



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

On Christmas Day, 1965 in Muskegon, MI, while trying to entertain his young daughters, Poppen strapped two kids skis together and formed the prototype for a toy that would become known as the "Snurfer." Commercially marketed by Brunswick Corporation, the product was the inspiration for the what we know today as the snowboard.

**In chronological order by year, list the candidate's achievements:**

December 25, 1965 – Created the first "Snurfer."

March 17, 1966 – filed patent for the creation.

November 5, 1966 – *Muskegon Chronicle* article titled "Snurfing with a Capital S" appears, detailing the events of the previous 11 months, and pending move of the toy into the market. The distinctive yellow and black board would appear in Sears Christmas 1966 catalog, priced at \$6.88

February 18, 1968 – first "International Snurfer Classic" is hosted at Blockhouse Hill in Muskegon State Park.

April 16, 1968 – Poppen's patent is approved.

February 17, 1970 – Crowd of 600 attend third annual Snurfer Championship.

1972 – Brunswick Corporation exits the business. Poppen sells production rights to JEM Corporation.

December 22, 1974 – Championship receives coverage in *Chicago Tribune*.

January 28, 1979 – young entrepreneur, Jake Burton Carpenter from Londonderry, VT registers to compete in the annual Snurfing competition. His application is initially denied as he plans to ride his own version of a snurfer, but is ultimately allowed as the event is divided into two categories. Prize money from JEM is awarded to riders in both divisions. Carpenter was in Muskegon trying to showcase products from his own Burton Boards, from his recently started company, Burton Corporation.

1995 – Poppen receives the first ever "Tranny Award" presented by TransWorld Media each year at the Annual Snowboarding Industry Conference to individuals who have made a significant contribution to the snowboarding industry. After winning the award, he learns to snowboard.

June 9, 2001 – Poppen is inducted into the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame.

June 22, 2009 – Poppen's collection of papers and prototypes are donated to the Smithsonian, with the first board is placed on display.

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/exhibitions/artifact-walls-snowboarding>

[http://invention.smithsonian.org/resources/fa\\_poppen\\_index.aspx](http://invention.smithsonian.org/resources/fa_poppen_index.aspx)

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

Raised three daughters with his late wife Nancy.

Served on the Norton Shores, MI city council including 17 years on the Norton Shores planning commission.

Owned and operated Lake Welding Supply Co in Muskegon, MI. Started with a partner in 1953. Today, the company is employee-owned.

Avid sailor, who won many competitive sailing titles.

<http://abcnews.go.com/Business/jake-burton-burton-snowboards-winter-sports-legacy/story?id=13413339>

At 57 years old, the widely successful snowboard tycoon is rarely seen without his signature ski uniform -- a skull cap, boots and his board that all bear his last name. Burton has created an entire lifestyle, an Olympic sport and a multi-billion-dollar industry almost entirely by himself.

It all started with a \$10 toy his parents bought him when he was a kid. It was called a Snurfer, a wood plank with a rope attached to one end that riders could use to surf downhill on land

Jake was inspired. "From the minute I got on it I was into it," he said. "I always thought that there was a sport there. It was made by a bowling company, Brunswick, and it was not marketed as a sport. It was sort of like the hula hoop."

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

J Paul King, 6920 Windwater Ct, Muskegon, MI 49444

Paula M Ziemelis, Muskegon Community College Librarian, 221 S. Quarterline Road, Muskegon, MI 49442

Julie Poppen – Daughter. [julie.poppen@gmail.com](mailto:julie.poppen@gmail.com)

## Tom West

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**From:** "Ski Hall Administrator" <Administrator@skihall.com>  
**Date:** Wednesday, April 23, 2014 8:12 AM  
**To:** "Tom West" <twest@skihall.com>  
**Subject:** Fw: Sherman Poppen Nomination

**From:** [Jason Dreweck](#)  
**Sent:** Tuesday, April 22, 2014 6:59 PM  
**To:** [administrator@skihall.com](mailto:administrator@skihall.com)  
**Subject:** Sherman Poppen Nomination

Dear Selection Committee,  
Im sending this email in support of candidate Sherman Poppen's nomination to the U.S. Ski & Snowboard Hall of Fame. I was shocked to find that snowboarding founding father was not currently an Honored member. Thank you for your consideration.

