



## Snowmass ski lodges have colorful history

By Catherine Lutz

Most people know that Snowmass Village was a planned resort from the get-go, a partnership between the Janss Corporation and the Aspen Skiing Corporation. But despite its carefully planned exterior, the fabric of Snowmass Village was made up of a small core of slopside lodges. There were just a few that first season of 1967/68. Managers and owners often lived on site with their families, and got to know their guests, who would return year after year, very well. They would do things like fetch corkscrews for guests in the middle of the night.

Snowmass properties were built and operated on the premise of the venerated small ski lodges of Europe: a roaring fire in a cozy lounge with comfortable couches and bookshelves. Guests spent time in the common areas, eating breakfast or having snacks with other guests, and often the owners. Skiing, and skiing only, was the focus (this was years before snowboarding).

Several of the original lodge owners are now retired, but since Snowmass' lodging lore is an important part of the Village's history, we thought we'd let the voices of that era speak for themselves:

**Ralph Melville** is the original owner of the Mountain Chalet in Aspen and Snowmass Village. He was also the main contractor on the Snowmass Mountain Chalet. Melville still owns the Aspen lodge, but sold the Snowmass one in 1985.

"We built it in the summer of 1967 and it was ready to go by Christmas. But it was one big construction site. Since we had one in Aspen, we felt we could expand a bit." Pete Bedford came on in 1968 and he stayed 19 years. (Pete and Carol Bedford are well-known names in the Village, and to this day received nothing but praise from their former place of employment.)

"We tried to have it more friendly, make people feel like they belonged. We had a lot of great guests over the years. When we first started at Snowmass, half the original guests had stayed at the Mountain Chalet in Aspen. Some stayed at both places but most decided they liked one or the other. Families, especially the younger ones, preferred Snowmass, partly because of Fanny Hill.

"We've always done a full hot breakfast at both places, varying the menu each day. There was only one choice: if it was bacon and eggs day you had bacon and eggs. At noon we'd have the soup pot on for the guests, free of charge. We offered tea and coffee and little

snacks after skiing.

“Our place set the whole tone of the way guests took the place. Our very first guest was a Mrs. Brown, I can’t remember her first name. She had so many packages come in, from Neiman Marcus and places like that. We had to set aside a whole corner of the garage for those packages. Many of the first guests we knew from the Mountain Chalet in Aspen, but we didn’t know her.

“We had told all our guests that the place wasn’t quite finished. So when they came, we were still working on the lobby; there were saws, planers, shavings all over the place. This Mrs. Brown, when she came in she seemed like one of those ditsy people. She came in and I showed her around. The rooms were clean and ready, but there were things like, no doorknobs on the room doors. She looked around and didn’t say anything and disappeared. Well, she came back with two Christmas trees, one for her room and one for the lobby. She said, ‘You have to put this Christmas tree up in this lobby.’ She just made a joke out of the whole thing! And all the guests took (the construction) as a joke, instead of complaining or getting uptight ...

”The packages? They were all Christmas presents for different people in her party. There were 10 or 12 of them coming to spend Christmas with her here. And the next year a lot of those people came back (and would keep coming over the years). Pete Bedford played a little joke: He got some wood shavings, and scattered them all over the lobby ...”

**Mark Moebius** is the son of Dick and Barb Moebius, who built the original Silvertree Hotel and later bought the Snowmass Inn and a part of the Pokolodi Lodge.

“We moved here in 1967, when I was 12 years old, from San Diego. My father had a friend who worked for Janss. He called my dad up one day and told him there was this new resort going up and that there were two sites in premier locations. So they put together this partnership and bought the land under the Silvertree. And that group sold to the Burwells. We operated the Silvertree for two years. (Town Manager) Gary Suiter calls my mom the matriarch of Snowmass.

”We lived at Sinclair Ranch, in an old log house. It was one of the original ranch buildings in Snowmass. It used to be right on the second hole. I remember the first snowstorm I ever saw. I was in math class in the Red Brick schoolhouse (in Aspen). It was a huge snowstorm with huge snowflakes -- it was the coolest thing in the whole world. I also remember riding up to Snowmass on the bus. There were four stops, and the roads were all dirt, with potholes. It would rattle your brains.

“I kind of remember opening day. My dad had the first confirmed reservation at the Silvertree. They were treated to a special ride up Lift 2, which is still there (now called the Burlingame lift). Stein Erikson jumped through a ring of fire.

“We skied non stop through high school. We skied mostly at Snowmass and Buttermilk - it cost \$1 back then. It was more expensive at Aspen Mountain. Twenty to thirty kids, just skiing all day long. And the people were coming for one reason and one reason only: to ski their butts off.”

**Jeff Tippett** was the manager of the Laurelwood condos, which were built in 1968 and opened for business in 1969. Tippett came on the scene in 1973 and stayed for 17 years.

“By 1973 the only things that were being built were condos. When I arrived Snowmass hadn’t ‘made it’ yet -- it was still getting the overflow from Aspen. But skiing here had established itself -- the Big Burn had a reputation around the country. In 1974 I spent the off-season here and from Friday evening to Monday morning I didn’t see another human. It was late April. Driving into Aspen wasn’t a formidable task, but driving back after a night on the town was. There was no bus.

”Everybody truly knew everybody then. There were not more than 100 people. The Opticon Theater, where they showed movies, was the only thing to do -- there was no TV, no cable. The Stonebridge Inn bar was the local watering hole.

“The most dramatic change was the developments on the other side of Fanny Hill, like the Wood Run places. But what really changed Snowmass was the conference center, built in 1985. It exceeded the quality of the resort, and was the incentive for Burwell to buy the Silvertree and take it down to a skeleton (and rebuild). Then the other lodges remodeled and added.