

# SANDPOINT

MAGAZINE

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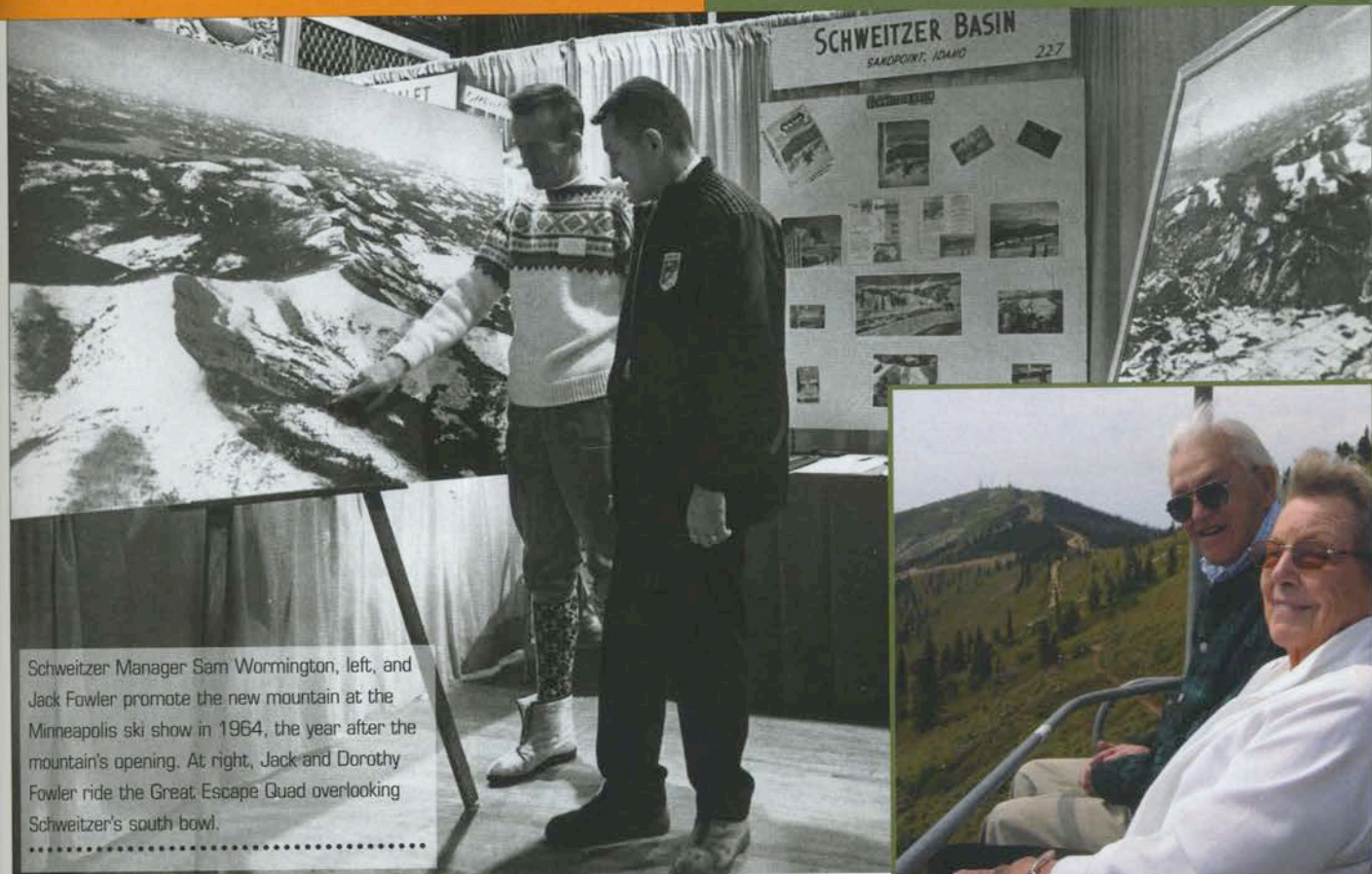
## Schweitzer Hurtles into the big time

INSIDE:  
SANDPOINT  
TRAVEL  
PLANNER



Artists in Love, Voices of the Pioneers, Charting Sandpoint's Change,  
the Fathers of Friends, Eating Local, Virtual Sandpoint, 'Winter Light'  
Photo Essay, Calendars, Dining, Real Estate ... and more





Schweitzer Manager Sam Wormington, left, and Jack Fowler promote the new mountain at the Minneapolis ski show in 1964, the year after the mountain's opening. At right, Jack and Dorothy Fowler ride the Great Escape Quad overlooking Schweitzer's south bowl.

