

Other FWSA Awards

FWSA SNOWSPORTS BUILDER AWARD 2011

The Association's Snowsports Builder Award is made to a person or persons who have made an indelible positive impact on snowsports. The builder honored may be for achievements in athletics, the press, publishers, historians, industry, humanitarian work, area development, technology; in short, for any indelible contribution to snowsports.

Dave McCoy, Founder, Mammoth Mountain

A Man and His Mountain

Mammoth Mountain's founder, leader and inspiration



Dave McCoy was born in Los Angeles on August 24, 1915 to William Thomas McCoy and Edna Rachel Metcalf. Until the age of six, Dave lived a quiet life in El Segundo, California where his father worked in an oil refinery. His next nine years were spent traveling throughout California with his parents, living in various towns, mostly in tent camps, relocating several times a year while his father helped build the early California highways.

In 1928, when Dave was twelve years old, his mother took him to Independence, California, a small town south of Bishop, for a visit. He instantly fell in love with the area and decided this was the place he wanted to settle.

After graduating as valedictorian of his class in the eighth grade, Dave was sent to the state of Washington to live with his grandparents where his grandfather was supervisor of the Wilkeson coal mine. During his high school years, Dave hitchhiked between California and Washington doing odd jobs to support himself while attending school in both locations. He worked on pig farms, grocery stores, grape vineyards and a variety of other places.

It was during his time in Washington that Dave was introduced to skiing by a group of Norwegian ski jumpers. Their motto was, "Just point 'em down the hill and ride!" Dave took every opportunity to hike up White Pass Mountain and ski straight down as fast as possible. His love affair with skiing had begun.



Dave graduated from Buckley High School in 1935 and instead of taking a job in the apple orchards of Washington he set out to pursue his dreams. He spent the summer hitchhiking south to Independence, working odd jobs (picking cherries, gold mining in Sierra City and tying flies for fishing) to pay his way. He finally arrived late in the afternoon on Labor Day in 1935 and began working that night as a dishwasher and waiter. The owner of the restaurant let him live in the garage, where he stayed for two years. Dave believes that "Some power, some force kept holding me near Mammoth."

While working in Independence, he caught his first glimpse of the woman he would eventually marry. "I was working as a soda jerk when the Bishop Cheerleaders stopped in on their way to Lone Pine to a game. I took one look at this girl and knew she was something special.

I didn't even get to ask her name." Roma recalls telling her sister, "One day I'm going to get a date with that guy." It wasn't until two years later when Dave was living in Bishop that he was introduced to Roma. In those days, Dave and a friend would tie their skis to the back of a motorcycle and take off for the mountains. As fate would have it,

Dave's friend had a sister, and when he finally introduced Dave to her, she happened to be the Bishop cheerleader he had seen two years earlier. At the time, Roma was living with her grandmother and was working to help support her. Dave and Roma dated for four years before they were married. The couple has since raised six children.

In March of 1937, Dave was asked to go to work for the Department of Water and Power (DWP) as a laborer but was given the responsibilities of a hydrographer, which required collecting and interpreting data from snow surveys to predict future water supplies for Los Angeles. Dave's extensive ski experience coupled with a strong work ethic allowed him to excel in his position at the DWP where he remained for 18 years, eventually becoming a certified hydrographer.



Dave's passion for the sport led him to skiing pioneers Tex Cushion and Corty Hill at McGee Mountain. As a member of the Eastern Sierra Ski Club, Dave helped keep Corty Hill's cable-sling lift maintained and running. During Dave's first Eastern Sierra winter of 1935-36, he and two friends from the DWP, Sam Griggs and Ben Boyd, had built the first portable rope tow in the Eastern Sierra. They took a Model "A" Ford truck, pulled the drive wheel off, locked the brake, jacked up the rear end and ran a rope up the mountain to a pulley. This "portable" rope tow allowed the club to ski anywhere in the valley from Independence to Bridgeport searching for hidden stashes of powder.

In 1941, Dave obtained a roving permit for his own portable rope tow. The Eastern Sierra Ski Club began losing interest in running their own lifts and agreed to sell their portable rope tow to Dave for \$85. To raise funds for the equipment, he tried to borrow the money against his Harley-Davidson motorcycle but the bank refused his loan. Upon leaving the bank, the secretary was able to convince them that Dave was a good risk. Little did the bank know that the kind-hearted secretary was also Dave's soon to be wife, Roma Carriere.

Extensive knowledge of snow pack and snowmelt gleaned from his hydrography job enabled Dave to set up his lift where the snow was the best. When the weather would allow it and the roads were clear, he took his portable rope tow to Mammoth Mountain. Dave and his friends were skiing at Mammoth on December 7, 1941 when news of the bombing on Pearl Harbor reached Mammoth. The skiers packed up the rope tow and loaded it into the truck. Skiing essentially came to a halt in the Eastern Sierra and Dave considered joining the Navy with his friends even though his hydrographer position exempted him from service. Ultimately, a ski injury would take the decision out of his hands.

Dave's love of skiing led to an interest in competitive ski racing. During the late 30's he emerged as a top competitor and was something of a local racing hero. In April of 1942, Dave made a spur of the moment decision to drive to Sugar Bowl, California to compete in the state championships. During the race he took a nasty fall, shattering the bones in his left leg. The doctors counted over 38 fractures and wanted to amputate, but Dave would not allow it. It took almost four years for Dave to rehabilitate his leg. Although he still walks with a slight limp, he continues to lead a very active lifestyle.

