

# Hey Juno...Jonathan and His Crew Beat You!

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As “Winter Storm Juno” slammed into New England leaving nearly three feet of snow in eastern Massachusetts, a family owned ski area about 100 miles to the west was shut out with a mere six inches. While a blizzard is usually a hardship for many, snow is the lifeblood for the Berkshire East ski area in Charlemont, MA.

For decades the Schaefer family at Berkshire East has confronted Mother Nature and while not every battle has resulted in victory, they continue to win the war. You’d think that getting only 6 inches of snow from the “Blizzard of 2015” would be like receiving a lump of coal on Christmas morning, but for the folks at Berkshire East, it was more like a little dusting of talcum powder.

Big deal Juno, you were really more of a nuisance. Berkshire East already had more than three feet of snow on many of their trails and it didn’t all come from you or Mother Nature. Back in November when I began filming for an upcoming documentary for the area, I quickly became aware of the financial and physical risks necessary to provide dependable skiing for thousands of skiers and snowboarders who call Berkshire East their home.



To make snow you need electricity and lots of it. Back in 2010, Berkshire East installed a 900 kilowatt wind turbine and a 400 kilowatt solar field that converts the wind and sun into electricity which provides more power than the area actually consumes on an annual basis. The remaining electricity is sold to the power companies.



You also need water which is captured in a large holding pond at the base of the mountain. From this pond the water travels to the control room. Under enormous pressure, the water is pumped up the mountain through a network of large diameter pipes to the snow guns.

While I initially expected to film a segment about how snow is made, it soon became apparent that I was filming the story of a young man who embraces responsibility and carries out his family's legacy.

Area manager, Jonathan Schaefer, had called in his small army of snowmakers in for the evening as a cold front was rapidly advancing from the west. Jonathan, the youngest of four brothers learned many of his management skills from his father Roy, a legendary ski area manager and a pioneer in the art of snowmaking.



After Jonathan connected the fire hoses to dozens of snow guns, the cold front moved through just as his dad had predicted and the temperature went well below freezing. A little after sunset, we hopped into a snow groomer and suddenly noticed a rush of water coming down the side of a trail. Over the radio, Jonathan heard the news that a coupling has ruptured under enormous pressure. When we arrived, the crew was already in the process of replacing the blown section. As the hands-on manager he is, Jonathan jumped to action, worked with his crew and after an exhausting effort he radioed the order for the pumps to resume. While Jonathan and his crew were able to replace the coupling, it cost them over an hour of valuable snowmaking time.



With the delay, many of the fire hoses that fed the snow guns had partially frozen. Rather than wait for heaters, Jonathan broke the ice up by cracking each frozen section over his knee. Eventually, he cleared the ice and as the water began moving; he pulled the switches on the 440 volt snow guns.

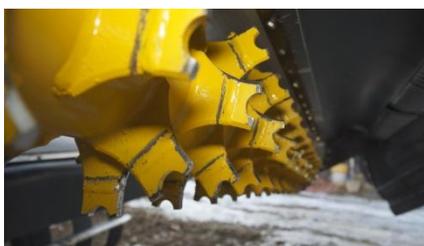
Snow guns resemble large concrete mixers. Each has a high speed propeller, an air compressor and hundreds of small nozzles that squeeze a mixture of water and air into the freezing air to produce snow.



Within an hour, Jonathan activated every snow gun on the Competition trail and returned to the groomer. Just filming his activity did me in, however Jonathan continued to be charged with energy, intent on making as much snow as possible.

By 3:30 AM, all of the area's snow guns were fully operational and the area was being blanketed in a manmade snow storm.

After a few hours of sleep, I returned to the area at 7 AM and found Jonathan standing by the edge of the holding pond. Overnight, it had dropped a few feet and contributed over a million gallons of water to the snowmaking effort.



A perfect skiable surface requires a knowledgeable team operating a fleet of groomers. These tracked machines have thousands of rotating teeth on their tillers that pulverize the snow and lay down a fine corduroy texture.

By 8 AM, Jonathan had greeted each member of his snowmaking and grooming crew and thanked them for a job well done.



As usual, Jonathan was one of the first to hop on the area's new quad chairlift. Berkshire East is where he grew up and developed the skills that eventually led him to become an internationally ranked ski racer. His friends told me that he approaches each day with the same enthusiasm as he has for every day of his life.

As morning went on, Jonathan greeted guests, said hello to all of his lift operators, skied with friends and employees and checked out the surface condition on every trail.



By noon, he had already finished making three commercials for the local television stations and then skied for an hour with his two year old daughter Reese on the magic carpet beginners' slope.

Jonathan and his crew of dedicated employees made snow for the thousands of loyal customers who are really part of an extended family. They made snow for the kids with aspirations to be the next Bode Millers or Mikaella Shiffrins. They made snow for all of the families who have grown up skiing at Berkshire East.

And as the sun set and the temperatures dropped, Jonathan and his crew went back up the mountain and made more snow.

While a storm like Juno makes snow every decade or so, Jonathan Schaefer and his crew continue to make it nearly every day.