

## **Inside Stevens**

December 8, 2008

### **The Passing of an Era**

Last week we learned that Bruce Kehr, an important part of Stevens Pass history passed away on December 2. Bruce was one of the founders of Stevens Pass Winter Resort. Starting in 1937 Bruce and Don Adams together forged a raw mountain location into a ski resort. They were passionate about the sport. They carved trails using hand tools and lots of back breaking, hard work. They built rope tows powered with vehicle engines and inventively using other materials. To power the rope tows, they hiked to each tow, carrying five-gallon cans of gas to fuel the engines every morning before the resort opened for guests. This was an era where ski industry pioneers, who had a dream and not much else, used their resourcefulness, ingenuity, blood, sweat and tears to make those dreams a reality.

Bruce and Don built a ski resort in what, at that time, was a remote location in the Central Cascade Mountains. In those early days, their guests had to drive to Scenic, catch a train through the Cascade Tunnel to the east portal and then hop a shuttle truck from there to the resort. There was no winter snow removal on Highway 2 in 1937 when they started Stevens Pass. Yet perseverance was the word of the day and that resulted in a business that is thriving today.

I didn't have the honor of working for Bruce Kehr, however in my over 10+ years of working at Stevens I had the pleasure of occasionally visiting with him and Virginia, his wife of 65 years. I remember Bruce and Virginia would often visit Stevens in the fall to see what was happening and connect with some of the people they worked with over the years. I can still visualize talking with both of them as they gazed out the window from the Administrative office of the Tye Creek Lodge. They were looking at the mountain and I could see a sense of pride in what Stevens has become as well as reliving the numerous memories they had as a result of their many years of life at the mountain.

It was always fun to see Bruce, I enjoyed the stories he shared. My fondest memory of Bruce was when he visited a few years ago, he was in his 90s, and took a ride on Skyline Express. I think that may have been the first time he had ever ridden a high-speed quad. He rode to the top of the lift, looked around and then downloaded. The expression on his face of riding that chair was priceless. I sensed he was reliving the many memories of his life at the mountain from 1936 to 1976. While much had changed as far as the resort, the mountain was, and still is, the same mountain that he helped build into a premier Northwest ski area all those years ago. He clearly enjoyed the ride immensely and was fascinated by this 'new fangled' type of chair lift. I can only imagine when you built a rope tow from spare parts, then to see the lifts of today, it would be truly amazing. We followed that with a tour of the cabin Virginia and he lived in the years they were operating Stevens. It's the cabin you see just behind the Pacific Crest Lodge, skier right of Showcase. He told us stories of life in the cabin and how the structure had changed over the years. It was obvious to all of us present that day how sitting again in the

cabin that Virginia and he shared evoked deep and meaningful memories for him. (Interesting note, one of the rope tows that serviced Big Chief in the early years came out of the basement of that cabin.) It was a thoroughly enjoyable day, one I will never forget.

There are a lot of people who knew Bruce far better than I. Yet in those brief visits we had I got a better understanding of him as a person, his love of the sport and the dedication he had to building a ski business. He clearly loved Stevens. I have a lot of respect and admiration for Bruce, and many other early pioneers of the ski industry, for what they sacrificed to build an industry that we all enjoy today.

Their aspiration of providing guests a great skiing and snowboarding experience while creating family memories is a part of all of us at Stevens Pass – our mission: Enriching the Mountain Experience for Generations. We are thankful that Bruce and Don had the dream and desire to start a ski resort that we all enjoy today whether as an employee or a guest. The spirit and vision of these two true pioneers will not be forgotten as long as the lifts still spin at Stevens.

With respectful admiration for a true pioneer of the ski industry, Bruce will not be forgotten by me and the rest of the Stevens Pass family.

John Gifford,  
General Manager, Stevens Pass

P.S. On Saturday, December 6, I was fortunate to be invited to attend a gathering of Bruce's family and friends at his home on Lake Chelan. At this gathering I learned more about Bruce – what he went through to build a ski resort, his interests outside of the resort and the family life that happened on the mountain and at their home on the lake. Through the stories and memories that were shared on Saturday, I got a very real sense of what a remarkable man Bruce was. His love of life, passion for skiing, dedication to family and enthusiasm for having fun in whatever he did. Clearly his family and friends will always remember Bruce with fond memories. We at Stevens Pass gratefully remember what Bruce accomplished as an industry pioneer.