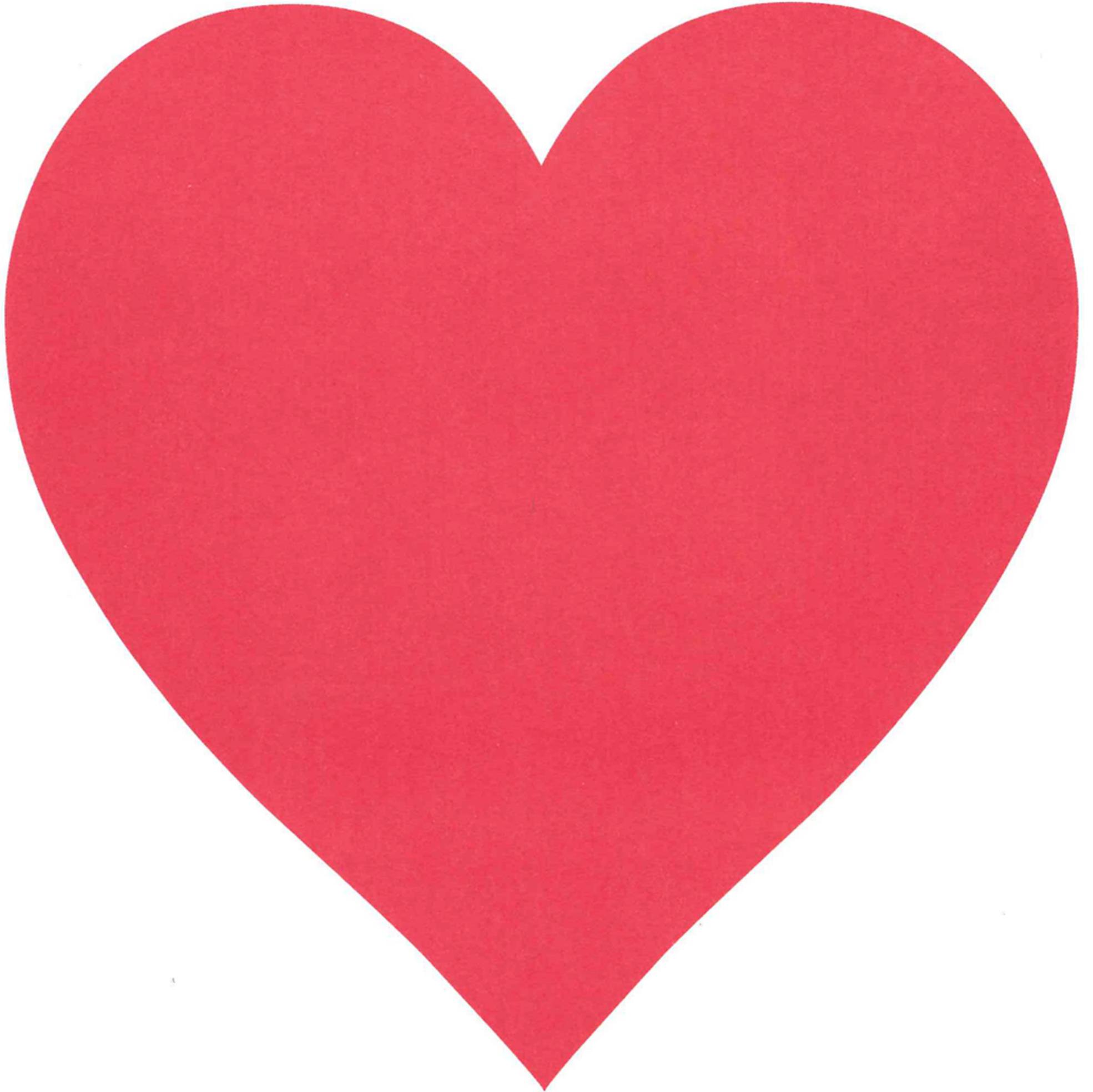


# MY MAINE



SPRING 2026

WORTH THE DRIVE

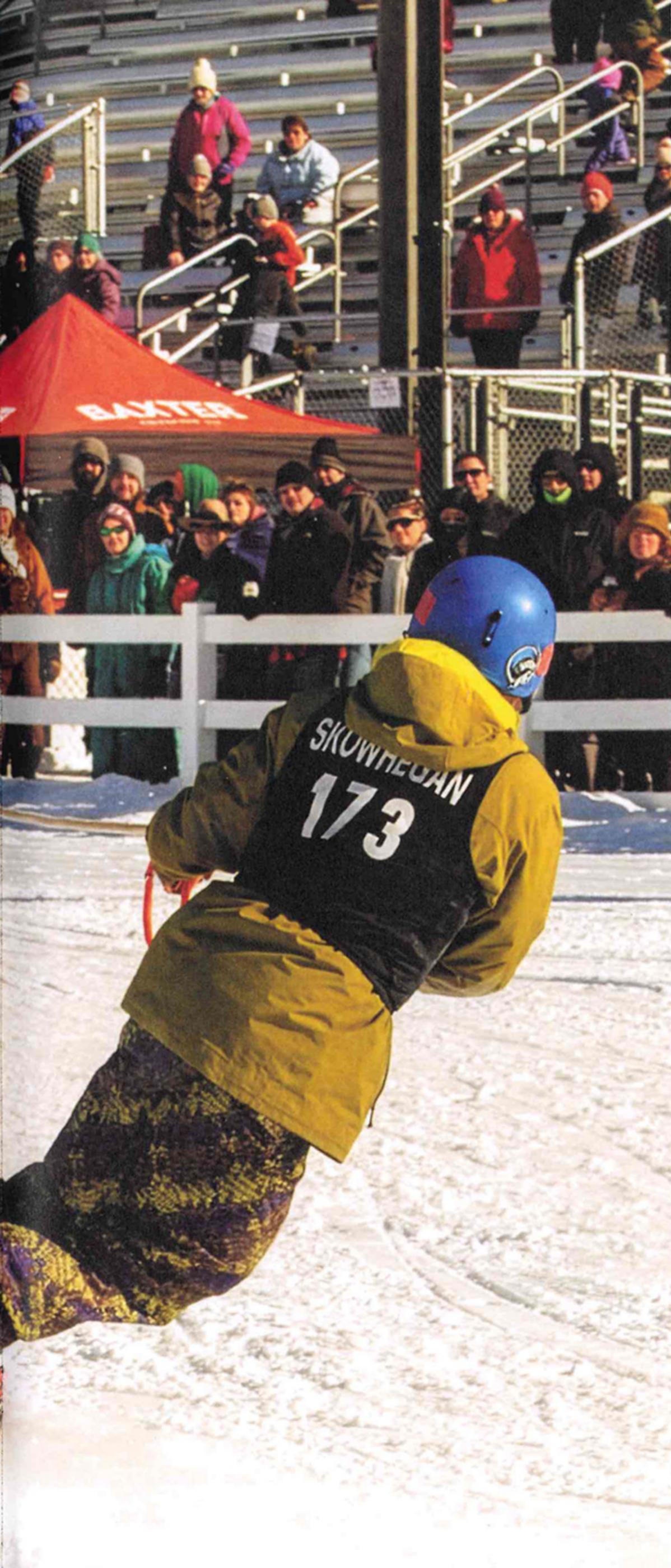
SKOWHEGAN  
43.39° N 70.19° W

# Pulled by Grit

How horses and skis built a winter community in Maine

WORDS BY MARY HALEY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KRISTINA CANNON & ANASTASIA PARADIS



**S**ki-jor-ing: the action of being pulled over snow or ice on skis by a horse or dog or a motor vehicle, as a sport or recreation activity.

In 2017, I was trying to make my break into marketing and found myself back in my hometown of Skowhegan, away from my previous ski-bum and raft-guide life, and interviewing at Main Street Skowhegan for a project coordinator role.

Part of the job was event marketing and management. I had researched their event lineup and wanted to wow them by pitching a new event to fill the winter gap in their event lineup. That event would be equestrian skijoring, something I had been captivated by for years.

In my early 20s, I had learned about equestrian skijoring while visiting Leadville, Colorado. Leadville is famously the highest-elevation city in the U.S., but it also hosts one of the most iconic skijoring races. Set against the backdrop of historic Victorian architecture, the race closes down the main street to haul in snow and run through downtown.

I grew up skiing and horseback riding, and I knew both sports had strong industries in Maine. What I didn't know was why no one was doing it on the East Coast. So, I championed Main Street Skowhegan to bring skijoring to Maine.

Luckily, I got the job, and the next year, I was given the greenlight to go ahead and put it together.

After extensive research and outreach to Western races, I pulled together a core group of people to help plan. The group was made up of skiers, horseback riders, and industry professionals to ensure each group was represented and contributed to the unique aspects of the race.

Once the location and basic logistics were solidified, the next part would be the hardest ... finding competitors.

Unsurprisingly, not many people knew what equestrian skijoring was. Most had a rough idea of dog skijoring, but we were essentially introducing a brand-new sport to Maine. Unsurprisingly, the skiers were instantly game. After a good bit of outreach and education horse riders began signing up as well.

The first Skijor Skowhegan race took place on the windiest day of February, with the day starting out in

single-digit temperatures. By the time competitors began arriving and the crowd started to grow, the wind had died, and the sun had come out.