COURTESY PHOTO

PHOTO BY SANDY COMPTON

# 'A good idea that got out of hand': Schweitzer

By Sandy Compton

If one man were responsible for the ski area in Sandpoint's backyard, it might be Jim Brown, who provided property and funding for the area; or Sam Wormington, Schweitzer Basin's first manager. But the person most responsible is probably a guy who had no inkling he would be involved in the ski industry – and it was only because he stopped to stretch his legs.

"I was driving home from Big Mountain in 1960," Jack Fowler said. "The wife and kids were asleep in the back. I stopped over by Hope, and across the lake was all this snow. I thought to myself, *Why did I drive eight hours when I could have stayed here?*"

Something told the Spokane dentist: "Hold that thought." Nearly 48 years later, Jack and his wife, Dorothy, a sculptor, met me in the Selkirk Lodge, close to where he had his first experience skiing Schweitzer – before anything besides the mountain was here.

Dorothy's bronze, "Children Playing in the Snow," graces the courtyard in front of the building where this interview

Jack Fowler, a dentist who envisioned a ski mountain, and his wife, Dorothy

began. On the table between us, to refresh our memories, was "Looking Back on Schweitzer," a book Jack wrote in 1991 with the help of Spokane newscaster Ross Woodward.

## After that first vision at Hope, what happened next?

**Jack:** Me and (architect) Grant Groesbeck and my oldest son, Tom, hiked in here Memorial Day of 1960. We tried a few weeks before, up Schweitzer Creek, but couldn't get up that way. We found an old road that came up kind of where the current one is. We walked up that and stayed all night above where the Red Cricket is now and then went up and skied one run. We hiked up the ridge. Not clear to the top, but to where the steep stuff begins.

**Dorothy:** Up around where the B&B is now.

**Jack:** I started promoting and Grant did the work on drawing pictures of things, the lodges and where the chairs would be. Eventually, Grant and I bought some property.

**Dorothy:** A quarter-section of land.

**Jack:** Down where the Red Cricket is, that was going to be

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the bottom of the chair. We weren't the first people interested. Jim Brown had been up here on snowshoes and thought about it, but he never did anything. But, Floyd Gray was a big advocate. Without him being mayor, we probably wouldn't have a ski area.

#### Who were your other allies?

**Dorothy:** Bud Moon was one.

**Jack:** Yes, Bud Moon. And the guy who had the motel.

**Dorothy:** Bob Cox.

**Jack:** Yes (laughs). I found this piece of equipment, for bringing folks up here – an old Army thing ...

#### The Weasel. I've seen pictures of it.

(A "Weasel" is an articulated, track-driven snow vehicle developed for military use during World War II.)

**Jack:** I talked Bob Cox and Bud Moon into buying it. We took it to Bud's house and started working on it. I don't know what we gave for it, but it wasn't worth a darned cent more.

#### So, Dorothy, how did you two meet?

**Dorothy:** I worked in Jack's dental office. Ours was a second marriage for both of us. We each have three children (laughs). So most of the kids up here in the early days belonged to us. We had our wedding in Sandpoint at the Methodist Church and our reception in the old lodge.

**Jack:** That was a good building. I was a little upset when they tore it down.

**They tried to tear it down. They had to burn it. It was too well-built (Jack and Dorothy laugh).**

**Jack:** Before we built that, I did a lot of traveling and saw buildings that had icicles about this big around (holds his hands a foot apart), and one where snow came off and smashed a car – a bunch of stuff like that. I told Grant, "You gotta put flat roofs on these things." We also put a flat roof on the Red Cricket.

**Dorothy:** We also built the Blue Beetle.

**Jack:** And the Overniter and St. Bernard.

When Ordinary Just Won't Do

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**All with flat roofs. And you built the Chapel.**

**Dorothy:** We had six children we wanted to take to church, but you couldn't have any downhill traffic before noon in those days.

