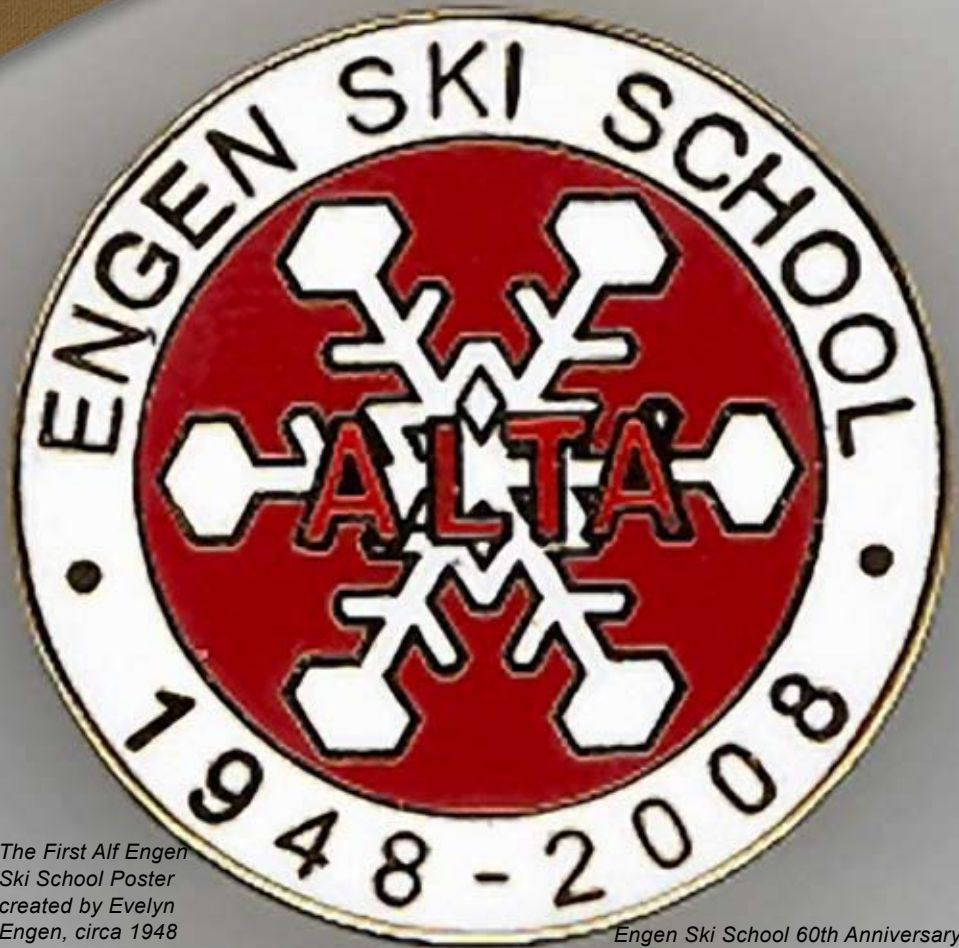




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# ALTA POWDER NEWS

**HISTORICAL EDITION**  
Online edition available at [alta.com](http://alta.com)



The First Alf Engen Ski School Poster created by Evelyn Engen, circa 1948

Engen Ski School 60th Anniversary Pin, 2008

## The Alta "A" Race A "Test for the Best"

One of Utah's first non-sanctioned, timed downhill skiing events for the "general public" was held at Alta, Utah in the early 1940s through the mid 1950s. This event was usually held several times during the winter season. It was based on a amateur skier's ability to achieve a downhill run (without gates) from the top of the old Peruvian Lift, down Corkscrew run, to the bottom of the Collins Lift, within a prescribed time... in comparison to a time set by a recognized prominent Intermountain alpine racer or other nationally ranked ski competitor, named in advance by the Alta Ski Club.

While the general course run was identified ahead of the event, very little was done to prepare the course. Skiers had to navigate the terrain under challenging conditions, including skiing at relatively high speed with wooden skis on marginally packed snow...with numerous bumps and other natural obstacles in their path.