Eventually Dave returned to his hydrographer job and resumed operation of his roving rope tow. The majority of the time the rope tow was stationed at Mammoth Mountain. The Main Lodge's predecessor known as "the Snake Pit," a 12' x 24' building with a dirt floor and outside toilet, served as combination first aid station and snack bar. The Forest Service decided to put the permanent permit to operate at Mammoth Mountain up for bid but no one bid on it, including Dave, because he didn't have the money. In 1953, the Forest Service awarded Dave the permit free of charge on the condition he begin developing the mountain. He already had a thriving rope tow business and soon Mammoth was entertaining more skiers than any other California operation, including those with chairlifts.

Dave went to the bank and asked for \$135,000 to build a chairlift, add on to the existing hut and pay salaries for a year. This time the bank thought it was too much of a risk and turned him down. Walter Martinoni, who built chairs for Donner Summit and Snow Summit, had built a chair for a client who decided he didn't want it. The two agreed that if Walter gave Dave the chair on a handshake of credit, Dave would install it himself and pay Walter after the winter. Dave and a group of hard-core skiers built their own crane, dug the tower holes by hand, mixed the cement and installed the motor, brakes, clutches and drive system. Mammoth Mountain's first chairlift opened on Thanksgiving Day, 1955, just in time to meet his permit requirements. Since 1955, Dave and his crew have installed an average of one lift annually.

Not only did Dave love to ski and race, but he also loved developing the ski area and coaching young racers. He coached 19 of his team members to the United States Olympic Ski Team, including two of his own children. Dave has been one of the most successful racing coaches in ski history. Dave's coaching success helped put Mammoth on the map as a great ski area. Parents began sending their children from all over the country to ski at Mammoth under Dave's tutelage. During the 1960s, approximately 80% of the US Women's National team trained at Mammoth.

After building his first chairlift in 1955, Dave went on to build one of the largest ski resorts in the country. In 1986, Dave bought nearby June Mountain, ensuring the future of great skiing in the Eastern Sierra. Today Mammoth Mountain has 27 lifts, four day-lodges, four hotel properties, four restaurants, a large maintenance facility and much more. Now a four-season destination resort, Mammoth Mountain is busy during the summer months as a world-class Mountain Bike Park and Adventure Center and operates a golf course and fly fishing guide service. Dave McCoy has been called one of the last great entrepreneurs in the skiing business.

Dave's commitment to the Mammoth Lakes community never waned. Besides continuously helping individuals in need, he was intricately involved and largely responsible for establishing the water district, hospital and high school. When he was asked to help establish a college in the Eastern Sierra, he joined with other town leaders to introduce the nonprofit Mammoth Lakes Foundation to pursue this goal. The Eastern Sierra College Center (ESCC) opened in 1996 with seed money from the McCoy family. ESCC, a branch of Cerro Coso Community College, fulfilled the Foundation's mission to develop higher education and cultural enrichment in the area. Associate degree programs, professional and technical training as well as special interest programs are now available in the Dave and Roma McCoy Learning Center, as well as student housing. Long-term goals include bringing upper division courses to the school as a 4-year university and construction of a performing arts center. Dave's tireless support contributes greatly to the success of the Foundation.

In the 1930s, Dave McCoy and his friends envisioned a bright and promising future for Mammoth. Dave took that vision and built upon it, making Mammoth an integral part of California's burgeoning tourist economy. The legendary founder of Mammoth Mountain saw Mammoth as one of North America's best-loved ski destinations, but also as an extraordinary four-season resort playground. Awards received by Dave include:

2011 FWSA Snowsports Builder Award
2007 Warren Miller Freedom Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award
2001 College Founder Award
2000 Texaco Star Award
1999 National Ski Areas Association Lifetime Achievement Award
1999 Ernst & Young LLP Master Entrepreneur of the Year Finalist
1999 Commendation from Senator Tim Leslie for "Exemplary Records of Community Service"
1996 Inducted into California Tourism Hall of Fame
1994 US Ski Association John Clair Award for Outstanding Support of the US Ski Team
1993 Southern California Edison Environmental Excellence Award
1993 National Society of Fundraising Executives Outstanding Philanthropist Award
1992 AT&T Skiing Award
1990 Ski Business Hall of Fame Award
1989 California Travel Industries Association Entrepreneur of the Year
1989 Jimmie Heuga Center Recognition Award for Outstanding Contribution in Re-animating the Physically Challenged
1988 Charley Proctor Award for Continued Improvement in Skiing Experience and Commitment to young skiers
1988 Ski Writers Association of Southern California Newsmaker Award for Dedication to the Spirit and Sport of Skiing
1986 City of Los Angeles Commendation for High Caliber of Recreational Activity Offered to the Citizens of Los Angeles
1986 Far West Ski Association Tommi Tyndall Award for Outstanding Ski Area
1986 Bishop City Council Outstanding Community Service
1985 US Department of Agriculture Certificate of Appreciation
1981 Rotary Club of America
1978 US Ski Writers Association Golden Quill Award
1974 FWSA Hans Georg Award for distinguished accomplishments and long term contribution to skiing
1968 National Alliance of Businesses for Public/Private Partnership
Boy Scouts of America in Appreciation of Untiring Work
Served on the President's Coalition for the Great Outdoors