

U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame: 2021 induction

Herman Kress Dupré

The son of Bavarian immigrants, Dupré built Seven Springs into a powerhouse resort, blanketed the world's slopes with his innovative HKD snowmaking technology.

If you're a Mid-Atlantic skier you've probably heard of Herman Kress Dupré and the legacy of his Seven Springs Resort, the ski area founded some 75 years ago in wooded hills an hour's drive from Pittsburgh. Wherever you're from, it's almost certain that you've enjoyed making turns on the smooth surface provided by Dupré's HKD Snowmaking systems, which are in play at an estimated 750 resorts around the world.

Dupré was a master tinkerer who showed up every day in jeans, work boots and a flannel shirt to elevate the Seven Springs experience and to lead HKD in delivering an economical, efficient, and environmentally sensitive manmade snow surface. When he took over Seven Springs in 1955, he transformed it from a small, private hunting and fishing club into a full-blown, 5,000-acre, four-season resort, which today has overnight accommodations for 5,000-plus guests, including a 10-story hotel. Dedicated to the resort, to snowmaking, to nature and to his family (including wife Mary "Sis" McSwigan and nine daughters), Dupré began every day by asking his staff and guests, "How can we do things better around here?" When they did "do better," whether it was the staff or his family, his enthusiastic, self-coined response was always, "*Excellenté!*"

Dupré was born Aug. 13, 1932, in Ligonier, Penn., the son of Bavarian immigrants, and began his education in a one-room schoolhouse. At age 22, while serving as a lieutenant with the Coast Guard, he returned home to take over the family business when his father, Alois, died. The operation was tiny at the time, but Seven Springs had installed the country's second rope tow (after Woodstock in Vermont). Within a year, Herman managed to secure a liquor license in a dry county, installed a Poma (with the help of the eponymous Jean Pomagalski), and opened the resort to the public. In the ensuing five decades, Dupré created and nurtured a vibrant year-round resort, with 750 feet of vertical for skiing plus golf and a host of other summer activities, including biking, fishing and tennis.

Dupré's father had bought the original 2.5 acres at Seven Springs for \$13 in a tax sale, and the son followed his parents (Alois and Helen Kress) in thriftiness and creativity. The family rule, at least in the early years, was to avoid loans. "When you're not allowed to borrow money, you do the best with what you have," recalled Herman. Another Dupré rule was that the entire family would work, so, among other tasks, the nine daughters waited tables, checked tickets, and taught skiing and tennis.

Always looking to bolster Seven Springs' 135 inches of natural snowfall, Dupré began tinkering with snowmaking in the late 1960s and never stopped (this was some 20 years after artificial snow had been pioneered at Mohawk Mountain in Connecticut). With a chemistry degree from Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, his first humble efforts involved garden hoses, golf course sprinklers, and a compressor he'd found in a salvage yard. In the mid-1970s, Herman sent his ski-racing daughters Rosi and Anni off to Burke Mountain Academy in Vermont in a Subaru loaded with his snowgun prototypes so the Burke crew could test them and provide feedback. Dupré eventually secured 34 patents to further advance the science of forcing water and pressurized air through a snow gun (he was also awarded an honorary Doctorate in Science degree from his alma mater in 2008).

In 1991, he launched the game-changing tower snow gun, and the company that was eventually called HKD was born. The 30-foot HKD tower was the first gun to mix air and water externally, producing dramatic savings on the power bill. Herman partnered with daughter Anni and her husband, Charles Santry, to launch the company, which today employs 70 people, plus several international distributors. Santry is HKD's president, while Anni is the vice president of finance.

The modern ski resort business would not exist today without snowmaking, and HKD is in play at many of the country's premier resorts from coast to coast, including Stratton, Stowe, Okemo, Loon, Sunday River, Wachusett, and Holiday Valley in the East; Boyne and Crystal in Michigan; and Western standouts like Vail, Copper, Aspen, Jackson Hole, Taos, Northstar and Mammoth Mountain. HKD is the official snowmaker for the U.S. Ski Team and has provided the surface for a host of special events, including the Big Air contest at Boston's Fenway Park.

In 2001, Dupré was honored with the Sherman Adams Award from the National Ski Areas Association for lifetime achievement. In 2013, *SKI* named the Duprés one of the

country's "Five First Families of American Skiing" (along with the Blakes, Mahres, Cochrans and Stieglers). Herman and his wife provided funding for the Saint Vincent's "Sis and Herman Dupré Science Pavilion," and also fueled an HKD snowmaking system makeover at the Dartmouth Skiway.

The Duprés sold Seven Springs in 2006 to the Nuttings of West Virginia; the Nutting family had grown up skiing there and owned a group of newspapers. The Nuttings acquired nearby ski areas Hidden Valley and Laurel Mountain, then sold all three to Vail Resorts for \$118 million in 2021.

Herman Dupré passed away on April 25, 2020, leaving his wife Mary, nine daughters (Denise, Laura, Rosi, Anni, Jan, Heidi, Gretl, Michele, and Renee) and 29 grandchildren. "During his lifetime, Herman planted over a million trees, and he probably spoke to nearly that many people," his obituary noted. "His was a life of learning, teaching, and difference-making. His quest for improvement got him out of bed early every day, and he met every day with gusto."

Career Accomplishments

Born: Aug. 13, 1932 (Ligonier, Penn.)

Died: April 25, 2020

1955: Returns from the Coast Guard at age 22 to oversee Seven Springs' two rope tows.

1957: Marries Mary (Sis) McSwigan; they move into the rope tow motor house as their first home, eventually have nine daughters.

1958: Installs first chairlift at Seven Springs.

1973: Applies for first of 34 patents covering snowmaking, sewage treatment and water storage.

1991: Introduces revolutionary tower snow gun to market.

1991: Partners with Charles Santry and his daughter, Anni to found Snow Economics, precursor to HKD.

2001: Receives NSAA's Sherman Adams Award.

2007: Gifts HKD snowmaking to Dartmouth Skiway.

2008: Receives Presidential Medal of Honor from Saint Vincent College.

2010: HKD installs snowmaking at Copper Mountain's U.S. Ski Team speed training facility, providing an early season, full-length surface for international teams.

2013: The Sis and Herman Dupré Science Pavilion is completed at Saint Vincent's, and Herman continues to tinker with improvements to HKD until his passing in 2020.