

Snowsports Builder Award

ART CLAY & BEN FINLEY

Founders National Brotherhood of Skiers

Submitted by Catherine Ohl, Awards Chair & Jane Gutierrez, VP Membership

At a time when African Americans on the ski slopes were a rarity and black ski clubs were an exception, Ben Finley and Art Clay were not deterred from their vision to create a national Black Summit. The two founders met in 1972 after being introduced by a mutual friend while Finley was President of the Four Seasons West Ski Club of Los Angeles and Clay was Trip Director of the Sno-Gophers Ski Club of Chicago.

They moved forward with a proposal to bring together 13 black ski clubs for an event that was called "A Happening," but was later changed to "Black Summit," at the suggestion of a member of the Jim Dandy Ski Club of Detroit.

The Black Summit would represent black skiers coming together at the summit of Ajax Mountain. The purpose was "to identify and discuss problems and subjects which were unique to the black skiing population, ski and socialize," according to Finley.

The historic gathering took place in Aspen, Colorado in 1973 and was attended by more than 350 skiers. There was an overall sense of camaraderie that pervaded the event and this same feeling is still significantly associated with all Black Summits.

The images of this occasion will forever stay in the minds of those who witnessed this event. As the East Coast met the West Coast, there were discussions of Teo Hyde of Chicago who was recognized as an aspiring contender for a position of the U.S. Ski Team.

The formation of the national organization was set for Thanksgiving weekend in 1973 in Salt Lake City, Utah. At a meeting of the club leaders, it was proposed that the primary purpose of the organization would be to place a black skier on the U.S. Ski Team. Those in attendance unanimously embraced this mission. Thus, began the commencement of the first national organization of predominantly black ski clubs.

The National Brotherhood of Skiers was chartered in 1974 and incorporated as a non-profit organization in Illinois in 1975. It received its 501(c)3 designation in 1978. The founding clubs were: All Seasons Ski Club (Oakland, CA); Black Ski, Inc. (Washington, D.C.),

Cascaders Ski Club (Chicago, IL), Chicago Ski Twisters (Chicago, IL), 4 Seasons Northwest (Seattle, WA), 4 Seasons West Ski Club, Inc. (Los Angeles, CA),

Inner City Ski Burns (Cleveland, OH), Jim Dandy Ski Club (Detroit, MI), Slippers-N-Sliders Ski Club (Denver, CO), Sno-Burners Ski Club (New York, NY),

Sno-Gophers Ski Club (Chicago, IL), Sno-Rovers Ski Club (Boston, MA), Ujama Ski Club (Compton, CA).



Black Summit '75 was hosted by the Sno-Gophers Ski Club and was held in Sun Valley, Idaho. Over 750 skiers attended. The clubs in attendance elected Ray Mott of Black Ski, Inc. as the NBS' first President.

History continued to be made with the NBS as Olympian, Bonnie St. John-Dean was the winner of two Bronze and combined Silver medals at the 1984 Paralympics in Innsbruck, Austria. Jahi Rohrer of Denver and Andre & Suki Horton of Anchorage competed in the U.S. National Championships. The NBS progress continues.

More recently, NBS member and US Disabled Team member, Ralph Green competed in the 2006 Winter Paralympics in Torino, Italy, and 2010 in Vancouver, Canada. Errol Kerr was a member of Team NBS from 2000 until 2009 when he joined the Jamaican Ski Team to compete in the Vancouver Olympics.

Today, the organization has grown to 60 clubs representing 43 cities and a membership of 3,000. The NBS is recognized by the ski industry as one of the largest ski organizations and its Summit as the largest gathering of skiers and riders, more than any other ski convention in the United States.

Diana Starks serves as the organization's president: "My passion for skiing goes back to my first national ski trip to Heavenly Valley Ski Resort in Lake Tahoe, NV. To be at the top of the mountain and look out at the to the left, and the desert to the right; and to be able to ski in two states on the same lift ticket was a thrill for me! I took a five-day race clinic and won a bronze NASTAR medal at the end of the week."

REI is a proud partner and supporter of the National Brotherhood of Skiers whose mission is to "identify, develop and support athletes of color who will WIN international and Olympic winter sports competition representing the United States and to increase participation in winter sports." It is through the local chapters, that the NBS provides education and opportunities to increase participation in the sport.

To raise funds for their program, the NBS hosts a Summit each year bringing together hundreds of winter sports enthusiasts. The 2015 Summit was held in Aspen Snowmass February 21-28th.

2013 marked the 40th anniversary of the Brotherhood's first organized meeting, which happened in Aspen. It is fitting that NBS returned to Aspen Snowmass this year for its annual Black Summit with more than 1,500 skiers and boarders in attendance.

It is with great pride that the Far West Ski Association recognizes Ben Finley and Art Clay for their contribution to skiing and for bringing a passion of the sport to black skiers across the nation.