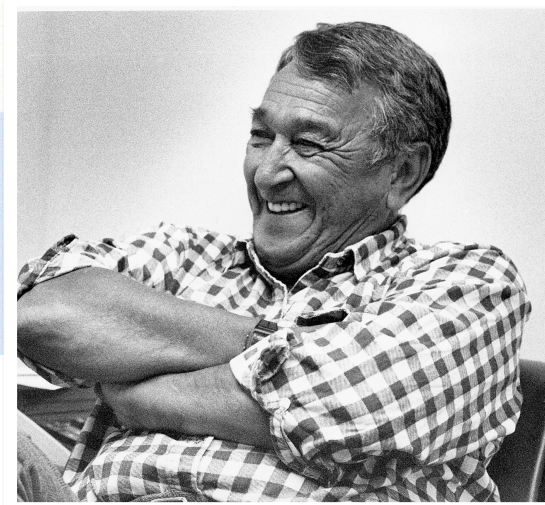


New Mexico Ski Hall of Fame

2004



Pete Totemoff



What makes a legend? However it is defined, there is no doubt that Pete Totemoff is a legend in New Mexico skiing. Pete came to Albuquerque from Cordova, Alaska to recover from tuberculosis and the surgical loss of a lung. In 1946, he answered Bob Nordhaus' ad seeking a manager for his ski area, then called La Madera. Already an accomplished skier, Pete had won the Alaska Ski Championship, an event requiring skill in downhill, slalom, cross country and jumping. At La Madera, he turned his expert hand to every possible job, including wire rope splicing, bulldozer operation and ski patrol first aid. Here he met Buzz and Jean Bainbridge, a friendship that would last a lifetime. As one of the U.S. Forest Service's first snow rangers, Pete demonstrated his skill at visualizing potential ski terrain, first developed as a teenager, skiing without lifts in the Chugach Range. This skill led to his design of slopes and trails at areas including Sierra Blanca, Santa Fe, Sipapu and Taos, creating the ski terrain that we enjoy today. Ernie Blake credited Pete with first recognizing the potential of the area that would become Taos Ski Valley.

In summer, Pete learned to fight forest fires, and was for many years the crew chief of one of New Mexico's hot-shot fire fighting crews.

Though always a gentleman, Pete was a character of the first order, with an expert eye for women and good food and spirits and the self conviction to speak his mind. What better traits for running a bar? After retiring from the Forest Service, Pete managed the Red Chair bar, today called Totemoff's at Ski Santa Fe.

In later life, sailing, which he had learned as a boy in the frigid waters of Alaska, became his passion. He was sailing at Elephant Butte Lake when he died of an apparent heart attack on July 31, 1990. At his memorial, the testimonial read: "He gave his best to New Mexico, his adopted state and brought a whole new era to fields of skiing and sailing." Pete was and always will be truly a New Mexico legend.

