center.
- **Key Log Rolling Crossing** - Supported by Jay and Judy Hoeschler and located near the new Samuel C. Johnson Family Outdoor Center, this Birkie Trail connecting bridge will allow safe passage over WI County Highway OO for all users of the Trail system.
- **Becker Law Link** - Supported by Becker Law Firm, this recreational tunnel will enable Birke Trail users to travel beneath WI County Highway 77, on race day and every day.

Plans for all projects are underway with completion dates ranging from fall 2018 to spring 2019; final approvals, permitting, and plan revisions are currently in progress.

Previously completed phase two capital campaign projects include an initial investment in snowmaking infrastructure for low snow years; procurement of a new dump truck, snowplow, skid steer, snow bucket, and Arctic Cat snowmobile; construction or renovation of trailside cabins including the addition of running water and solar-powered generators at each. Trailside cabin benefactors include Timber Trail Cabin (Anonymous Family, Cable, WI); Franzen Firetower Trail Cabin (Greg & Marilyn Franzen); Strand-Johnson Gravel Pit Trail Cabin (William Johnson); and Mandli Boedecker Trail Cabin (Mike & Jane Mandli). These gifts are in addition to thousands of donors who made the initial phase of the capital campaign a smashing success.

The American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with a mission to promote and conduct the finest international cross-country ski competition and healthy, active lifestyle events; to serve as good stewards of the American Birkebeiner Trail; and to support healthy and active lifestyles among people of all ages and abilities. As the sole steward of the over 100-kilometer Birkie Trail system, the ABSF spends an estimated \$350,000 annually on ongoing trail maintenance, mowing, and grooming.

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About the American Birkebeiner® Ski Foundation and Birkie® Events

Located in Hayward, Wisconsin, the American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation (ABSF), a 501(c)(3) organization, is known for its signature American Birkebeiner Ski Marathon held each February. Today, the Birkie has grown to encompass a variety of year-round, silent sport events that promote a healthy, active lifestyle for thousands of outdoor fitness enthusiasts. The ABSF also acts as steward of the legendary Birkie Trail, providing year-round grooming, mowing and maintenance to all 100+ kilometers. From the iconic American Birkebeiner ski race, to the Birkie Trail Run Festival, and Fat Bike Birkie, the ABSF and the Birkie Trail attract skiers, runners, bikers, trekkers, and hikers, from around the world. Learn more at www.birkie.com.