

NOMINATION FORM

For HONORED MEMBERSHIP

In The U.S. SKI & SNOWBOARD HALL OF FAME

Candidate's Name: James Niehues

Date & Place of Birth: December 22, 1946 / Loma,  
Colorado

Address of Candidate: 11786 Barrentine Loop, Parker CO, 80138

Telephone Number:

970-744-1494

Email:

jimniehues@aol.com

Is the candidate still living? If not, provide date and place of death:

YES

Nominator information:

Name: Jason Blevins

Address: POBox 3211, Eagle, CO  
81631

Telephone Number: 303-564-5192

Email: jason@coloradosun.com

For what category are you nominating this candidate?

Athlete:       

Snowsports Builder:  X

Heritage:       

(See appendix one at the end of this form for category definitions)

An 8 x 10 photograph of the candidate must be supplied: \_\_\_YES\_\_\_

State why the candidate merits election to the U.S. National Ski & Snowboard Hall of Fame (limit this statement to 250 words):

Over a career spanning more than 30 years, James Niehues, 72, has painted more than 300 ski-resort maps. He is the shepherd of skiers, guiding us through snowy landscapes that he creates with an authenticity that still today defies computerized capabilities.

In a resort industry that has evolved and innovated every season for decades, technological wizardry has improved nearly all aspects of the ski experience: Faster chairlifts, seamless commerce, and increasingly technical skis, boards and clothing all keep us effortlessly carving. Still, we embrace Niehues' paper art, which harkens back to age-old, once-crucial mapmaking skills that have faded from modern life.

No artist has had a more-lasting impact on the sport of skiing. His maps have been printed hundreds of millions of times and used across the continents. But Niehues' journey was winding. He didn't dream of painting maps, but it became his dream job. And now, his maps are as much a part of the ski experience as chairlifts, groomed trails and hot cocoa.

His maps chart the history of skiing's progression through the decades. Built as navigational tools, they become marketing machines, urging skiers to visit, linger, return and explore. Without Niehues, the ski world would be lost. Yet, despite the millions who know his work, few actually know his name.

In early December, Jim and a team of fans - myself included - helped him launch a book of his resort maps on Kickstarter. It became the best-selling art book in the history of Kickstarter, with more than 5,000 buyers in the first month. In early 2019, almost 5,000 more buyers ordered the book before it published in June 2019.

In chronological order by year, list the candidate's achievements: (eg: January 12, 1965: proposed the establishment of the Professional Ski Instructors Alliance)

In 1989, Jim a skilled artist and fledgling businessman, approached map artist Bill C. Brown looking for work. He hoped maybe Brown - who had dominated the hand-illustrated resort mapping market for the previous decade - had some map illustration work he needed help with. And just as Hal Shelton had done for him in the 1970s, Brown handed off the entire mapping business to Niehues. The trio of map artists created a genre, with Niehues taking the art form to a new level. For more than 30 years, he has hand-painted resort maps for more than 300 ski areas across North America, Australia and New Zealand.

In 2019, he painted Mount Bachelor and the list of resorts waiting for new maps or updated maps grows with each passing month.

On one page provide additional data, anecdotes, etc. that you feel are pertinent to this nomination:

Please list the names and addresses of those people who are supporting this nomination (Minimum of three - limit six):

**Bill Jensen** has spent his lifetime in the resort industry, captaining the world's largest ski areas and most-influential resort companies. Jensen, co-owner and CEO of Telluride ski resort, has worked with Niehues for decades, spanning several ski resorts. Direct quotes from Jensen:

It's interesting, reflecting back on my career, Jim clearly has defined the image of the entire industry through the eyes of everybody who skis. It's amazing to me. I look at his work and I say, "Oh, I get it. I get that mountain." It's the one image that really can define a resort. Photography doesn't do it.

We print our maps on stone paper. This is our third year doing that. They are completely biodegradable, so our maps by Jim have an environmental twist.

Jim is an iconic part of skiing, from the way we use his maps to his signature in the bottom corner. I mean, how many trail maps of his have been printed? Hundreds of millions? What other artist can say that?

What's next after Jim? We have ... a really sophisticated mapping technology that we currently use for snowmaking, snow safety and incident identification. My guess is that if Jim goes away, we will see technology step in and perhaps we'll have 3D mapping that will replace his artistic skills and interpretation. That would be a loss. It would be a loss for the history of our sport and the uniqueness of that trail map that fits in your pocket. Everyone across the world even folds his maps the same way. They are such an ingrained part of the sport and the ski experience.