For many lodge guests, and some Salt Lake City locals, competing for one of the prestigious Alta pins was considered a genuine test of their athletic skiing prowess. The pins, consisting of the letter "A" were issued in bronze, silver, and gold, recognizing the level of achievement. The gold "A" was the hardest to obtain. All pins were held in very high esteem by those receiving them. The ultimate achievement was to win all three, which was rarely obtained due to the high requirement level to qualify for a gold pin. Usually, a special awards presentation was made by a representative of the Alta Ski Club in the Alta Lodge at the end of the day's event. Many who won "A Race" pins often displayed them on their ski caps or parkas to highlight the achievement. No official records were kept on award recipients and the "A Race" pins. Like other old ski memorabilia, these pins are now only collector's items and memories for those who earned them.



## ALTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### The AHS Mission Statement

The Alta Historical Society is a not-for-profit organization, approved by the IRS under 501 (c) (3) guidelines. It was formally established in 1995, chartered by direction of Alta Mayor, Bill Levitt and initially set up under the umbrella of The Friends of Alta.

The specific mission of the Alta Historical Society is to:

- \*Collect and preserve valuable historical photographs, film, documents, artifacts and oral histories that are directly tied to Alta's past.
- \*Facilitate ways and means to tell the story of Alta's rich history in ways that will enhance the cultural awareness for visitors and citizens of the Alta community.
- \*Work in support of, and collaborate with, other organizations having a focus on Utah history and goals which are compatible with the Alta Historical Society.

### History of Alta's Ski Schools 1938-2009

As part of Alta's 70th anniversary, the 2008-09 ski season also marks the 60th anniversary of the Alf Engen Ski School. For all of the 70 years, Alta skiers have enjoyed the continuous presence of ski schools. During the past 6 decades, Alta has retained the name Alf Engen Ski School in honor of legendary ski jumper, ski racer, and ski teacher—Alf Engen. Alf directed the ski school from 1948 to 1989. Previously, the ski school carried the names Alta Ski School, Dick Durrance Ski School, and Sverre Engen Ski School. In the early days, the ski school operated as an independent enterprise, separate from the Alta Ski Lift Company, with its own operating permit issued by the U.S. Forest Service. In the early 1960s, with the encouragement of the Forest Service so that it could have a single point of contact within the ski area, Alf and S. Joe Quinney merged the ski school into the Alta Ski Lifts Company.

The following individuals have served as the ski school directors at Alta:

<u>Years</u>	<u>Name</u>
1938-39	Karl Fahrner
1940-41	Bert Jensen
1941-42	Dick Durrance*
1942-43	Friedl Pfeifer*
1943-44	Martin Fopp
1944-45	Karl Fahrner
1945-48	Sverre Engen*
1948-89	Alf Engen*
1989-92	Paul "P.J." Jones
1992-99	Alan Engen*
1999-present	David "Hoopa" Robinson

\* U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame inductee

#### Karl Fahrner – 1st and 6th Director

Only one person has held the Alta ski school directorship two times—German born Karl Fahrner. He headed the ski school at Alta in the 1938-39 and 1944-45 ski seasons. Fahrner was a respected European alpine ski racer prior to coming to the U.S. and

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Karl Fahrner on Mt. Baldy, 1939



Dick Durrance circa early 1940s



Friedl Pfeifer circa 1943

placed high in U.S. alpine competitions. He started the first organized skiing in Ellicottville, New York, in 1936.

In a Salt Lake Tribune article dated December 18, 1938, Fahrner describes an early morning ski outing at Alta:

“It was a crispy morning, one that made one feel he is alive. Never in all my skiing days have I experienced such snow. Let me say here that 20 years of skiing in competition have taken me to all the well-known ski resorts of Europe and this country. Two years ago, I spent four weeks in the Canadian Rockies, sometimes called the North American Alps. And never have I found conditions to exceed those of last Sunday at Alta.”

**Bert Jensen – 2nd Director**

Bert Jensen headed the ski school operations at Alta in 1940-41. Not much is recorded regarding his tenure as ski school director. What is of record, via a Forest Service Special Use Permit dated 9 January 1941, indicates that Jensen had to operate within very strict guidelines. The Salt Lake Winter Sports Association was granted permission to conduct ski teaching operations, but limited teaching to “an area approximately 400’x 600’ covering high street south of Little Cottonwood Creek in southeast portion of Alta.” This area included a rope tow installed in 1940 on the Rustler hillside near the current 180 Degree Bend.



