

Western Ski Heritage Prize

MT. HOOD CULTURAL CENTER & MUSEUM

The story of the Mount Hood Cultural Center and Museum's founding has an interesting history according to curator Lloyd Musser. In 1998, Betsy Valian and Maryanne Hill—both long-time Government Camp residents—filed papers to establish a local historical society. The effort was further spurred by the death of Ida Darr, widow of Everett Darr. The couple had run ski shops in Portland and Government Camp since the 1930s and had been partners in nearby ski areas, including Summit and Mt. Hood Ski Bowl. Their daughter, Lori, had a 40-foot-long truck crammed with her parent's ski and mountain climbing memorabilia, papers, books and photographs



A 9,000-square-foot bed-and-breakfast in the heart of Government Camp was for sale for \$2.5 million. The owner accepted \$1 million, which included the building site, a bare lot, and street footage in the small mountain village.

A committee raised nearly \$500,000 and Clackamas County paid the rest of the initial investment. The building required extensive renovation before it was able to open as the cultural center in 2001. It now attracts some 20,000 visitors each year.

A service stipend supports a tiny staff for the museum, but most of the operation is handled by volunteers. The center's lynchpin is Musser, a retired forester who has been the volunteer curator at the village focal point since 2000.

Winter visitors have been coming to Mount Hood since the early 1900s, but the development of alpine and Nordic skiing took off in the 1920s. Summit, the first alpine ski area on Mount Hood, opened in 1927 on the highway at the west end of Government Camp. It consisted of restrooms, a warming hut and an open area for people to hike up and ski down.

At the same time, at the east end of town, Scandinavian immigrants formed the Cascade Ski Club and built a large jumping hill on Multorpor Mountain just south of where the museum now stands. (Multorpor and the Ski Bowl resort merged in the 1960s to create the current Mt. Hood Ski Bowl.)

The jumping competitions drew thousands of spectators and encouraged ski area development. In 1954, the North American Ski Jumping championship was held at Multorpor; the event is documented at the museum in historic photographs taken by Ray Atkeson and Hal Lidell.

Hood's next big boost came during the Depression with the construction of Timberline Lodge, a Works Progress Administration project. As part of its Timberline display, the museum has a chair from the original Magic Mile lift. The chairlift was one of the earliest built in the U.S. (the first was at Sun Valley in 1936) and, at more than a mile in length, was the longest such lift in existence. Its length and above the tree-line location resulted in the Magic Mile title.

Ski clubs have also played an essential role in the history of Hood and in the museum's collection. The Skiyente Ski Club, which has been going strong since 1955, has probably been the most active in its support of the museum. The all-women's club holds its King Winter dinner in conjunction with the center each year to honor a man or woman for promoting Mount Hood skiing.

The museum has a representative ski patch from every ski club or organization that ever existed in the state.

One of the museum's most popular collections covers the Mt. Hood Ski Patrol, which is represented with exhibits of old first aid packs, a rescue toboggan and other memorabilia. Musser also likes the museum's Going Downhill Fast Gallery, which focuses on the evolution of skiing at Mount Hood.

"I enjoy sharing the Timeline of Mount Hood Skiing History with young people, and local ski history is noted in juxtaposition to international skiing history and innovations," he says.

Perhaps the best exhibit is the wall of downhill skis. It starts with handmade, seven-foot-long cedar skis made in the 1900s by a local settler and progresses through the current models.

Many of the skis and bindings have a local connection, such as belonging to a local skier who served in the 10th Mountain Division, to a test model of early Head metal skis used by Don Fraser, a Pacific Northwest Olympian. There is also a twin-tipped Olin Mark IV Comp ski of the same model used by James Bond—stunt double John Eaves, Canada's world-champion freestyler—in "The Spy Who Loved Me."

Beyond the various materials on display, Musser says the museum has more than 1,000 pairs of skis, as well as a large number of collectible boots, poles and old ski clothing, all of which can provide fodder for future exhibits.

Despite its wealth of skiing materials, the mission of the museum extends beyond skiing. "It is to collect, preserve and interpret the history of Mount Hood," says Musser.

One of the most striking exhibits is a basement cubicle holding a full-size U.S. Forest Service fire lookout station. The museum also has a gallery featuring art-work inspired by Mount Hood. Beyond its cultural contribution, the museum serves as the visitor center for Mount Hood and Government Camp.