**Jack:** So the kids didn't go to church during the ski season.

**Dorothy:** There was a Catholic service in the Bierstube at noon (laughs). All the Protestants would go out and get in line at noon. Then, Jack donated the land for the Chapel. We started talking with our friends and got a committee going, and it grew.

**Jack:** A young man named Metcalf was killed up here, and his parents donated a bunch of money, which built the basement, in 1976. We thought kids on the hill would come. They didn't, but we started getting church youth groups. Lois Hatch (who handles the reservations for the Chapel) has a day right after Labor Day when she takes reservations, and within a couple of hours, it's filled for the winter.

**Dorothy:** And a lot of the summer, too. We hired the dormitories built about eight years ago. We can put 50 kids and their counselors in there. The Chapel itself was built all by volunteer labor. This will show we were idiots; putting on a roof after the first snow (points to a picture in the book). We had ropes tied around us to keep us from sliding off.

**skiing. Do you still ski?**

**Jack:** I ski a little. But at 85, mostly on Chair Two.

**Dorothy:** I'm 81 and I could still ski – I get jealous when Jack skis – but I'm still sculpting, and I'm afraid of falling, so I quit a couple of years ago.

**What was your favorite run?**

**Dorothy:** Over from the top of One

and down through the trees into the bottom of Stiles.

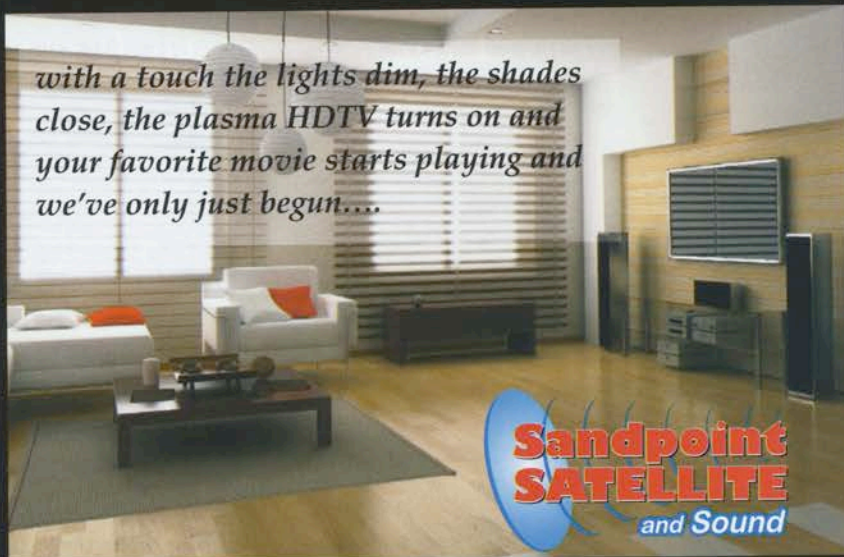
**Headwall!**

**Dorothy:** Headwall. Yeah. We were both good skiers. Powder skiers.

**Jack:** I was always wandering out to different places. (The) people I was with sometimes didn't like where I took them.

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**Speaking of sliding, let's talk about**



**I have the same problem. Dorothy, how long have you been sculpting?**

**Dorothy:** Since I was 55. I came to it late (points at Jack); he didn't give me time to myself.

**I'm staying out of that argument (Jack laughs).**

**Dorothy:** I majored in art in college and saw what Jack's drive had accomplished here, so I set my goals very high. I wanted to be a nationally known sculptor before I died and to set an example that you can do anything at any age if you set your mind to it and work hard.

**How are you doing?**

**Dorothy:** I have work all over the world. Boeing sends my sculptures to world leaders when they buy jets. They also commissioned me to sculpt the Princess Mother in Thailand.

**Jack:** I got a free trip to Thailand. She said, "I'll do it, but I have to take my husband."

**Dorothy:** (Laughs) No, I said, "I need to take my business manager." The first monument (a sculpture that is life-sized or larger) I did was for the Ronald McDonald House, and the second monument was this one up here. Since then, I've done monument work for air museums and also cathedral doors. For Our Lady of Lourdes in Spokane, I did four 14-foot doors; a cathedral in Great Falls; and one in Northern Israel.

**Jack:** (Laughs) Got a good trip out of that one, too.

**Dorothy:** The last I did was astronaut Michael Anderson, who went down with the Columbia – an 8-foot monument in Spokane. NASA is putting a second one at Boeing Field beside the Museum of Flight. That will be dedicated in May.

