

McCall Magazine

WINTER/SPRING 2007

The history of
BRUNDAGE
Mountain Resort

Flying High at Tamarack

Manchester Mountaineers

Reasons to be in McCall this Winter

\$3.95 US \$4.95 CAN

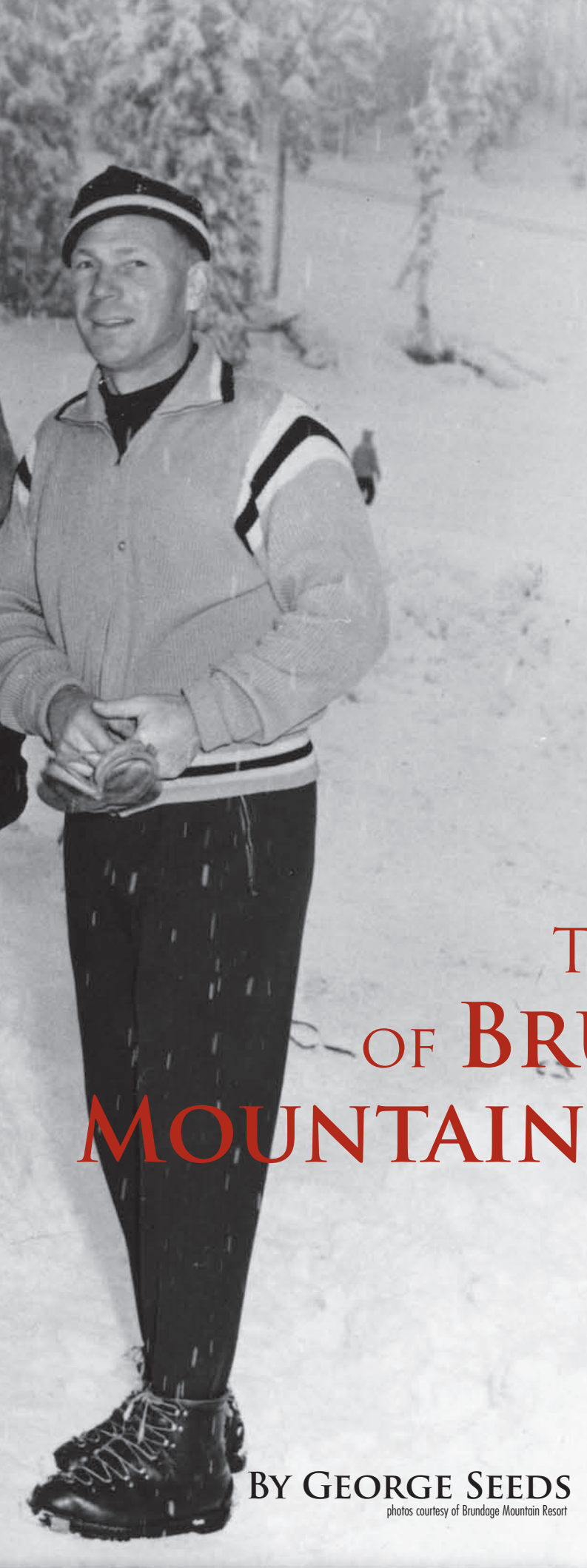


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The three partners:

Warren Brown, J.R. Simplot and Corey Engen



The roots of Brundage Mountain Resort wind back nearly 70 years. It's a history that has rewarded the community with a lasting legacy and created some of the legends of McCall.

THE LITTLE HILL THAT COULD

In 1937, Warren Brown, along with his father Carl, owned Brown's Tie and Lumber in McCall, which operated a sawmill on the shores of Payette Lake.

Throughout the 1920s, the business had prospered, during which time Brown had become an accomplished dog sled racer and an American pioneer in both alpine skiing and nordic jumping.

However, the company, like numerous others, struggled to survive when the great depression hit in 1929. When the federal government's Civilian Conservation Corps came to town and set up camp three years later, the mill received needed orders and renewed life.

