

# Far West Ski Association

presents the **Snowsports Builder Award** to



## *Ronnie Lupe – Tribal Leader & Visionary*

Sunrise Ski Park, the last of Arizona's ski areas to be developed, is the product of several visionaries. Owned and operated by the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) it sits on sacred Tribal Land in Eastern Arizona. Without the vision and political astuteness of **Ronnie Lupe**, skiing in Arizona would be much different.

Early on these lands were recognized as rich in recreational opportunity but were open only by invitation from the tribe. The first lifts started running in 1970, but the story behind this development is one of respect for heritage and the patient perseverance of one man – Ronald "Ronnie" Lupe.

Returning to his home as a young Marine Corps veteran of the Korean War, Lupe was elected to the Tribal Council in 1964 at the youthful age of 34. In the following election of 1966, he was elected to the position of Tribal Chairman. He was the youngest ever elected to that post. Ronnie was a Councilman for a total of 10 years. For 52 years of his adult life, Chairman Lupe has served the people of the White Mountain Apache Tribe as a member of the Governing Body.

These were years of great activity as the Tribe expanded on its tribal identity, defining its place in a changing society. The tribe needed to protect its sacred lands, assert its tribal rights, and protect and promote its heritage while fostering economic development to provide for the well being and prosperity of all tribal members.

Born in a Wickiup, Ronnie Lupe has guided the tribe's interests for over 50 years. He is also the man most responsible for the establishment of the unique new tribal asset — Sunrise Ski Park. The WMAT had received many requests from sportsmen and outdoorsmen, including skiers, to come onto the lands, but the tribal elders were wary of these strangers coming onto their sacred lands in great numbers. Chairman Lupe envisioned a recreational ski area and led elders on visits to the proposed sites for lifts, runs and lodge. Ultimately, the objections were overcome and the council agreed to the desirability and feasibility of a ski resort.

Shortly thereafter, Chairman Lupe flew to the Economic Development Administration (EDA) to finalize initial financing for equipment and infrastructure that would enable work to start. The result is an operating ski area that provides revenue to the Tribe, employment to Tribal members and economic benefit to the communities of Springerville-Eager, and Pinetop-Lakeside and Show Low.

Named after the most important religious ceremony of the Apache, the first Sunrise lift began running in 1970. Architect Jimmie Nunn, another Arizona visionary, worked with Chairman Lupe to design the facility, the first lodge, runs and lift locations. Since those early days, Sunrise has grown into a three mountain area with 65 runs, eight chair lifts, two surface tows, three day lodges, a hotel and numerous summer recreational opportunities all within about a 4-½ hour drive from three major metropolitan areas: Phoenix, Tucson and Albuquerque.

Without the vision, patience and perseverance of Chairman Lupe, Sunrise Ski Park would not exist and eastern Arizona would not be what it is today. Chairman Lupe, you are a Snowsports Builder! May you always stand in the rays of the sunrise.

Respectfully nominated by *John Watson, J Gloschay and Jane Jackson.*