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Ski Pioneer Otto Werlin Passes Away at 82

(LOVELAND SKI AREA, Georgetown, CO.) – Otto Werlin, 82, retired General Manager of Loveland Ski Areas, died November 25, 2008. A major influence on the Colorado Ski industry has moved on to other mountains.

Werlin was born in Denver in 1926 to his recently immigrated German parents. An East High school and Regis graduate, he served in the US Army in the Occupation Forces in Germany. It was there that his German relatives fostered the love for performance cars by sending a chauffeured Mercedes to the Army post to pick Werlin up for his days off. Otto and his lifelong friends tore up the midget car race tracks around Colorado, had a speed record or two out at Bonneville and in general ignored speed limits and slow vehicles. Werlin attended University of Colorado, Boulder, majoring in Marketing and Business along with Mechanical Engineering classes, which served him well in later years. Werlin had 10 years in the early oil and gas industry in Colorado with tenures at Bay Petroleum and Tenneco Oil Company during the mid 50's and early 60's. In 1964, Gordy Wren left Loveland for the Jackson Hole Ski Area and Werlin was named the new General Manager of Loveland Ski Area.

During his 28-year career there, Loveland and all the front-range areas went through the greatest growth period of the Colorado industry. From just two lifts and a rope tow at the Basin, 5 major lifts were constructed during his tenure along with the sister area just down the road, Loveland Valley. There were tumultuous times, as when the Dwight D. Eisenhower tunnel was drilled through the middle of the ski area. However, Werlin and owner Chet Upham, seeing an opportunity, utilized the power of the pumps and compressors from the tunnel construction to bring snowmaking to Loveland, making it the first major ski area in Colorado to have artificial snow as part of their program. Many major learn-to-ski programs had their beginning at Loveland under Werlin's direction. Groups such as Snow Dodgers, Winter Fun, May D&F ladies days, Denver's own Sippers and Sliders, the Kansas City Ski Club to name a few brought hundreds of eager, wishful, winter Olympians to the Basin on a weekly basis.

Under his leadership, he also guided the early development of the Colorado ski industry. As part of the original group that nurtured the industry from the early front-range ski areas to the mega-resorts of

today, Otto, the gentle giant of Loveland, was an icon. Names like Gordy Wren, Pete Siebert, Curt Chase, Darcy Brown, Steve Knowlton were not only peers and competitors in the industry but intimate friends; a testament to his character and class. His tenure as a Board Director of Colorado Ski Country USA brought the Colorado ski industry to a pinnacle of success and reputation worldwide. He assisted the State of Colorado in their bid to host the 1976 Olympics, planning for the Men's and Women's Downhill courses on Mt. Sniktau, a neighboring peak to the Loveland complex. The original Professional Ski races debuted at Loveland in those early years. Skiing greats like Stein Erickson, Anderl Molterer, Pepi Gramshammer, Steamboat's Billy Kidd and Moose Barrows, Bill Marolt and Jimmy Huega all put their skills to test on the big slopes at Loveland.

When Otto came to Georgetown and Loveland Ski Area as General Manager in 1964, there were only a handful of ski areas alive and well. There was no Keystone, no Copper Mountain, no Lionshead or Beaver Creek; really just the four Denver areas, Loveland, Berthoud, Winter Park and Arapahoe Basin. Vail was only two years old. Untold thousands of people learned how to ski at Loveland-they rode the lifts, played in the snow, and drank a few toddies in the Rathskeller. People from all walks of life-senators, governors, rookie ski patrolmen and instructors, race car junkies-all found a man who shared their interests and was always willing to lend an ear and share a good laugh. Even a couple of state patrolman over the years who would stop the tall, gray-haired Werlin for excessive speed in one of his car-toys, would end up under the hood listening for engine noises.

As Buff Rutherford, retired Asst. General Manager, commented, "He liked people and he didn't back away from any problem. The way he treated you – you just knew he would back you up." Otto never asked anyone to do a job he himself wouldn't do. Rutherford recounts Otto's first New Year's Eve on the job at Loveland. Buff discovered a big problem in the sewage plant after the area closed. It was a repair that he couldn't do by himself and the only one left in the area was Otto. He didn't hesitate helping Buff with one of the dirtiest jobs and they rang in the 1965 New Year there.

Ron Kidder started at Loveland in 1966 and worked on Snowmaking and Ski Patrol, later moving up to Ski Patrol Director. "Otto's management style was the most influential on me. He was always available, he always helped out, and he always gave thanks when the job was done. Even after he retired, I would receive a call from Otto every opening and closing day of the season. He had a lifelong devotion to Loveland." Otto's management style was sometimes off-beat and laced with humor. He could read people so well, he knew what would inspire his employees. He often managed by example. Employees were never surprised to see him shoveling off the deck or parking cars when needed.

Werlin had many passions. He was one of the first formative members of the Denver Timing Association one of Denver's race-car organizations. He served on the Mt. Evans Hospice Board and as museum curator for the Shelby American Collection Museum in Boulder, CO. Several years were spent looking after the historical legacy of Georgetown as a member of the Georgetown Historical Preservation Commission. He also enjoyed rescuing homeless Doberman Pinschers and a good round of golf.

Werlin suffered more than others with chronic ski injuries, perhaps due to the leverage on those long bones to turn a ski. Before he assumed the management position at Loveland he had a major spill at Loveland Basin oddly enough, severely breaking a leg and ankle in multiple places. Even with a pronounced limp and occasional grimace over the intervening years, his indomitable spirit never

wavered. When asked how he could possibly keep skiing with all the screws and plates in his leg, he genially responded: "I just ski peacefully."

In addition to a large circle of friends, Otto's legacy includes his wife of 51 years, Polly; His daughter Lis, her husband Jeff and two daughters, Piper and Polly of Louisville, CO; his son Peter and Kim who with their daughters Claire and Grace live in Georgetown, CO and his son Otto, with his wife Genneace in Vallejo, CA and their son Jace of Phoenix, AZ. Eldest son Bill with Claudia and daughter Jessie still living in Yokohama, Japan round out the first generation. Grandchildren Jake Werlin, JP Werlin and Corrie Winnacker along with 4 great-grandchildren carry on the Werlin traditions in Pennsylvania and California. Otto's sister, Rosemarie, is still in Denver with her two children, Lisa, Bill and their families.

Come share your memories of Otto with us, December 19th, Noon, Easter Seals Handicamp complex, south of Georgetown 2.5 miles on the frontage road back toward Denver from Georgetown.

The Handicamp is on the south/east side of I-70 essentially at the I-70 - Hwy 40 junction, 10 miles west of Idaho Springs. The left side of I-70 if you're headed west. The right side if you're headed from Georgetown to Denver.

Just bring yourselves, your best memories of Otto and spend some time with us understanding the amazing breadth of his humor, insight and how he touched the lives of so many people. Hope to see you there.

Donations in Otto's name can be made to:

Doberman Rescue of Colorado
3071 South Ogden
Englewood, CO
80113
www.dobermanrescueco.org

Charlie's Place Animal Shelter
P.O. Box 292
Dumont, Co 80436
www.friendsofcharliesplace.org

Historic Georgetown Inc.
P.O. Box 667
Georgetown, Co. 80444

**Loveland Ski Area is located 53 miles west of Denver, or 12 miles east of Silverthorne at Exit 216 on Interstate 70.
Call (303) 571-5580 or visit www.skiloveland.com for the latest snow conditions, live web cams and additional information.**

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