Ski jumping had been a popular winter pastime in the town, with a temporary jump set up on nearby Timber Ridge. Now, with an influx of government workers, consensus grew for a permanent hill for the long, slow winters.



This need would be the impetus for building one of the first ski hills in the nation, the Little Ski Hill, as it would later be known, which opened in 1937 on 80 acres donated by Brown's company.

The forest service took possession of the land two miles north of McCall in exchange for assuming long-term preservation of the area—with the stipulation that it only be used for recreation.

It was the type of community-minded altruism that would mark Brown's life.

"Warren was always so humble and he was such a giver, but he didn't want to be in the spotlight," said Patty Boydston-Hovdey, a former Olympic skier from McCall.

Under forest service supervision, volunteers, including workers from the Conservation Corps, helped clear the

THE HISTORY OF BRUNDAGE MOUNTAIN RESORT

BY GEORGE SEEDS

photos courtesy of Brundage Mountain Resort



Top: Brundage Lodge, 1962, right page: Brundage, early days.

three initial ski runs and build a day lodge from locally harvested logs.

To get skiers up and down the mountain, Brown had his millwright design and build a 1,200-foot long ski lift from two large toboggan-style sleds—as one went up, the other would go down.

As the hill neared completion, Brown realized that he had neither the time nor the expertise to run a ski area, so he asked Alf Engen, a consultant that helped design the little hill and would later become famous as one of the founders of Alta Ski Area outside Salt Lake City, Utah, for a recommendation.

“Warren [Brown] was talking with my uncle Alf [Engen] and said, ‘You know we really don’t know too much about this skiing business, Is there somebody that can help us?’ and my uncle told him, ‘Well, my younger brother, Corey, is kind of between jobs right now, so you might talk to him,’” said Dave Engen, Corey Engen’s son, a former U.S. Ski Team member, and long-time McCall resident.

In fact, Corey Engen had immigrated to America with his mother only four years earlier from his native Norway to join Alf and middle brother Sverre in Utah.

Their father, a famous skier in Norway, had died in the influenza pandemic of 1918, which helped prompt his sons to seek a new beginning overseas.

Once in America, the two older brothers had started a ski

December 1937: Warren Brown brings in Corey Engen from Utah to manage the Little Ski Hill outside McCall.



April 1961: The forest service issues a permit to Brown, Engen and Simplot to build the ski resort. Total cost is estimated at \$215,000.

November

1961: The Brundage Mountain Company begins lift operations on Thanksgiving Day—attendance is estimated at 1,000. The first lift tickets sell for \$4.00.

Fall 1965: Dave Engen is selected to the U.S. Ski Team.

Late 1950s: Brown, Engen and J.R. Simplot discuss the possibility of a new ski resort and decide on Brundage Mountain.

June 1961: Johnny Boydston is hired as the first employee of Brundage Mountain Company—he remains there for 27 years.

February 1963:

The first Engen Cup races are held—Norman Zachary of McCall takes first place.

July 1964: Corey Engen is seriously injured in a fall when the chairlift malfunctions while carrying a group of children.

jumping tour across the country—dazzling crowds with this new sort of derring-do—and Corey had come to join them.

Knowing little English, he spent hours in movie theatres to learn the language.

When word came of the job in McCall, he quickly took it, and, at 17, became head of skiing at the little hill.

His exuberance quickly won the locals over and soon the little hill became the place to be, especially for area children. Brown instituted a bus service, at his company's expense, that would pick up kids at the local school and deliver them to the little hill—and a waiting Engen.

"We'd wear our ski clothes to school, jump in the bus afterwards, and we could ski for a couple hours—every day, but Monday," Dave Engen recalls. "Dad was out there and the course was set, the jump was packed, and we could just have at it—and we did."

Then, with the later advent of lights on the hill, which allowed parents and children to ski after work and school, the hill became a community happening.

"Wednesday nights at the Little Ski Hill was like this town potluck—everybody came and had a big feast and then everybody went out and skied," said Boydston-Hovdey. "You'd do your homework at the table in the lodge and then go ski until 10 o'clock—every Wednesday night."