We had scraped together 25 teams, a few hundred bucks in prize money, and a decent little oval track.

We had spectator parking plowed and marked. Online response had been positive, and we figured a hundred people might come to watch. Boy, were we wrong.

Before the race even started, the small parking area was full, and cars began parking along the road. People were packed along the track fencing. The beer garden was full. And the crowd was ecstatic!

It was as much proof of concept as we needed to forge ahead. The next year, we moved shop over to the Skowhegan State Fairgrounds. We needed a bigger track, a bigger groomer, bigger jumps, and room for bigger crowds.

The year after, a few folks from Topsham who had been volunteering at Skijor Skowhegan contacted us and wanted to start their own.

We shared our research and materials to help them get started and celebrated the sport's growth. Topsham Skijoring and its prime southern Maine location helped bring even more media attention to the sport.

In 2024, Skijor Bangor held its first race, becoming the third in the state. With the new addition, organizers from all three races agreed to participate in a triple crown.



This allowed teams to earn points at each race for a season win. I'm psyched to share that the triple crown will return for the 2026 season.

A core group of competitors and fans has taken shape, traveling to each race and bringing more people into the circuit.

What started out as a small grassroots race, with me timing people on a handheld stopwatch, has turned into a full-fledged competitive expansion of the sport in the East. Skijor USA, a Midwest-based promotional organization, even promotes our races. Skijor Skowhegan now attracts over 50 teams and 2,500 spectators from across the Northeast.

And while skijoring is all fun and good, it serves a deeper purpose. For Main Street Skowhegan, Skijor Skowhegan is a beloved event that creates an undeniable positive economic impact for its community.

It's an expensive event to run, and the organizers don't make much profit on it, but the businesses in Skowhegan do. We love the sport, but what we love more is hearing that for many of our businesses, race day is one of their busiest days of the winter. That it saves their bottom line. That it brings energy into downtown.

Here, the sport is all about community and teamwork—the teamwork between skier, horse, and rider, the bonds of friendship among volunteers and racers, and the support it brings to our communities.





Photo by Jamie Walter

