

## Who is VASS? Who are you?

Patrick Stafford-Smith, Vice President

You know who VASS is, don't you? VASS is you, but what does that mean? Well, we went looking for answers.

Did you know that half of new VASS volunteers are between ages 20 and 30? Or that approximately 50% of volunteers have been around for one season? Or that 90% of existing volunteers plan to return next season?

That's just some of what we found out in a VASS volunteer study by the VASS Board as part of our effort to keep improving the volunteer experience at VASS.

We asked Sian Blyth to help us - you may know her as the long time BC disability snow-sport guru and founder of YOU CAN (you-can.ca).

We're now looking to communicate and apply what we learned to make things better for our volunteers. We won't be able to do it all at once, but this season you'll see some of the efforts we will make to improve how and what VASS offers.

VASS needs to continue to tap into you, your skills,

and all the volunteer enthusiasm out there.

We hope to continue to empower all volunteers to help actively maintain and develop the organization. So, if you feel you have something more to offer, let us know - speak to your program coordinator or send me a note. Our strength lies in what you can do - whether it's another season volunteering on the slopes, or helping through the use of the skills you enjoy and have honed at home and work.

### How you can help VASS

- BE A RETURNING VOLUNTEER – sometimes it can be hard to find the time, but your effort, skills and experience really matter. So dust off any doubt and make the commitment to volunteer again this season.
- INVITE A FRIEND - new volunteers are key to the future of VASS and your friends and family are where we can spread the passion and interest. And you could win an iPad! (See contest details over page...)
- JOIN VASS on FACEBOOK - the VASS Facebook group helps us share our news, information, and stories.

## Profile: Mark Hopkins and the will to get back up again

When the corporate world told Mark Hopkins he couldn't work because he could no longer learn, VASS asked him to teach.

This is the story of Mark Hopkins, a once aspiring actor, whose life was turned upside down over 20 years ago when he was told he had a brain tumour. Mark knew something was wrong.



For four years he had been suffering from headaches and seizures; he was forgetting his lines during onstage performances. One doctor after another blamed his problems on stress: stress from work, stress from having a new baby.

It wasn't until 1993 that he was finally diagnosed with having a brain tumour.

By that time his life was slowly crumbling around him.

His wife had told him that after his operation she would be leaving him and taking their two children with her, and with the impact of undergoing brain surgery the future of Mark's career was uncertain. But Mark wasn't about to give up.

Six weeks after his operation he was back at work, enjoying regular visits from his children and attempting to pursue his acting career. "I accepted normal was not coming back - I had to accept a new normal now."

But things weren't going to be that easy.

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## VASS Volunteer Info Night

Want to find out more about volunteering for VASS or have friends that want to get involved? This is the chance to find out what VASS is all about and have a fun evening out with other VASS volunteers.

Tuesday, November 29, 6-8 pm  
Café Barcelona  
1049 Granville St  
(between Nelson & Helmcken)  
Appetizers will be served!

## Invite a Friend - Win an iPad

As part of our new volunteer drive, VASS will be giving away **two iPads!** Every VASS member who recruits a new volunteer will be entered into a draw for one iPad, and the other will be the grand prize for the VASS member with the most new volunteers recruited. Don't miss out - invite friends & family that you think would be great ski/snowboard instructors to join the VASS family!

To qualify, a new volunteer must enter their name in the "Has a VASS member referred you?" space when they register for VASS and then successfully complete the CADS 1 training.

## Just Singin' Round Fundraiser

Don't miss out on an evening full of food, fun, door prizes & fantastic music from prominent West Coast Musicians, all donating their time to local charities. 100% of ticket sales go directly to VASS. November 1 at the Rowing Club in Stanley Park. See the VASS website for all the details and ticket information.

For all VASS news and events, visit [www.vass.ca](http://www.vass.ca) or find Vancouver Adaptive Snow Sports on Facebook.



Following his brain surgery, Mark was having difficulty learning, and despite being fed lines during performances via a microphone, he was quickly losing his confidence. Following an annual MRI, Mark received a phone call from his doctor telling him the haemorrhage was back, "bigger and better than ever." He had to go in for emergency surgery. This time, following his operation, Mark was placed on permanent disability. "I was faced with a world telling me I could no longer learn." That's when Mark reached the lowest point in his life.

"I was a 240lb unshaven mess. I remember sitting in my living room, going to walk across the room, falling down and not having the will to get up again." This is when VASS entered Mark's life. He was attending a brain injury meeting in 2005 when Anne Bethune came to talk about VASS.

"I knew there was something special about this lady," he says of VASS's president. "VASS looked amazing. Initially I thought it was only for people who were physically disabled. Then Anne told me about the brain injury evening."

After 25 years off the snow, Mark was back. Just three lessons later and VASS asked Mark if he had heard of the Paralympics. By his fifth lesson VASS had invited him back for the next season as an instructor. After just one lesson snowboarding Mark was invited to instruct.

The season after he got involved in VASS racing and came home

with a gold, a silver, and a spectacular wipe out at the Nor-Am Championships. Today, Mark volunteers as a VASS instructor in six different programs, including volunteering at the last three annual CADS Festivals. He has raced with the world's top Paralympic skiers and last season he not only skied 168 times, but skied 11 different mountains in 11 days. "Suddenly the gates, the barbed wire, all the restrictions, were being taken down. VASS got rid of all the doors and now every season I think, how can this get better? But it does."



## Dates for CADS

All new instructors must complete the Canadian Association of Disabled Skiers (CADS) level 1 course prior to working with students. Course dates for this season are: January 6, 7, and 8  
January 13, 14, and 15  
There is also a CADS 1 refresher day for returning volunteers planned for Sunday, December 11 – times TBA.  
For more details on instructor training and the dates of all the courses, including CADS II & CADS IIA, see the VASS website.

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