

Snowsports Builder Award

CLIFF BLANN

Cliff Blann (1918-1996)

Several themes come through upon reading the history of the development of Mt Bachelor. The ski area was community funded and built on a pay as you go basis by a bunch of central Oregon folks who volunteered, worked for no pay, or worked for little pay.

The founders and most of the early workers were experienced in the timber and lumber business but were developing a ski area from scratch and with limited experience in area development. However, they had seen ski areas and almost all were skiers.

In the beginning, Bachelor was home-built by home town folks from Bend. Today, the fame and reputation of Mt. Bachelor is global. The man we honor here tonight – Cliff Blann – was one of these central Oregon skiers and we honor them all in his name, from founder Bill Healey onward. They all made it happen.

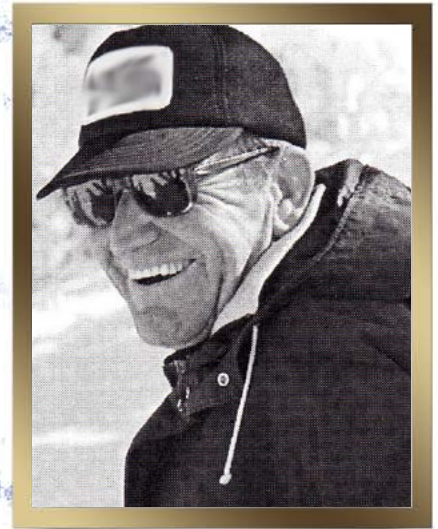
Cliff Blann had adventurous beginnings. Always an outdoorsman, he was an original member of the Bend Skyliners and part of its rescue squad in 1938 when it became a part of the National Ski Patrol System. He won the Underdahl trophy as the Oregon outstanding junior skier for the 1937-38 season. In 1940 he took second in class in an 8 minute (!) downhill race from the 7000 foot level on Mt. Hood.

In World War II, he saw action as an 82nd Airborne Division paratrooper in the South Pacific. After the war, he was hired for a year in 1951 to operate a rope tow at Moore Park near Crater Lake, but he had a family and had to earn a living.

He entered the lumber business in Bend, but kept his eyes on the mountains, continuing to ski and explore the Cascades with the Skyliners. When the Bachelor Butte opportunity came along in 1959 he was a natural to be a part of it.

Cliff Blann joined founder Bill Healy's ski enterprise at Bachelor Butte in the 1958-59 season, first to maintain machines and assure smooth road and hill operations and two years later became the mountain manager.

He came aboard in time to install the first chair. The yearling operation consisted of a Poma lift, two rope tows and a 30x50 foot day lodge and served 29,000 skier visits. When Blann retired 24 years later from the now renamed Mt. Bachelor, it had over 500,000 skier visits and served skiers with multiple double and triple chairs and base and summit lodges.



Cliff Blann as the new Mountain Manager in 1961.



The team of Louise and Cliff Blann—Mrs. Inside and Mr. Outside, probably in the mid 1960s.



Cliff and founder Bill Healy share a private moment at Cliff's retirement party.

Not only was he directly responsible for the care of the mountain and the equipment and personnel required to do that, but in the beginning his wife Louise worked the office and ticket counters. "The man that made the place pay for itself season after season by being the best operation in the Northwest was Cliff Blann."

Bachelor was Cliff's life and that of his children: twins Jerry and Sherry, Dave and Casey. In the early days it was a family business with Louise overseeing all the ticketing and inside operation and Cliff the outside.

In those days, season passes were sold out of the Blann house in Bend where she took and filed photos of the pass holders. She developed passes that could be used all season and attached to the skiers' clothing. She did radio reports on snow conditions.

There were summers when three Blanns alone were manning the operation. Working outside alongside Bill Healy as operations manager, Cliff's reputation was legendary as a "hard-core tough guy who could fix anything, deal with all weather conditions, and intimidate his staff" and admonish skiers, often with an abundance of "cuss words."

He was committed to providing the best possible mountain experience for the guests. In his words, his job description had three tasks: keeping the roads to the mountain open, maintaining all equipment and lifts in perfect condition and finally "anything else." "He had a gruff exterior, kind heart and an undying commitment to work, friends and family."

There are many anecdotes from co-workers about Cliff Blann in his 24 years at Mt. Bachelor, told with the respect due him for his work. The Far West Ski Association extends its respects to the Blann family and to all the pioneers who made Mt. Bachelor happen.

Cliff Blann skied the northwest for over 50 years and was a builder of snowsport. FWSA is pleased to recognize Cliff Blann as its Snowsports Builder for 2014.

John Watson
Historian

Images are from the book "Mt. Bachelor: Bill Healy's Dream."