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## Olympian-designed ski trail opens Hilltop Orchards intended for all cross-country skiing skill levels

By Benning W. De La Mater  
Updated: 01/09/2010 10:11:37 PM EST

Berkshire Eagle Staff

RICHMOND -- The area's newest cross-country ski trail has an Olympic touch.

John Morton, a two-time Olympic biathlete from Thetford, Vt., was on hand Saturday to officially open the 2.7-kilometer trail he designed at Hilltop Orchards.

Morton and Hilltop owner John Vittori worked together to add to the extensive network of trails that dip and climb over much of the property's sweeping 189 acres.

And the two believe this is just the beginning of their collaboration -- Vittori is hoping to build Hilltop's cache from not only an apple, cider doughnut and wine destination but also as a hotspot for cross-country skiing.

"We feel we can develop this property into a destination of sorts for Nordic skiing," Vittori said. "It's a vision we both share."

Morton, 63, and his wife, Kay, skied the track early in the morning before sipping hot cider beside a fire with visitors later in the day.

He competed in both the 1972 Winter Olympics in Sapporo, Japan, and the 1976 games in Innsbruck, Austria. He's also been a part of five other Olympics as a coach, team leader and, most recently at Salt Lake City, as chief of course for the biathlon events.

Designed many trails

The former men's ski coach at Dartmouth College began developing trails for private landowners, municipalities, schools and resorts and in places like Scotland and South Korea.

His reputation in the field is what

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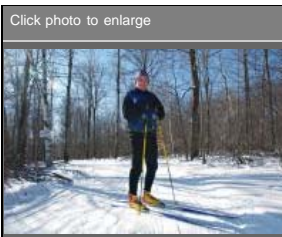


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John Morton poses Saturday on the trail that... (Caroline Bonnavier Snyder / Berkshire Eagle Staff)

Vittori liked. He and his work crews had constructed a series of hiking, skiing and snowshoing trails on the Richmond property over the years, nearly 3 kilometers worth. "But when I see John's work, I see the difference in what a professional trail can add," he said.

Morton said the Hilltop land is one of the best canvases he's worked with.

Hilltop has it all

"The thing that excited me is that there was tremendous potential," Morton said. "The trail runs through the apple orchard, forested land, open pastures, and it has these fabulous vistas. It's everything a cross-country skier wants."

Morton and Vittori said the trails will satisfy everyone from beginners to experts.

Cross-country skiing is recognized as one of the most effective cardio workouts. Morton said studies have shown that few if any sports can push the body to process oxygen like a Nordic skiing workout.

And it's easy to do, too. Morton said an hour lesson is all one really needs to get started.

The new trail, which is a four-season track, nearly doubles the distance of the total network at Hilltop. But Vittori said he

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isn't done yet. He plans to phase in new trails over the next several years, with the potential of having a total of 17 kilometers of trails.

"We have this incredible piece of property here, and we want to make as much of it available to outdoor enthusiasts as possible," he said.

To reach Benning W. De La Mater:  
[bdelamater@berkshireeagle.com](mailto:bdelamater@berkshireeagle.com),  
(413) 496-6243.

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