Professional skier **Chris Davenport** has covered a lot of ground in the world of skiing. He has won big-mountain ski titles and starred in dozens of ski movies. In his second chapter, he has emerged as one of North America's most accomplished ski mountaineers. The Aspen father of three continues to stoke the flames of skiing and push the boundaries of the sport, all while becoming a global advocate in the campaign to thwart climate change. Direct quotes from Davenport:

*For me, growing up in North Conway, N.H., in a family of skiers, my parents would take trips every winter and they would always bring home ski maps. I grew up with my bedroom walls covered with James' ski maps. I would collect them from every place I went to and every place my parents went. I would lie in bed and stare at these places I had never been, and they seemed so far off and otherworldly, and I would imagine being on each trail. It was such a cool fantasy for a young boy obsessed with skiing.*

*Once I moved to Colorado and started skiing at as many places I could, I continued to collect maps. It was like scrapbooking. It was a collection of memories. They helped me remember these amazing experiences. When I moved to Aspen, I hung trail maps on all my garage walls. Without knowing the artist himself, those maps spoke to me as a skier and became sort of the repository of my ski experiences.*

*It's been true for my own kids, too. They haven't been to some of the places I've been, and they can look at a map and imagine. When I first took them to Whistler, we spent weeks looking at the map to Whistler Blackcomb, and I showed them where we would ski and their eyes would just light up with the promise of all those black diamonds and steep lines. It was like the maps were a portal to a different world.*

*In the Aspen ski-patrol room, the entire ceiling of the ski-patrol shack is covered in trail maps. I go in there and just gaze into the ceiling. It's like going into a museum. You take a deep breath and just slowly take in the art.*

*His level of detail is amazing. The thousands of hours he's put into documenting ski resorts around the world is just unheralded. As a student of the history of skiing who loves all the aspects of where we came from and how we got to where we are today, Jim has played such a huge role in the development of our sport, and there are so many like me who have been deeply influenced by Jim and his art.*

*His maps are important — even vital — for everyone whose heart and soul revolve around the sport of skiing. Jim's maps are just so important to growing up as a skier. We didn't have the internet back then, so we couldn't point to a lift and tell our friends about those days that were so important to us.*

*I've always admired Jim's creativity and his ability to bring out everything these mountains have to offer. It's like a piece of art hanging in a museum.*

*There's something very important about the tactile response we get from a paper map in your hands. It's a very different experience than a map on a phone. For me, it's the same in the mountains. When I'm hiking or skiing the backcountry, I want a paper map.*

*I would play a game in my mind when I was young. I would look at the trail maps and imagine the spaces between the runs. I would imagine what's in those detailed trees. I would fantasize about what the mountain was hiding, what wasn't being clearly depicted on the maps. The better you get at looking at those trail maps, the better you can get at sniffing out those secret places. I wonder what's in there. Is that a cliff? Is it dangerous? Is it spectacular? In some ways, you get fluent at looking at those maps, and it gives you a better instinct for navigating the mountain and finding the potential, the possibilities just off the trail he's painting.*

**Michael Berry** shepherded the National Ski Areas Association through skiing's and snowboarding's most dynamic years. For 25 years, he represented more than 330 American ski resorts — from the largest to the smallest — as the resort industry contracted and consolidated. He had the front-row seat to every innovation in snowsports over a quarter-century. He has watched the restless industry grapple with every possibility in its search for ways to entice and retain more skiers. Direct quotes from Berry:

*People never stop exploring new technology. Everyone looked at digital maps, going back even 25 years ago. But they just kind of came out cold. What Jim brought to the table and continues to bring to the table is that subtle interpretation that he applies through his artwork. His maps have animation, but they are still truthful to reality. His ability to make things*

*understandable and make people see his art and understand how to get from here to there — that's a skill that makes him a master.*

*At the end of the day, the trail map is utilitarian. It has to move us from Point A to Point B. His work has such a depth to it that it allows us to understand the reality on the ground so much better than a photograph or digitized image ever could. That is the artistry of his work.*

*Oh, yes, there are always budgetary talks when it comes to maps, when it comes to everything in this industry. There's always a bright, young innovator who thinks there must be a better way. We've seen people move away from Jim's maps, pursuing alternatives that are usually more technologically based. But, almost always, they come back to Jim. There's a warmth to Jim's work that can't be replicated in any other form or fashion. Think about it: If technology was going to replace him, it would have done so 15, 20 years ago. And it hasn't.*

*Jim may want to retire, but until his heir apparent is found, he is not going to be able to retire. There is such a powerful value in his imagery, with its texture and detail and warmth — and really, no digital approach can achieve that.*

