

**Birkie Brings Champions**

Para-Nordic athletes arrive to ski the Legend

February 10, 2009

Edmonton – Fresh from the International Paralympics Committee World Championships in Finland, three members of the Canadian Para-Nordic National Ski Team will be attempting to break some records at this year’s Canadian Birkebeiner Ski Festival.

The athletes come from all over Canada, and vary in their international competition experiences. Five time Paralympian and multiple Paralympics medalist Colette Bourgonje hails from Saskatchewan. This year, she is once again joined by BC’s Lou Gibson, a sit-skier in both biathlon and cross country skiing with two years experience on the IPC World Cup circuit. Rounding out the team is 18 year old Mark Arendz, from Prince Edward Island. Mark is also a biathlon and cross country skier, and placed 6<sup>th</sup> at the 2009 IPC World Championships in the Biathlon pursuit.

The Strathcona Wilderness Centre in Strathcona County is hosting the Paralympians this year. They will be holding a meet-and-ski event on Friday, February 13 from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. at the Strathcona Wilderness Centre. The athletes will be talking about their Paralympics and World Cup experiences and taking visitors out for a fun afternoon ski. For information and directions, contact the Centre at 780-922-3939 or [www.strathcona.ab.ca/wildernesscentre](http://www.strathcona.ab.ca/wildernesscentre).

“We are extremely proud to be able to say that we have Olympic level athletes at our event,” Brian Lucas, Chief of Loppet for the Birkebeiner Society said.

The Canadian Birkebeiner Ski Festival will be held on February 13 and 14, 2009. Participants can register online at [www.eventsonline.ca](http://www.eventsonline.ca) until 10 pm MST on February 11.

Trail conditions and more event information can be found at [www.canadianbirkie.com](http://www.canadianbirkie.com).

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