This kind of spirit and dedication yielded an impressive number of nationally prominent alpine skiers, including



Dave Engen, Boydston-Hovdey, and Brown's son, Frank, who participated in the 1960 Olympics at Squaw Valley, California.

Corey Engen, himself, competed in the 1948 Olympics in St. Moritz, Switzerland, finishing third in the jumping portion of the Nordic Combined event.

Eventually, the popularity and success of the little hill led to dreams of something bigger.

UPWARD AND ONWARD

In the late 1950s, Brown started talking to Engen about pursuing another ski area and soon both men were involved in the search.



photo courtesy of Brown family archives

January 1972:

Patty Boydston is selected to the U.S. Olympic Ski Team for the games in Sapporo, Japan.

November 1976: A new double chairlift, the Brundage Creek, opens alongside the Pioneer chairlift, doubling skier capacity.

November 1970:

Corey Engen sells his ownership share of Brundage to Brown and Simplot.



February 1973:

Corey Engen is elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame.

Brown, having logged many of the surrounding hills, knew the area well and began to suggest possible locations.

Engen then spent hours hiking the various mountains, in both summer and winter, to access the feasibility of each.

Their search even included the West Mountain area where nearby Tamarack Resort now sits.

Eventually, the two settled on 7,600-foot Brundage Mountain, located just off Goose Lake Road in the Payette National Forest. Only 10 miles from town, it possessed favorable snowfall and exposure along with the possibility for long uninterrupted runs.

But finding a spot was just the beginning—there would be approval and permitting from the forest service; planning, logistics, and manpower issues; and, of course, a fair amount of money.

Brown knew that to make it happen he would need more capital, so he and Engen contacted an old friend and avid skier, J.R. “Jack” Simplot.

Simplot had parlayed the J.R. Simplot Company into one of the biggest potato processing outfits in the country. Though he lived near the company headquarters in Boise, Simplot also had a home on Payette Lake and was a frequent visitor to the little hill.

In fact, Simplot had talked to Engen and Brown in the past about finding a bigger ski area, so when they approached him, it was an easy sell.

With Simplot on board, now it was time to bring in the forest service. They needed a champion for their cause and

they found one in McCall District Ranger Wally Lancaster.

“Wally and my dad worked hard together and became very good friends,” said Dave Engen. “To do things today takes an act of Congress, whereas in those days the two guys could basically get things done and did.”

Corey Engen spent days on the mountain trying to find just the right area for skiing and, as a trial, held the first race there in February of 1961.

Gates were set in natural openings through the trees, mostly down what would later be called Main Street. Contestants from all over the state sidestepped up the hill before taking off.

Dave Engen won that race as a high school junior and, in the following year, won every slalom race he entered, capped by a victory in the U.S. National Junior Championship.

In April of 1961, after an open bidding process, the partnership of Warren Brown, Corey Engen and J.R. Simplot was awarded the permit to develop a ski area on Brundage Mountain. The estimated cost was \$215,000.

The first order of business was to map a lift line and, in the days before GPS and lasers, Engen came up with an ingenious solution.

He borrowed an old parachute from the McCall Smokejumper Base and hung it on a large white fir tree at the base of the hill. After climbing to the top of the mountain, he was able to spot the tree and set the straight line required.

At that point, it was time for the heavy work to begin.



September 1983:

A 5,000 square foot addition to the lodge is completed.

December 1987:

Corey Engen is named Director of Skiing and Mike Sellers takes over as head of the ski school.

November 1990: The new Centennial triple chairlift opens, expanding Brundage’s acreage by over 30 percent.

July 1980: Judd DeBoer and his wife, Diane, Warren Brown’s daughter, buy out Brown Industries and their 50-percent interest in Brundage.



April 1988:

Johnny Boydston retires after 18 years as mountain manager at Brundage.

June 1985:

Brundage Mountain Company incorporates and DeBoer becomes President.