Rustler rope tow circa early 1940s

**Dick Durrance – 3rd Director**

Dick Durrance attended Dartmouth College in the 1930s and won the U.S. Collegiate championship all four years in both alpine and Nordic ski disciplines. During active competition, he retired the prestigious Harriman Cup at Sun Valley, Idaho, winning it three times. He was the national alpine slalom champion 1935 and the national downhill champion in 1937 and 1940. He was the national alpine combined champion in 1937, 1939, and 1940. In 1936, he was named a member of the U.S. Winter Olympic Ski Team.

In 1940, he married Miggs Jennings, a winning racer in her own right. They moved to Utah and he took over the ski school operations at Alta, succeeding Bert Jensen. During his time at Alta, he not only headed the Dick Durrance Ski School, but also helped build the Alta Lodge and headed Alta’s training of 150 paratroopers of the 503rd Parachute Battalion, which pre-dated the start of the famed 10th Mountain Division, headquartered in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

In the early 1940s, Dick Durrance developed a special pin which carried his namesake. Many of those who took ski lessons from Durrance received this pin as a special acknowledgement of participation. Today, the rare Durrance ski-school pins are treasured as a collector’s item. During his time as Alta’s Ski School Director, he developed a deep-powder skiing technique called the “dipsy-doodle.” Durrance was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1958 and was named a founder of American skiing in 1994.

**Friedl Pfeifer – 4th Director**

Although Friedl Pfeifer’s skiing career is legendary, his time at Alta as a ski school director was limited to one ski season due to the start of World War II—1942-43. At the end of the 1942-43 ski season, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, and joined the famed 10th Mountain Division. He served in Italy and was seriously wounded in action, losing one lung.

Pfeifer was born in St. Anton am Arlberg, Austria and came to the United States after winning the famed Arlberg-Kandahar downhill and slalom championships in 1936. His ski-teaching experience began in St. Anton under the tutelage of Hannes Schneider.

He won the U.S. national slalom championship in 1939 and 1940. Besides being an outstanding competitor, he coached the U.S. Women’s Ski Team in 1956. In the 1960s, Pfeifer ran the Aspen Ski School and started the International Professional Ski Racers Association. He was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1980.

**Martin Fopp – 5th Director**

Martin Fopp headed the Alta ski school during the 1943-44 ski season. Swiss born,

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he came to the U.S. in 1940 with an established reputation as a top European ski racer, having won the 1938 Parsenn Derby in Switzerland. In the early 1940s, he managed the ski school at Timberline until World War II closed the ski area. In 1942, he won the U.S. National Downhill Championship at Badger Pass, Yosemite, California, edging out Alf Engen who placed second.

His father, Lieni Fopp, was a prominent hotel owner in Davos, Switzerland. He is credited for financing the world’s first J-bar cable lift in Davos in 1934. His J-bar revolutionized European lift design.

**Sverre Engen – 7th Director**



Sverre Engen circa 1945

Sverre Engen took over as ski school director following his early years as Alta’s (and America’s) first designated Forest Service Snow Ranger. Sverre ran the ski school for several years and authored a book titled, Ski With Sverre. In 1948, he turned the ski school over to his older brother, Alf, who had just returned from Europe as coach of the U.S. Winter Olympic Ski Team. Sverre went on to become a successful skiing filmmaker and partner in the initial construction and managing of the Rustler Lodge at Alta in the late 1940s through the mid 1950s.

During World War II, Sverre served with the 10th Mountain Division. He was awarded the Silver Merit Star (1945) by the National Ski Patrol for outstanding service, and he was inducted into the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1971. In 1976, he authored a second book titled, Skiing a Way of Life which highlighted his lifetime ski experiences... now regarded as a collectors item.

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Dick Durrance Ski School Pin

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### **Alf Engen – 8th Director**

For the next 41 years (1948 to 1989), Alf directed ski school operations at Alta. According to Alf's wife, Evelyn, the first few years of ski school operation were very challenging. Business was slow and both Alf and Evelyn had to put most of the revenue received in the ski school back into the business to help it grow. After the 1948-49 ski season, Alf hired his first full-time ski instructor—Tom Foley. Tom had been working on the ski patrol at Alta.

The following year, Alf became acquainted with Junior Bounous and began giving him alpine ski lessons.