Jason Dreweck  
[Jason\\_Dreweck@yahoo.com](mailto:Jason_Dreweck@yahoo.com)  
720.933.1608

## Tom West

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**From:** "Ski Hall Administrator" <Administrator@skihall.com>  
**Date:** Wednesday, April 23, 2014 2:50 PM  
**To:** "Tom West" <twest@skihall.com>  
**Subject:** Fw: Nomination Consideration

**From:** O'Mara Patrick  
**Sent:** Wednesday, April 23, 2014 2:26 PM  
**To:** [administrator@skihall.com](mailto:administrator@skihall.com)  
**Subject:** Nomination Consideration

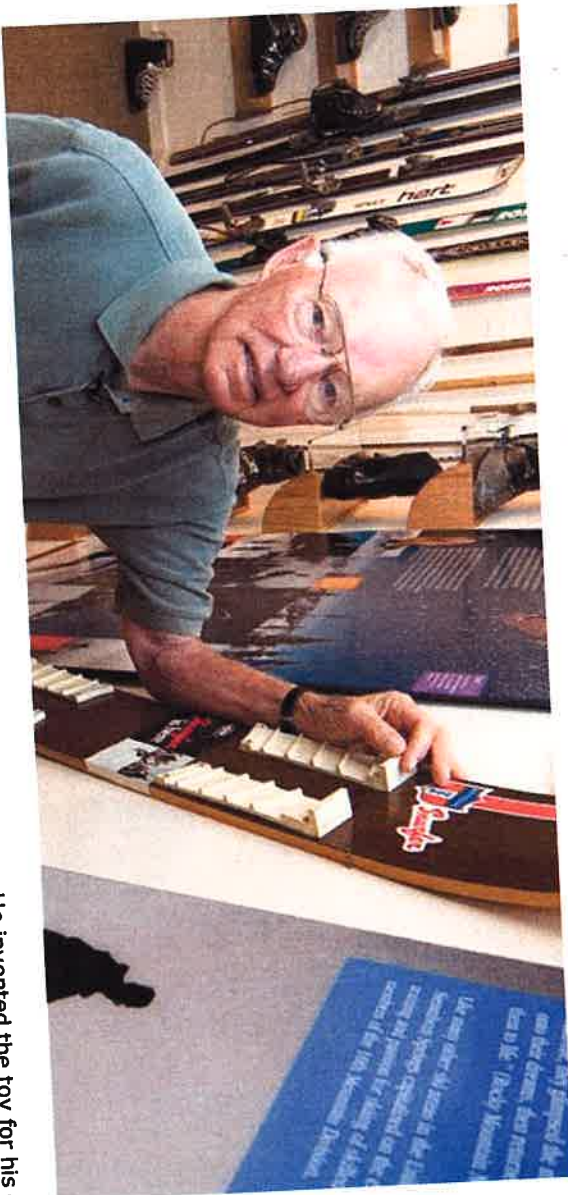
Dear Selection Committee,

I'm writing to encourage your nomination and selection of Sherman Poppen to the "US Ski & Snowboard Hall of Fame". Sherman's imagination and creativity were, perhaps, the major impetus in the origin and early evolution of Snowboarding. Your consideration is appreciated.

Respectfully,

Pat

Patrick O'Mara tel./cell 303 589-2013 E-mail [pomara@hotmail.com](mailto:pomara@hotmail.com)



Sherman Poppen stands next to a 'Snurfer' at the Tread of Pioneers Museum. He invented the toy for his children, and it became the inspiration for today's snowboard. A collection of his Snurfers and marketing materials now are in the Smithsonian Institution. Enlarge photo — Photo by John F. Russell

## Smithsonian honors the snowboard's predecessor

Sherman Poppen's 'Snurfer' displayed in national museum  
By Tom Ross (Contact)

ADVERTISEMENT

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS — On Christmas Day 44 years ago, Sherman Poppen felt a sudden need to get his children outdoors.

Out of that urgency rose the sport of snowboarding, when Poppen improvised a prototype of a stand-on-top sled on the snow-covered Lake Michigan sand dunes.