**Jack:** NASA is going to fly us over for that.

**Dorothy:** Jack likes the perks (both laugh). We've really been a great team.

*We make our way to the Quad, passing where the next generation of lifts is being*



Sam Wormington and Jack Fowler ride Chair One for the final time on April 8, the last day of Schweitzer's 2006-07 season, as Tom Chasse, Schweitzer's general manager, stands by.

*installed. Jack says: "The first lift cost \$175,000. They're spending \$6 million." I point out that they are getting two lifts for their money, and he laughs. On the way up the Quad, we talk about the lift we are riding.*

**Jack:** They needed this, but I'm not too sure they needed that new lodge yet. I think they got ahead of themselves. But that's just my idea.

**Dorothy:** They might have waited and left the old lodge.

**Jack:** The Beirstube was so crowded that if I saw you across the room and wanted to talk to you, it would take a half hour to get to you, but in the meantime, I'd meet everybody in the place.

**Dorothy:** That's progress, honey. But it doesn't have the same atmosphere.

*From the top of the Quad, Jack and I walk to where he can see the new runs created when the Idle Our T-Bar was installed. Jack tells tales as we walk.*

**Jack:** Before there were any lifts back here, a kid rode up One, skied down to there (the Stiles Saddle), walked up here, then skied down and dropped in there (Shoot the Moon). By golly – I don't know where Sam was that day – I got some guys lined up, and we went looking for him. We found him over here. He was OK, but it took lots of bodies to do it.

**So, you were involved in running this place?**

**Jack:** Not really.

**If you're looking for lost skiers, that's pretty involved.**

**Jack:** I suppose, but Sam was running the place. Once he made his mind up, he would just say, "This is the way it's going to be done," which was good.

*We walk past the top of Six, and I point out the new runs.*

**Jack:** Holy catfish.



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*Back with Dorothy at the picnic table, Dorothy and Jack open the book "Looking Back on Schweitzer."*

**Jack:** (Points to a construction picture of the old lodge) We got the building started about early August, but when elk season came, we didn't have a crew. Everybody in Sandpoint went hunting.

*They point out familiar faces: Scotty Castle, Wayne Parenteau, Werner Beck (who ran the ski school), Jim and Margaret Toomey (who bought the first lift tickets sold at the new area), the Baysingers (a family of 10 who skied on a very affordable \$150 family pass) and Dr. Merritt Stiles (for whom the run Stiles is named), who became president of the United States Ski Association.*

**Tell me about Merritt Stiles.**

**Jack:** (Chuckles) He was overweight and decided that wasn't the way to be.

**Dorothy:** So he took up skiing – in his 40s – for his health, and then he promoted it.

**Jack:** We got him on the Schweitzer board of directors.

**How about Sam (Wormington)?**

**Jack:** We were looking for someone to run the place, and for a while, I thought it would be me, but I didn't know anything about running a ski hill ... besides, I was supposed to be practicing dentistry.

**Dorothy:** Supposed to be.

**Jack:** Yeah (laughs). Sam was running an area in Canada. I'd been up there skiing a couple of times, met and talked to him. Me and Stiles got him

down here for an interview, and we hired him as manager. We were already working on the chair, and he came up and supervised the rest of the job.

**Who did pick the line of Chair One?**

**Jack:** It was a guy who worked for Riblet (the chair lift manufacturer). Grant and I wanted to put it down on our property, but he thought it was better placed there. There were a lot of ideas that went in here.

*We are riding down the Quad, and I point to the top of the ridge.*

**Have you skied Jack's Dream, Jack?**


**Jack:** Yeah, but just once.

**It can be challenging, but I think you'd be happy to know that. You called Schweitzer in your book, "a good idea that got out of hand."**

**Jack:** Yeah, Grant and I thought at first we were just going to put a T-bar up here for the family and a few other people and that was going to be it.

**Are you happy it got out of hand?**

**Jack:** Yes, I am.

**Dorothy:** I am, too. So many people have gotten pleasure out of this. ... He's influenced a lot of lives. On Jack's 80th birthday, we had a celebration for him, and Schweitzer gave him one of the old chairs, painted blue of course. We took it home, and Jack put it between two pine trees as a swing. All of our grandkids know that's part of the original Schweitzer. I'm glad we are, too. 

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