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## H. William “Bill” Kirschner

Born: 1918 P. 2006

Information submitted in a nomination letter to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame – Sponsor: Charles Ferries

*Bill Kirschner, founder of the K2 Ski Company, can be considered the “father of the fiberglass ski” in the United States. K2, named after the two Kirschner brothers and the famous Himalayan Mountain, was started in 1964 on Vashon Island, Washington, following the two years of development and testing of the fiberglass ski.*

Bill Kirschner’s first job was at the Tacoma Smelting Company, where he was a metallurgical

engineer. He and his wife did not stay in Tacoma long before they moved across Puget Sound to nearby Vashon Island. In 1944, during the war, Bill’s job was “frozen” at the smelter, as there was no ore to smelt. He and Barbara moved to Howe, Idaho, where he was in charge of development and management of a nearby mine. They returned to Vashon in 1946, and Bill joined his father and brother at Kirschner Manufacturing, making fracture equipment for veterinarians. The Kirschner splint is still used in veterinary clinics today.

Bill began to experiment with fiberglass, developing a “dog” cage for use in veterinary clinics. The easy to clean fiberglass cages were widely accepted. Kirschner manufacturing continued to be successful, eventually expanding beyond the splint and cage business into the field of animal research products.

During the long hours spent to insure the success of his manufacturing business, Bill found time to help his wife raise three children – Bill, Bruce, and Becky. He was also active in community affairs, committing endless hours to the local Kiwanis Club, sitting on the founding Board of the Vashon Island Golf and Country Club, and serving as a director on the Vashon School Board for 19 years from 1950 to 1969.

In the early 1960s, Bill decided to introduce his children to the sport of skiing. After outfitting all in ski-gear, and taking up the sport as a family, he began to wonder if the fiberglass knowledge he had acquired with the development of animal cages could be applied to snow skis. Never thinking of himself as an inventor, or an entrepreneur, Bill set out to develop a ski. In 1962, he borrowed a friend’s pair of Head metal skis, and used them as a model to build his first pair of snow skis. When asked why skis, Bill would reply that he had run out of things to “fiddle” with at Kirschner Manufacturing. He always thought a fiberglass ski could be practical and economical, so he decided to build his own.

Unfamiliar with the ski industry, he talked with the owners of a Seattle based ski distribution firm, A&T Ski Company, and they encouraged him to continue his ski development. Following two years of development and testing, production was started in 1964. His wife, their friends, and his children all worked side by side during those first years at the ski factory.

The Ski Company, called K2, named after the two Kirschner brothers, and a famous Himalayan Mountain, spun off the Kirschner Manufacturing Company and was incorporated in 1967. Bill took control of K2, while his brother continued with Kirschner Manufacturing.

Bill developed the first commercially viable fiberglass ski in the United States. His initial emphasis was on the recreational market with a model by the name “Holiday.” It was not until 1968 that the company began to change its emphasis to racing. Bill recognized the importance of a successful racing program and the credibility and new product ideas it generated. With the encouragement and knowledge from his staff, K2 entered into competitive ski racing. K2 skis met with instant success, getting both U.S. Ski Team members and collegiate skiers to use the product. Working with the racers helped drive the development of other models in the K2 line of products. Red, White, and Blue soon became the trademark of K2 and was recognized worldwide. Bill stayed busy designing skis, patenting a process for manufacturing “wet wrap” skis and designing the machinery to make them.

K2 is still recognized as one of the premier ski brands in the world. Bill Kirschner can be considered one of the great ski entrepreneurs of the 1960s, the golden years of the U.S. ski business.

H. William “Bill” Kirschner was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 2001.