Poppen, 79, is a longtime resident of Steamboat Springs and is widely recognized as the grandfather of snowboarding for his invention of the Snurfer, a precursor of the modern snowboard. Now, his personal collection of Snurfers, marketing materials and even legal documents have been added to the collection of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

Without the snow that covered the shores of the Lake Michigan sand dunes on Christmas morning 1965, the history of snowboarding might have traced a far different course. It's even fair to ask whether the snowboard would exist today were it not for Poppen's Yuletide ingenuity.

"I had two kids, 10 and 5 (Wendy and Laurie) with a third (Julie) due any day," Poppen recalled. His first wife "Nancy said, 'Sherm, you've got to get those noisy kids out of the house.' We got the sled out and went out to the dunes behind the house. But I realized the runners on the sled would cut through the snow and it wouldn't slide."

Sherm suspects his unfulfilled desire to go surfing caused him to invent the new snow toy on the spot.

Living in a home overlooking Lake Michigan in the city of Muskegon, Mich., Poppen always had wished that the Great Lakes wavelets were big enough to allow him to learn to surf. It didn't hurt that the large dune behind the house resembled a permanent wave.

The frustrated surf daddy seized on eldest daughter Wendy's 36-inch skis purchased from



Pictured are blueprints for Sherman Poppen's Snurfer. Photo by John F. Russell



Sherman Poppen, inventor of the Snurfer, laughs when asked about his role in the development of snowboarding. Photo by John F. Russell



a Kresge's five and dime store. He grabbed a couple of pieces of wooden molding from his shop and screwed them into the cheap skis to lock them together side by side.

Every parent has had the experience of watching their youngsters spend more time playing with the discarded wrapping paper on Christmas morning than with the toys Santa had painstakingly assembled the night before. In the case of his improvised toy, Sherm didn't know what to expect, but he was pleasantly surprised.

"They just had so much fun," he said.

The molding strips gave the children a chance to brace themselves as they slid down the dunes and tumbled in the snow. And they did it over and over.

### **Tweaking the Snurfer**

A natural tinkerer, Poppen wasted no time going into his woodworking shop with the intent of improving his stand-on-top ski.

"It was a good thing it kept snowing that winter," he said.

He quickly gravitated to a wooden water ski. The wide surface negated the need to bind a pair of skis side by side. And by carving a groove down the center, just like an Alpine ski, the water ski tracked better over the snowy dunes.

Nancy came up with the contraction of the words "snow" and "surfer" to dub the new toy the "Snurfer." Her husband wasn't dreaming about adults carving up formal ski hills at this point in the development of his invention.

"I always envisioned replacing the children's sled," Poppen said.

He had observed that almost every winter in Michigan, a child either was seriously injured or even killed when their sled collided with a tree, or in some cases a motor vehicle.

"You could always jump off (the Snurfer) if you were going to get in trouble," Poppen said.



The jumping off part was good, but it took Poppen's father, Cyrus, to recognize that something was missing.

"He said, 'Son, this is stupid, every time you fall off you have to chase that thing down the hill!'"

Poppen quickly added a handheld leash to the nose of the Snurfer, and the refinement produced unanticipated performance benefits. By putting tension on the leash, the neighborhood Snurfers in Muskegon could brace themselves more effectively. But they also learned that they could steer the board by leaning back and un-weighting the nose of the board.

### **An adult perspective**

By late winter 1966, Sherm's adult friends were coming over to the house to share a six-pack and try the kids' new toys.

"It was just super fun, that's what it was," Poppen said.

Some of his backyard Snurfing pals worked nearby for Brunswick, a bowling alley equipment manufacturer. Coincidentally, Brunswick was planning a move into smaller consumer goods, and Poppen quickly landed an appointment to present his concept for the Snurfer. Company officials liked the idea and by March of 1966, Poppen had filed patent applications, a trademark and a copyright on the word Snurf.

The original Snurfer was in stores in time for Christmas 1966. It was yellow with black stripes and bore a logo with a cartoon-like figure of a boy, Snurfy, wearing a stocking cap riding the Snurfer with his right arm extended, emulating surfers. It retailed for \$5.70, about as much as an early skateboard.

Brunswick promoted the product with print ads in the form of a half-page cartoon.

The first Snurfer enthusiasts braced their snow boots against a set of metal staples designed to help them stay on the board.