A JOHNNY FINE OPENING

Johnny Boydston had worked for a construction company, was an Air Force mechanic, and had been with the highway department before becoming the one-man operations manager of Little Ski Hill for several years.

As a jack-of-all-trades, he was the natural choice to be the first employee of the new Brundage Mountain Company. He would stay there for the next 27 seasons as the mountain manager.

In June of 1961, with Brown supervising, Engen, Boydston, and a logging crew from Brown's lumber company began clearing trees for the lift line, ski runs, base area and access road.

"It was Greek to me—I had never worked in the woods," said Boydston, now 86 and retired in McCall. "But we got the job done."

Because there were no capable helicopters, individual roads had to be cut to the base of where the towers would go so they could be hauled up by truck.

Then, all the tower foundation holes had to be dug by hand.

"Oh, it was terrible," said Boydston. "There was a lot of rock."

At the same time, Frank Brown, an architect and contractor at the time, was commissioned to build the 3,000-square-foot lodge that would hold a cafeteria, first-aid room, ski shop, restrooms and maintenance facilities.



Judd DeBoer and J.R. Simplot take a last ride on Brundage's oldest chairlift. Pioneer Chairlift was replaced with the Bluebird Express quad in 1997.



July 1991:

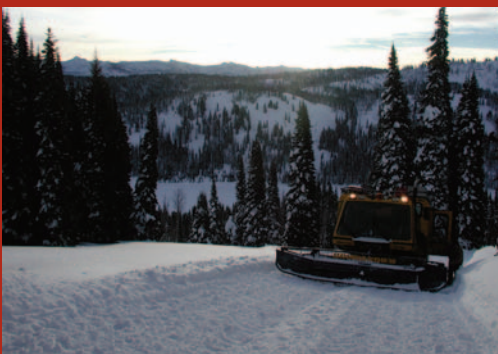
Brundage opens for lift-served mountain biking and scenic chairlift rides.

December 1993:

Brundage opens a new half-pipe for snowboarders on the Main Street run.

June 1995: Engen retires to Utah.

January 1991: Snowcat skiing on Sargent Mountain begins.



July 1993: A 40,000 square foot outdoor amphitheater in front of the lodge is completed.

November 1994:

Brundage opens the 4,000 square foot Children's Center in the old maintenance shop.

January 13, 1996: Brundage breaks its single day record for skiers.



Warren Brown and J.R. Simplot 1987— 'Love those fries.'

One of the first workers on the lodge was Judd DeBoer, the 22-year-old fiancé of Brown's daughter, Diane.

"The lodge was just a little A-frame and there were no stairs, so you had to walk quite a ways up from the parking lot just to get to it," DeBoer said. "Like you can image, it was a different age."

By August, the hill was cleared, the lodge was being framed, and the access road and parking lot were almost ready.

However, soon the whole project would nearly turn to ashes.

While the marketable trees had been taken to the mill, the remaining slash of smaller trees and undergrowth were put into numerous burn piles.

After a recent downpour, Engen contacted Lancaster and both agreed it would be a good time to set the piles ablaze.

"Well, the weather changed and it got real hot, and real dry, real quick, and the wind came up—while the burning was going on," said Dave Engen, "And this thing started going."

Corey Engen, Boydston, and every available hand dug in to try to stop the pending disaster. They worked day and night for five days to control the blaze.

"My dad said it was the only time during construction that he was really concerned," Dave Engen said.

Finally, after a herculean effort, the fire was out—without having to call in forest service crews.

By September the Riblet lift towers were raised and by October the mile-long Pioneer chairlift, the second longest in the state, was started for the first time.

By the end of November, Brundage was sporting the double lift with a 1,800-foot vertical drop, a 1,200-foot rope tow for beginners, and completed lodge facilities; a thousand skiers jammed the parking lot for the grand opening on Thanksgiving Day, 1961.

A daily lift pass sold for \$4 and a season pass was \$50.

Three weeks later, Governor Robert Smylie attended the ribbon cutting ceremony in a driving snowstorm.



May 1996:
Brundage Mountain
Whitewater Adventures
opens.

