

New Mexico Ski Hall of Fame

2019



Toni & Ilse Woerndle



The Woerndles met in Germany, where Toni was a top skier and an alternate on Germany's 1936 Olympic ski team. He had grown up skiing and climbing in the Garmisch-Partenkirchen area of Germany. Toni met Ilse, who came from a Stuttgart, Germany publishing family, while she was climbing the nearby Alpspitze. They were married in 1949 and moved to Aspen, Colorado in 1951 where Toni taught skiing at Aspen Ajax and then became the head ski instructor for the Stein Erickson Ski School at Aspen Highlands in 1958. During this time, they were able to scrape together enough money to purchase an old miner's cabin which they turned into a bed and breakfast, their first Alpine Lodge.

Toni was invited to join his Aspen Ski Corp. boss, Buzz Bainbridge, in Red River in 1959, where Toni had been hired as the original Ski School director. Ilse joined him in 1960, and they purchased the S.E.B Motel from area founder Stokes Bolton. They turned the rather plain, boxy motel with unpainted cinder block walls and flat roofs into a 5 acre, 30 room chalet style motel with a restaurant, bar and movie theatre, renaming it the Alpine Lodge. Ilse took the lead in drawing designs for the buildings, restaurant and bar, and adding a ski rental shop and ski clothing shop. As their ski rental shop grew too large for the little shop at the Alpine, the Woerndles purchased a building across the street that had been a grocery store and opened Sitzmark Sports in 1977.

Toni also worked at the ski school at Monarch for several years during this time. Both Toni and Ilse were very active in promoting skiing in New Mexico and especially Red River. Toni coached the Junior Racing Team for years, not only on the hill but transporting the teams to events all over New Mexico and Colorado. Ilse was a first class marketer spending many hours at the Chamber of Commerce sending out brochures for Red River and the Alpine Lodge. She was the first in Red River to offer package deals on lodging and skiing for a fixed price.

Toni was always on the hill ready to give advice on skiing while Ilse was always a friendly face at the restaurant and Ski Shop and on the slopes though her 70s. Toni died in 1981 and Ilse continued to run the Lodge until selling it in 1991. She died at age 92 in 2013. Both were true ski pioneers and avid ambassadors of the sport in NM. Through Toni and Ilse's efforts, Red River became a true family ski resort and the Alpine Lodge was at the heart of it for decades.

