

Far West Ski Association

presents the **Snowsports Builder Award** to



Bob Wilbanks — National Ski Club Newsletter

In 1986, the Oklahoma City Ski Club sent a letter to all the ski clubs in neighboring states that their ski club was being sued by the IRS who wanted to declare the club a for-profit tour operator. They were asking for legal defense funds because, if they were found guilty, all ski clubs could all be declared for profit operations. At that time, **Bob Wilbanks** was the editor of Space City Ski Club's Sitzmark and when their board discussed the letter, he volunteered to find a list of ski club mailing addresses and mail-merge a letter to all the clubs they could find — although no one knew how many clubs were out there, who they were or where they were located.

It turned out that Ski Group (an annual traveling trade show for clubs) had a list of 1,000 clubs — but would not share the list for competitive reasons. NASTAR had a list of 1,000 clubs — but would not share it for competitive reasons — and Steamboat had a mailing list of about 1,000 clubs — but would not share the list for competitive reasons. So it was assumed that there were 1,000 clubs out there — but who and where were they?

Bob could find no other ski resorts that maintained a reasonable current ski club officers list because of the time and expense required to maintain that list of ski club officers due to annual elections and constantly changing addresses. The industry assumed that there were then 1,000 ski clubs in the U.S. that purchased 6% to 8% of the U.S. ski market — but most resorts, tour operators and lodges didn't know who or where they were until they walked into the 30± spring Ski Group shows each year.

What the ski industry saw as a difficult market, Bob saw as an opportunity to do something fun and to escape a boring job that he had been doing for 20 years.

He began to compile a list of ski clubs and their officers through ski councils, etc. and soon had a listing of the officers of 560 clubs. He then began publishing "*The National Ski Club Newsletter*" in 1987, claiming that it was sent to 56% of the ski club market — because it was assumed that there were 1,000 clubs in the U.S. A few years later, he was mailing The National Ski Club Newsletter to the officers of almost 2,500 ski clubs and the assumptions about the U.S. ski club market size had been changed dramatically upward to well over one million members.

"When we discovered that there was no way for America's ski clubs to communicate with each other on a national basis nor for the ski and travel industries to communicate with the clubs — except for 1,000 clubs at the spring ski shows, it was obvious that there was a communication gap in this market," said Bob.

"If a ski club in Georgia came up with an idea that helped ski clubs, why should it take 3 years for clubs in Oregon to figure out the same idea — if ever? Initially we called the magazine an idea exchange system among America's ski clubs because if a concept worked in Texas, it should work in Alabama. So, if a concept worked somewhere, we told the other clubs about it and an idea could flourish quickly within this audience."

At this time, he published a bi-monthly black and white magazine of 12 to 16 pages that basically told America's ski club officers and the ski industry what the ski clubs in America were doing. The magazine also told those officers what some resorts were willing to do for the clubs on a national basis.

Respectfully nominated by *John Watson & Far West Ski Association Board of Trustees.*