November 1997:
The Blue Bird Express
high-speed quad
chairlift opens.

September 2000: Warren Brown, 88, dies in a
Boise hospital after suffering a stroke.

April 1998:
Brundage announces
skier visits have
doubled in the last
decade.

April 10, 1997: The first skier fatality in
Brundage history occurs when Richard Eugene
Thomas, 29, hits a tree and dies of chest and head
injuries.



A TIME FOR FIRSTS

The next several years at Brundage saw a string of firsts. The first regionally sanctioned race was held there in January 1962 and, later that year, the first ski school director was hired, Herb Hyna, a tall Austrian-born instructor lured from Colorado.

The first Engen Cup race was held in February of 1963, and was won by a local skier, Norman Zachary. Also that year, the first groomer, a used Thiokol, was purchased from Bogus Basin Ski Resort in Boise and the first platter tow was added, a new 1,800-foot Tiegel.

The following year, the lodge got its first new wing, doubling the dining area and adding 900 square-feet of deck, the parking lot got its first expansion, and the access road was paved for the first time.

The resort also had its first near-catastrophe as well—one that remains today as the scariest moment in the mountain's history.

In the summer of 1964, Boydston was spending his off-season working at the old Shore Lodge in McCall.

Because Brundage had occasionally offered summer lift rides, Simplot had agreed to allow a church camp to ride up the mountain. Through a mix-up in communication, though, word never got to Boydston or Engen.

"One day I was down at Shore Lodge working on the dock and Corey [Engen] comes along and says, 'John, jump in the rig, we got a whole mess of kids to haul up the mountain,'" Boydston recalled.

When the two got up there they were confronted by a noisy mob of over a hundred grade-school children supervised by just a handful of adults.

"They were all jammed around the lift—it was just pandemonium," said Boydston.

Proper safety protocol calls for at least one of the chairs on the lift to be run all the way around before anyone boards, thus ensuring that the lift is operational.

However, because the group had been left waiting and the children were now clambering for a ride, Engen decided to run the lift without this precaution.

He jumped on a chair and told Boydston to leave the one behind him empty before loading the group so he could get off at the top and help those behind unload. Despite his unease, Boydston agreed and started loading the chairs.

It didn't take long for Engen to realize, though, that his decision had been a mistake.

"My dad got about a third of the way up the chairlift and he could start to feel a little jerking on the cable and the farther up he got, the more he could feel it," Dave Engen said.

Without the advantage of walkie-talkies, Corey Engen had no way to tell Boydston to stop the lift—other than hollering to the children behind him.

Apparently, the group was unable to understand what he was saying and so the lift kept on going. By now, over sixty children had been loaded.

Engen realized that the only way now to stop possible disaster was to jump onto one of the towers that had a

May 2003:

Brundage is granted approval by the forest service on their revised Master Development Plan which allows for five additional ski lifts.

August 2006: Brundage and the forest service finalize the land swap. Brundage assumes ownership of 388 acres at the base of the resort in exchange for 349 acres within national forest land.

April 2003:

Brundage announces an all-time record number of skier visits for the just completed season, their second record year in a row.

May 2006: J.R. Simplot Company sells its 50-percent stake in Brundage to the DeBoer family. Corey Engen, 90, dies of natural causes in Orem, Utah.



Helicopter installing towers of the Centennial lift in 1990.



telephone at the bottom.

"He tried to get off, and swung over, but he missed with his legs to catch the rungs that run up and down the tower ladder," Dave Engen said.

Corey Engen was left dangling from the chair.

Meanwhile, at the bottom, Boydston was still loading the children.

"They started waving their arms and yelling up and down the lift more than they had been and so I stopped the lift and got that noise shut down," said Boydston. "Finally, we got word that the workman fell out of the chair."

Boydston grabbed a stretcher and, with two of the adult men, headed up the hill on foot. They found Engen on the ground—he had sustained several broken vertebrae in his back as well as a broken ankle, but he was alive.

"He accomplished what he wanted to accomplish, but at great personal cost," Dave Engen said.

