

## *New Mexico Ski Hall of Fame*

2003



# Ben Abruzzo



Ben Abruzzo was always a thrill-seeker. A mid-westerner from Rockford, Illinois, born in 1930, Ben's young life was filled with adventures, including those requiring rescue by the fire department and athletics like learning to ski on the snowy Rockford streets towed behind a car. After graduating from the University of Illinois with a degree in business administration, Ben was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Air Force and sent to Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque. Through a series of unsatisfying jobs, the constant in Ben's life was his family and his love of the mountains. Much of his free time was spent skiing at nearby La Madera; so much so that Ben was hired to manage the area in 1957. A year later, he became partners in the area with its owner Bob Nordhaus and over the next 30 years, the pair became some of Albuquerque's most notable and successful businessmen. Their legacy might be most monumentally captured in Sandia Peak Tramway. An idea so audacious, so seemingly impossible at the time that only the iron wills and determination of Ben and Bob sustained the effort through to the opening of the Tram in 1966.

Of course, one life-defining project would not be enough for Ben so he set his sights on ballooning. He succeeded in making his mark in that arena too, as part of the first manned balloon crossing of the Atlantic among other records.

Ben returned to skiing in 1984 when he purchased the Santa Fe Ski Area. He set about turning the small day area into a well-regarded and popular destination resort that continues to be run by the Abruzzo family. It would be the last project realized in a lifetime filled with dreams. Ben and his wife, Pat died in an airplane crash in 1985. For his love and fearless support of our sport of skiing, Ben is recognized with induction into the New Mexico Ski Hall of Fame.