## Idol worship

Snurfers have become highly collectible among modern snowboarders.

"You could go on eBay right now and pay \$200 or \$300 for the original black and yellow model," Poppen said with a note of pride in his voice.

Phillip Johnston, a snowboarder for 18 years, did just that. He had Poppen autograph two Snurfers on Friday.

"Sherm Poppen is definitely an idol, someone I look up to," Johnston said. "I just thank him for my lifestyle, the way I live today."

Johnston is the manager of The Click snowboard shop and a longtime snowboarding instructor at Steamboat Ski Area. His uncle gave him his original Snurfer. Johnston said his mother tells him stories about how he rode his Snurfer at an early age while his pals were sledding.

"I thank Sherm for the lifestyle, the way I live," Johnston said. "Without him, I wouldn't be working at The Click. I might not even be living in Colorado."

## Burton takes it to another level

Brunswick continued to refine the boards, Poppen said. The Super Snurfer incorporated a metal skeg or keel beneath the tail, which greatly enhanced the ability to steer the board. They were made of seven-ply plywood. A sheet of plywood big enough to trim out two boards was steamed and pressed with glue to get the desired shape.

The company even added a little sizzle by packaging them with a little container of Snurf Wax tied to the leash and an envelope of decals in the shape of flowers and feet. The idea was to allow owners to customize their boards.

Poppen recalls encountering a youngster named Jake Burton Carpenter at a Snurfer race in Michigan in the mid-'70s. Jake Burton, as he had become known, had cut up some inner

tubes and screwed them in strips onto his Snurfer.

"So, in effect, he had a little binding," Poppen said.

Burton would continue altering Snurfers and pushing the design envelope until he founded his own snowboard company, Burton Snowboards, leading a revolution at American ski resorts and the eventual radical redesign of Alpine skis. In a printed interview at his company's Web site, Burton acknowledged the transition from Snurfer to snowboard.

"During the late '60s, I modified Snurfers until 1977 when I started the company and built my first production prototype ... there was no road map. I combined some skateboarding and a little bit of surfing experience with the Snurfer."

Poppen said he doesn't resent the fact Burton was able to build on his invention and play a major role in launching the snowboard industry. To the contrary, he says, the two are good friends.

"It was Jake's perseverance that got us on the chairlift," Poppen said. "Otherwise (snowboarders) would still be hiking up the hill."

Upon his retirement, Poppen moved to Steamboat. Ironically, he didn't take up snowboarding right away.

"I became a hardcore tree skier," he said with a grin.

Nancy Poppen died in 1993. But Sherm remarried, and his second wife, Louise, loved snowboarding. Finally, at the age of 65, he was persuaded to buckle into a snowboard. He never looked back.

"It was a lot more mellow," Poppen said. "It's much easier on the body. You don't need poles, and I love the soft boots."

A bad back has forced Poppen to reluctantly give up snowboarding, and he and Louise are preparing to move to Georgia to be closer to family members. As they prepared to pack

their belongings, Sherm was confronted with the difficulty of storing his original Snurfers and related paperwork in a smaller home.

It was Louise who first suggested the Snurfer memorabilia belonged in the Smithsonian.

At first, Sherm scoffed at that notion, but he made a call and to his surprise, curator Maggie Dennis showed a strong interest. She recently met with the Poppens at their Front Range home and left with selected items.

Poppen's collection is destined for The Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History.

The mission of the Lemelson Center is to document and interpret the role invention has played in American history and encourage the inventive spirit in young people.

In almost 15 years of production, about 800,000 Snurfers were sold, netting Poppen about \$150,000.

Clearly, for him, it hasn't been about money for a long time. Poppen is content to know he has a place in the history of snow sports. He particularly is proud of having received the "Tranny Award" at the annual TransWorld Snowboarding Industry Conference in 1995.

Poppen was inducted into the Snowboarding Hall of Fame in 1995 and has been nominated this year for the National Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame.

Aware that the Smithsonian can exhibit a only small fraction of its collections at one time, he is particularly happy that the Lemelson Center intends to give the Snurfer a permanent place on the Web.

"They're going to digitize everything," Poppen said. "You'll be able to see photographs of my boards and my patent documents. ... It's exciting to think this all started in my woodworking shop in Muskegon. It's just so overwhelming."

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