

#190

Ralph “Doc” DesRoches

Born: 1920 Died: 2003

Information submitted by J.H. Carruthers, Chairman, Historical Committee

Flamboyant is not the adjective for the biography of Doc DesRoches; steady, stalwart, dedicated, reliable and efficient, yes.

Ralph “Doc” DesRoches entire life was actively devoted to skiing and the advancement of the ski sport in general. There are a number of United States F.I.S. and Olympic Ski Teams who owe DesRoches for his help getting them to their competitions. Fundraising for the United States Ski Team, however, was only one of his many facets.

Born in Mexico, Maine, in 1920, Doc started his ski career with a two year stint on the high school ski team. From 1939-1943, his talents on the boards were such that he earned a Class “A” rating as a competitor in the downhill, cross-country and combined at the University of New Hampshire.

It was at the UNH DesRoches’ fundraising talents began to bloom. Two years he headed the Campus Chest Drive and two years it went over the top. Seventeen years later in 1960, Doc would undertake to raise \$140,000 for the development program of the U.S. Ski Team. The result was \$140,000 and the beginning of a serious assault by the U.S. Ski Team on international competition.

Like many ardent skiers of the early 1940s, he gravitated to the 10th Mountain Division, then located at Camp Hale, Colorado, but injuries kept him from going overseas. He would finish out his service as ski instructor at the Re-distribution Center at Lake Placid.

After the war, Doc settled seriously into the ski business becoming head of the ski school and ski shop at Laurel Mountain, Ligonier, Pennsylvania. In those early days of uncertain supply and equally uncertain demand, he found himself overstocked on hats. Then, he discovered a store in Cleveland that was overstocked on skis. During the twelve years from 1945 to 1957, he must have proven his ability, since in 1957, he became president of Laurel Mountain Slopes, a post he held until leaving to become executive secretary of the Ski Industries of America in 1963.

Threaded through these years was a constant, active role in the various associations both amateur and professional which represent the skisport. It started with him becoming a member of the Eastern Ski Association in 1934 and led to a directorship from 1959-1965. The association valued his service and voted him a Lifetime Honorary Director in 1965.

The list of service to associations are many: board of directors of the USSA from 1962 to 1967; press liaison for the U.S. Ski Team at Val Gardena, Italy, in 1970, the Olympic Team in Sapporo, in 1972; and Honorary Life Member of Rocky Mountain Ski Association in 1975.

More importantly, perhaps, has been DesRoches’ ability to be acceptable to all elements of the sport. He remained a member of the Professional Ski Instructors Association and was Charter member #6. He was also a charter member of the National Ski Area Association from 1959 of its inception to the time he joined Ski Industries of America in 1963.

As executive secretary of the Ski Industries of America, he was instrumental in bringing the manufacturers and retailers closer together in a more orderly manner through the vehicle of trade shows. These original trade shows in a number of geographic locations have since been consolidated into one giant show where manufacturers show their wares to the retail buyers in Las Vegas.

In all, Doc rose to the unenviable unofficial post of “Let’s Ask Doc About It.” Writer Paul Hanenberg wrote in 1966, “If anybody can claim to the title of Mr. Skiing in the USA, Ralph A. DesRoches is the man.”

Finally, there is a human facet which should not be overlooked. Together with his ski-oriented wife, Toby, they had a fulfilling and rewarding – if sometimes hectic – family life together and raised four fine children, Laurel, Becky, Aimee, and Alec. That’s a life accomplishment by itself.

Ralph A. “Doc” DesRoches was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1977.