Bounous at that time was a noted local Nordic competitive skier and wanted to improve his alpine downhill skiing abilities, especially in deep powder snow. Alf obliged and taught Junior how to ski well—very well. They quickly developed a strong and lasting friendship that resembled a father/son relationship. Junior's quiet and humble demeanor impressed Alf, along with Junior's ability to quickly master the ski pointers that Alf offered.

Bounous began teaching in the Alf Engen Ski School, soon becoming Alf's first Assistant Director, serving from 1948 to 1958. Bounous left Alta in 1958 when he was offered the job of Ski School Director at Sugarbowl in California. He returned to Utah in 1967 and directed the Ski School at Timp Haven (now Sundance), then became the Director at Snowbird in 1971. Since 1992, he has served as Director of Skiing at Snowbird, just 2 miles away from where he started his teaching career. Junior became a major contributor to the development of skiing in the U.S.

In 1964, Alf promoted Max Lundberg to the position of Assistant Director in the Alf Engen Ski School. Lundberg retained that position until he left Alta in 1986 to take a position as Director of the Professional Ski Instructors of America Educational Foundation. While Lundberg was in the ski school, he designed the very attractive Engen Ski School instructor pin, which is still in use today. Following Lundberg, Lynn "Nic" Nichol took over as Assistant Director, and retained that title until Alf retired as director at the end of the 1988-89 ski season and became Alta's first Director of Skiing.

Alf was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1956. He was named one of the founders of American skiing in 1994, and he was selected as Utah's overall "Athlete of the 20th Century" in late 1999.

### **Kenneth Paul "P.J." Jones – 9th Director**



Paul (P.J.) Jones circa early 1990s

Paul "P.J." Jones, an exceptionally fine skier and ski teacher, was named director of the Alf Engen Ski School in April of 1989 when Alf was named Alta's first Director of Skiing. P.J. took the reins of the ski school with over 20 years experience in the ski industry starting in the mid 1960s at Bridger Bowl, Montana. Among other accomplishments, he was a graduate of the Austrian National Ski Instructors Academy in St. Anton, Austria and a three term member of the Professional Ski Instructors of America (PSIA) National Demonstration Team. Prior to arriving at Alta, he held the position of General Manager of Buttermilk Mountain in Aspen, Colorado.

While director of the Alf Engen Ski School (1989-92), he divided his considerable energies between updating the ski school operations and helping to standardize the PSIA Intermountain Division material and testing procedures.

### **Alan Engen – 10th Director**

Alf's elder son, Alan, took the helm of the ski school from 1992 through 1998. His skiing and ski teaching roots run deep. He virtually grew up in Alta's ski school operations from the time his father assumed the directorship in 1948. Alan began skiing at age 2 and competing in 1950 at age 9. His competitive career spanned 42 years ending in 1992 when he took over the directorship of the Alf Engen Ski School. Alan was five times Intermountain Ski Association Junior Champion and five times Intermountain Ski Association senior champion. He was a member and co-captain of the University of Utah Ski Team from 1959 to 1962 and was selected as a member of the U.S. All American Collegiate Ski Team in 1961-62. He placed second in the U.S. National Alpine (Downhill, Slalom, and Giant Slalom) Championships in 1960 and was third in the National Collegiate Athletic Ski Championships the same year. Alan also competed in the highest level of FIS (Federation of International Skiing) competition as a member of the United States CISM Ski Team in Europe during the 1964 and 1965 seasons, receiving several medals in World Cup competitions.

In the early 1980s, Alan again re-entered competitive skiing and won the United States Ski Association—Intermountain Division overall Masters series title six different years. He was named a "Legend of Utah Skiing" in 1988; inducted into the Utah Sports Hall of Fame in 1991 and the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 2004. In 1999, Alan was presented the "Outstanding Contribution Award" by the Intermountain Ski Areas Association for "outstanding efforts to further the sport of skiing." He also received a "History Maker" award by the Utah Ski Archives in 2005. He was inducted into the University of Utah Athletes Crimson Club Hall of Fame in 2006, and in 2007 was named Utah's "Best of State" as a professional athlete in Sports and Recreation.



