

## Looking for help

Generation Why is looking for writing and photography from high school students in the five-county Record-Eagle coverage area.

If you are in the ninth through 12th grade and have an essay, article or photographs to share, please send it to: Generation Why, Record-Eagle, 120 W. Front, Traverse City, MI 49685 or email to [jtaylor@record-eagle.com](mailto:jtaylor@record-eagle.com). Please include your name, school, grade and phone numbers where you can be reached. Questions? Call 933-1511.

# GENERATION WHY

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[www.record-eagle.com](http://www.record-eagle.com)

## Slope story



The book cover for "Light the Night."

## Simple gift, rich return

*Students find rewards in writing Hickory history*

BY MOLLY TOMPKINS  
AND RYAN NESS  
Special to the Record-Eagle

**Note:** In celebration of Hickory's 60th anniversary, "Light the Night" will be available on shelves in time for the 2011 holiday season. For more information, visit [www.preservehickory.com](http://www.preservehickory.com).

In April 2010, our moms asked us to join them at a breakfast meeting. Although we were high school sophomores who both grew up skiing at Hickory Hills, we really didn't know each other well. A breakfast meeting seemed a bit weird, but we're always looking for free food and were intrigued by the invitation. We agreed to go.

Moms have a special knack for making jobs sound easy. Their pitch was smooth: "Would you be willing to write a short history of our local ski hill, Hickory?" After listening a while, we figured the task would be relatively simple — take a few photos, do a little research, dig up some facts and maybe interview a few family friends about their own Hickory ski experiences. No big deal, right?

Our first interview had a strong impact. Larry Bensley, the son of Hickory's visionary, Loren Bensley, opened our eyes to Hickory's rich history.

Larry spoke eloquently about his father's vision for an affordable ski area in Traverse City and about meeting his own wife of more than 50 years while skiing under Hickory's "romantic" lights. His eyes sparkled as he shared memories, and his excitement for the project inspired us.

Larry also suggested we seek donations for the book's publication so we could donate all of its sales proceeds back to Hickory Hills. From that first interview, our project evolved from a seemingly simple historical documentation to a community-wide volunteer effort that has taken nearly two years to complete.

At first, our research consisted of days spent sifting through old microfiche news articles and photos — we were overwhelmed. We were uneasy and didn't really know how to proceed.

Luckily, early support from the Traverse City Record-Eagle helped get word out about the book. Testimonials and memories of Hickory flooded in from all over the country — through emails, blog entries and phone calls. Hickory

Hills veterans pulled dusty shoeboxes full of forgotten mementos out of their closets and basements. People poured out their hearts, re-creating for us a sense of the magic they had experienced at Hickory.

At times, the work seemed endless. We pulled all-nighters in ski team hotel rooms. We made phone calls while traveling across Michigan for ski races, cross-country and debate competitions. We often conducted three interviews a day — between ACT preparation and studying for finals. And just when we felt exhausted or discouraged, we would be rejuvenated by calls like one from a 70-year-old skier in Colorado who still has her very first Grand Traverse Ski Club race bib hanging in her living room.

We felt compelled to share the stories of so many who took the time to speak with us, who shed real tears of joy in the retelling.

After more than 70 interviews, we've learned that history is best expressed through stories — real voices describing real experiences. And as we've become immersed in these stories, Hickory's history has become more than just one more obligation for two busy high school students — the story is a part of us.

Hickory has meant the



Molly Tompkins and Ryan Ness, authors of "Light the Night."

Special to the Record-Eagle

world to so many people. And knowing they're depending on us to share their stories has compelled us to keep going and never give up.

While words can speak volumes, we also know pictures can shout. "Light the Night" could never have captured the essence of our little hill without the stunning photographs of local photographer Jack Bensley. The Bensley family's generosity in allowing us to see Hickory through the eyes of young Jack Bensley gave us a clear vision: The book had to revolve around his images. It just felt right.

We chose the title "Light the Night" to reflect what we've heard over and over: Hickory has been a beacon of light through dark northern Michigan winters that offers affordable and safe recreation to all youth.

Consistent with the spirit of giving that is the foundation of Hickory's history, all the expenses and publication costs of "Light the Night" have been paid through the financial support of our gracious donors. Their generosity also makes it possible for us to dedicate all sales proceeds from "Light the Night" to the Preserve Hickory organization, ensuring that future

generations will have an opportunity to forge their own unforgettable memories at our tiny but mighty city-owned ski hill.

We knew Hickory Hills contributed significantly to Traverse City's heritage, but through the process of writing this book, we have come to realize its history is richer than we ever imagined. Little did we know that saying yes to a simple request from our moms would provide such a big return — to our community, to Hickory and to us.

**Molly Tompkins is a senior at Central Senior High. Ryan Ness is a senior at West Senior High.**



## Buggy

Special to the Record-Eagle/Samantha Gilbert

**Samantha Gilbert, a 10th-grader at Elk Rapids High School, took this picture of a leaf as well as other insects.**



Gilbert

## Fall's beauty

Special to the Record-Eagle/Marie Laird

**Marie Laird captures a northern Michigan fall in this series of three pictures. Laird is a 10th-grader at Traverse City Central High School.**



Laird