**David Perry** has held leadership roles with the most-influential resorts and operators in the country, including Aspen Snowmass, Intrawest and Whistler Blackcomb. Today, he's the chief operating officer at Alterra Mountain Co., which has corralled 14 resorts and dozens of resort partners to create the new Ikon Pass. Direct quotes from Perry:

*There are people all over the world who collect these maps and put them on their walls and they put them in their dorm rooms, and when you had a bottom bunk with your brother, you would pin them on the underside of the mattress, tucked into the bedsprings so you could look up at them at night. At least that's the way it went in my household.*

*I remember when I was starting in this business in my 20s and I wondered if anyone else was painting these maps. I would look at them and see they were clearly from the same artist and just wonder how he could do every single one. I distinctly remember thinking, "How does one guy do all the resorts?" To have completed that many resort maps, what a remarkable achievement. What a legacy to leave the sport. Just incredible.*

*I worked with Jim to create a few maps. He had the understanding that he needed to create a tool for navigation that was also a work of art and he had to portray the mountain in a two-dimensional way, and mountains are not two-dimensional. His maps always feel real, but they are clearly a representation in two dimensions of the amazing experience that everyone is having and dreaming about. To do that more than 300 times, that's just mind-boggling.*

*I was hired away from Intrawest in the early 1990s and went to work with the marketing team at Whistler Mountain, which was competing against Blackcomb back then. It was 1992, and my predecessors at Whistler had really blown it. They had wanted to make the resort map fun and different. It was cartoonish — with all these figures, and the trees were oversized. It was weird and it wasn't functional as a tool you could use to navigate. It didn't inspire you to dream at all. It was a failed attempt to be innovative. So, the first thing I did when I was hired was contact Jim and commission him to do a new Whistler map. We were expanding into the alpine, ... and we wanted him to really highlight the new bowls, all the high-alpine bowls that are such an amazing part of the Whistler ski experience. I wanted them portrayed larger than life so the real-exciting skiing was right there, in front of your face when you opened the map. That meant the bowls had to be out of proportion to the rest of the mountain. If you accurately reflected those bowls based on acreage, they would be tiny.*



*So, working with Jim, I would ask if he could angle this bowl that way and flatten it out so we could show all five bowls. And he was so great. He was so good because he knew he didn't have to be literal, but he had to be accurate. There is a difference. ... He knew that. He accurately portrayed the vision for skiing the mountain, and no one has ever done it to the level of precision that he has.*

*He would take a picture of his sketch, blow it up and send it to me in a giant tube in the mail. He would send me the draft, and I would call him and we would talk over the phone. He was so good at taking input. He was great to work with. He wasn't a sales-y guy, and he wasn't promotional in any way. He was a head-down, nose-to-the-canvas, get-the-work-done and satisfy-the-client kind of guy, focused on making a quality piece of work. He always struck me as a really diligent and dedicated guy.*

*Resorts are always looking for ways to control costs, right? When we talk about needing to print, say, 500,000 maps, someone always asks, "Why do we need that many? Can't we do 400,000 and save money?" The answer is always no. This is actually our primary marketing piece. Skiers and snowboarders, maybe they pick up a map at a ski show or at the mountain and they take it home with them and put it on their wall or on their coffee table and they share it. This is the most important marketing piece we make, and it is not something we want to scrimp on. We used to print a certain number of Jim's maps on plastic paper that wouldn't melt when it got wet and wouldn't crease. It was four times more expensive to print those, and we'd use them for VIPs or press packets, but that was a testament to how important Jim's maps were to our marketing.*

*We would go every year to the London Ski Show. Such a huge deal. More than 150,000 Brits would go through there, and it would last for 10 days. The Brits can't real-ski at home, so they all traveled to ski. Every resort was there. Resorts from across Europe and North America. The biggest ski-racing stars were there. The beer was flowing, and it was like going to a*

*giant pub. And the No. 1 thing every resort needed to have back in the day was a giant blowup of your resort map. And we'd give thousands of maps away. You might as well not even go if you didn't have Jim's maps to hand out.*

Please provide a list of sources for visual material that can be used at the candidate's induction presentation:

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We will have copies of the book, a promotional video of Jim's career and many, many photos.

Signature of nominator

Jason Blevins

Mail completed nomination form to: U.S. Ski & Snowboard Hall of Fame,  
P.O. Box 191, Ishpeming, MI 49849 or email to: [administrator@skihall.com](mailto:administrator@skihall.com)