Alf Engen & Junior Bounous circa 1955

As a ski teacher, Alan was first certified by the Intermountain Ski Instructors Association in the 1958-59 ski season. During his years as Director of the Alf Engen Ski School, Alan focused on continuing the ski school's outstanding legacy; providing a sound historical record of Alta's many skiing contributions since 1938; and in highlighting Utah's rich ski history, via authoring two award winning books and founding a world class ski museum which carries his father's namesake.

In 1999, Alan was named Alta's second Director of Skiing, succeeding his father, and continues to serve in that position.

### **David "Hoopa" Robinson – 11th Director**

The current Director of the Alf Engen Ski School is David "Hoopa" Robinson. Hoopa arrived at Alta in the fall of 1980 from New England, where he had 10 years of ski-industry experience. For the



"Hoopa" circa 2009

next 5 years, he worked at Alta as a full-time ski instructor and lived in company housing. The core of the crew who lived, skied, ate, and worked together in the 1980s all evolved to be first supervisors, then later directors and department heads of the Alta Ski Lifts Company. This group is still in place almost 30 years later. The lessons learned in the 1980s, the friendship, the teamwork, the hard work, the respect, and the love of the sport, molded the framework of how Alta operates today.

Hoopa had a special mentor at Alta—Alf Engen. "I was fortunate that I was able to spend a lot of time with Alf during my early years at Alta. We would ski, talk, and watch his old ski-jumping and powder-skiing movies. The thing I remember most is how proud Alf was of all things Alta. His ski school, of course, but also the ski area as a whole, the town of Alta, all the people he had skied with over the years, and all the great friendships he had developed. While looking over Alta from high places, he would often say that he had the greatest office in the world, surrounded by the world's greatest people, and he was right."

Hoopa states that the ski school mission is clear—"With a dedicated group of certified instructors and loyal support staff, we shall keep alive the original spirit and love of skiing as modeled by the founders of Alta and simultaneously we shall stay at the forefront of an evolving ski technology and teaching methodology so that the Alf Engen Ski School can help the Alta and its guests remain at the center of the powder-skiing universe."



Alan Engen circa 1993

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Alf Engen Ski School Office Managers from left to right Evelyn P. Engen, Jean Morton & Annette Carhart

## Alf Engen Ski School Office Managers

Alta's ski school history would not be complete without highlighting the important contributions of the Alf Engen Ski School office managers. Before Alf, none of the previous ski school directors had used an office manager. Alf recognized that he needed the skills and wisdom of his wife, Evelyn, to create and operate a successful ski school.

### **Evelyn P. Engen**

Evelyn and Alf started the ski school that bears his name in 1948. She was not only Alf's first ski instructor, but also took care of all the ski school bookwork—payroll, tax accounting, correspondence, advertisement, and a myriad of associated administrative duties. And all this was accomplished without benefit of computer technology.

In addition to Evelyn, two other ladies must also be given credit for the continued behind-the-scenes successful operation of the Alf Engen Ski School. They are Jean Morton and Annette Carhart.

### **Jean Morton**

The late Jean Morton was the wife of Alta Ski Lifts General Manager, Charles "Chic" Morton. She began a full-time career in the ski business when she married Chic, serving as a lodge receptionist, ticket seller, and office manager for the Alf Engen Ski School. Jean's outgoing and friendly personality was one of her key strengths. She started programs at Alta that are still operating successfully today, such as "Ladies Day." She was a key player in the start of the Cottonwood Club program at Alta, which ran for 30 years. Jean passed away in March 2006 at age 78.

### **Annette Carhart**

Annette has strong ties to Alta. She grew up in Salt Lake City and learned to ski on the Alta Lodge rope tow. She spent summers hiking and camping at Alta with her cousin, Kim, who is the daughter of Alta's past General Manager, Chick Morton. She has worked for the Alta Ski Lifts Company for over 30 years, starting as a weekend ticket seller while she was in high school in the early 1970s. In 1981, Annette began working with the Alf Engen Ski School when Jean Morton needed an extra hand in the office. In 1988, after a few years working part time at Alta and in Salt Lake City as an office assistant, she returned to Alta full time and has worked in the ski school office ever since.

In the spring of 1992, she became the Alf Engen Ski School Office Manager—a year-round position. Winter seasons find her working with a staff of 15 sales representatives and 100+ ski instructors, keeping her finger on the pulse of daily operations. Summer seasons find Annette as our "Girl Friday," helping everyone with everything that needs to be done before the next winter season begins.

## Humorous Alta Ski School Tales

### **A Faulty Cable Grip**

In the early 1950s, the old, original Collins single chair lift occasionally had problems. On one occasion, the late Alf Engen, who was the Ski School Director at the time, was riding the chair up in a robust Alta snowstorm involving high wind. The chair just ahead of him did not have anyone in it. But it broke loose from the drive cable and started to roll backwards. Alf had to make a quick decision—whether to stay on the chair and get hit or to jump out of the chair. Unfortunately, he was 40 feet above the snow. Alf quickly decided to pursue the latter option and jumped. He landed unhurt, lying prone in very soft snow. As he was extricating himself and getting back on his feet, another skier who had absolutely no idea of what had just happened came over Alf on another chair. He looked down at Alf trying to dig himself out and quipped, "Hey Alf, tricky skiing isn't it!"

### **A Lost Leg**

The late Sverre Engen enjoyed telling stories of when he ran the ski school at Alta in the mid-1940s. One of his favorite tales involved an incident in which he and a young lady to whom he was giving a lesson heard a voice yelling for assistance. As he and his student approached, he could see a man who had fallen and was requesting assistance in getting his equipment together, some of which was scattered up the hill from him. Sverre inquired if the man was injured and he yelled back up the hill, "No, I'm OK, but I need you to find my leg and bring it down to me." The young lady skiing with Sverre heard this and passed out cold. She had no idea that the man had a prosthesis that had come off in the spill he had taken.

### **A Misplaced Tree**

In the early 1970s, Alf and Alan Engen were riding up the Albion double chairlift at Alta, and could see off in the distance a person coming down the hill at a relatively high rate of speed...and totally out of control. He disappeared from sight as he went over a rise in the hilly terrain and they saw the top of a pine tree start to shake. Thinking the person had obviously hit the tree, Alf radioed the ski patrol indicating he thought the man might be injured since they could not tell from their location on the lift. A few moments later, he came into view and — yes, he had clipped the lower branches of the tree but was not injured. He was just standing upright facing the tree, shaking his fist and swearing to the top of his lungs, "#\*@\*\*#", that's a hell of a place to put a pine tree."



Alf & Alan Engen

### **Annual "Speak Like Alf" Contest**



Nic Nichol

During the 1970s and 80s, one of the year-end's most looked forward to events was the annual contest featuring who could most closely talk like the Ski School Director, Alf Engen, featuring his well known Norwegian accent.

Although there were many individuals who would practice all year long to get ready for this special contest, without fail there was always only one person who came out on top—that being Alf's assistant, Lynn "Nic" Nichol.

After many years of Nic continually winning this "prestigious" title, it was decided in 1989 that the contest should be "who could talk most like Nic imitating Alf." The room was full of contestants vying for the honor, however, in the end, it was unanimously decided the winner that year was none other than Alf himself.

Alf passed away in 1997, but his memory lives on in the Alf Engen Ski School, through-out Alta, and the Alf Engen Ski Museum at Utah Olympic Park, thanks to Nic Nichol who never tires of relating his stories and experiences with Alf—highlighted by his now well perfected "Alf Engen accent."

### **Uncle Wayne's Lift Riding Stories**

Long time Alta ski instructor and contributor to building Alta's early ski lifts, the late D. Wayne "Uncle Wayne" Nichol, used to tell the following stories:

In the late 1940s, he brought a local friend up to Alta to ski. This friend had learned the basics, but had never ridden a chairlift. Wayne, after watching his friend ski decided he was proficient enough to try the big mountain. He proceeded to take his friend over to the Collins single-chair lift and told him to get on behind him. The friend took the instruction literally, and instead of taking the next chair following Wayne, he wrapped his arms around Wayne's neck and hung on. According to Wayne, Fred Speyer, then general manager of lift operations, came running out of his office, shut the lift down, and, as Wayne put it, "Gave us a chewing out that would have made a grizzly bear blush."

Another story Wayne loved to tell was that in the early days, the old Collins Lift encountered many technical difficulties. So, to properly prepare for a ride up, Wayne would always carry his lunch with him in his pocket so, "If the lift stopped, I wouldn't starve to death before it started up again."



D. Wayne Nichol

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Historical Edition

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