While the two men carried Corey Engen down, Boydston went to the top and found the problem. Due to the summer heat, the cable had expanded and the large bull wheel, in response, had pulled the cable back into the way of a metal bracket. The chairs were catching the bracket and being ripping off the cable, one by one—37 in all.

"It was the most awful pile of chairs—and I mean tangled, Oh my stars," said Boydston.

It was likely that, left unchecked, the cable would eventually have spun off the bull wheel, throwing all sixty or so children to the ground—at major loss of life.

Instead, the children were safely evacuated several hours later and Engen was taken to the hospital.

In an amazing show of recuperative powers, Engen was back skiing that winter and went on to win several more races, including the United States Ski Association Masters Championship in 1983.

"He was a perfect specimen of health," said Boydston.

MILESTONES

Over the next forty years, Brundage continued to have success and the mountain showed steady expansion. A new double chairlift was added in 1976, the Brundage Creek, that ran alongside the Pioneer lift, doubling skier capacity.

Then, in 1990, the Centennial triple chairlift opened to the south of the main lifts, expanding skiable acreage by over 30 percent.

An off-piste area became available that season as well, when snowcat-accessed skiing was first approved by the forest service, opening up 7,600-foot Sargent's Peak to powder enthusiasts.

Snowboarding became part of the landscape in 1993 with the opening of a half-pipe and, later, a terrain park.

Finally, a new detachable quad chairlift, the Bluebird Express, replaced the two main double lifts in 1997.

The lodge also underwent expansion, including a two-story,



3,000 square foot addition in 1971 and another 5,000 square foot addition in 1983 that featured large open deck seating with mountain views.

Then, in a move that pleased parents, Brundage opened a 4,000 square foot Children's Center in 1994.

As for skiing, Boydston-Hovdey, daughter of Johnny Boydston, won a string of races in the 1960s and 1970s, including three Engen Cups in a row. She also won the National Alpine Championships slalom event in 1970 and was subsequently selected to the U.S. Ski Team.

She spent several seasons on the World Cup tour and participated in the 1972 Winter Olympic Games in Sapporo, Japan, finishing eighth in the slalom event.

"Going to see Patty at those Sapporo games was wonderful," Boydston said. "We are real proud of her—and not just for her skiing, either."

Warren Brown showed himself to be quite an impressive skier as well, winning, at the age of 71, a title along with Engen in the 1983 Masters Championship held at Brundage.

Summer recreation also expanded over the years with lift-served mountain biking added in 1991 and, two years later, a new 40,000 square foot outdoor amphitheater near the lodge was completed, allowing for a summer concert series that continues to this day.

Brundage also got into the whitewater rafting business with the opening of Brundage Mountain Whitewater Adventures near Riggins, Idaho, in 1996.

On the corporate level, Brown and Simplot bought out Engen's one-third share in 1970 and formed a partnership.

Then, in 1980, DeBoer and his wife, Diane, bought out Brown's share, and, five years later, incorporated Brundage with DeBoer assuming the position of president.

Under DeBoer's leadership, Brundage continued to grow, ultimately posting an all-time record number of skier visits in the 2003/2004 winter season.

However, as success marched on, it left behind two of the resort's founding fathers.

Warren Harrington Brown died in a Boise hospital in September 2000, at the age of 88, after suffering a major stroke.

He left behind a legacy of industry and community



Snowcat trips are popular at Brundage.

involvement that included not just the Little Ski Hill and Brundage Mountain Resort, but a decade of serving as the local representative in the Idaho Senate.

"A gentleman, he was," Boydston said. "Just a remarkable man and about the nicest individual you could work for."

Then, in May of this year, Corey Engen, at the age of 90, died of natural causes at a care center in Orem, Utah—a town he and his wife, Norma, had moved to in 1995 after 58 years in McCall.

He had been the mountain manager at both the little hill and Brundage before becoming the ski school director in 1970, and later, taking the largely volunteer post of Director of Skiing in 1987.

"Corey never retired, he just stopped getting paid," said Brundage Marketing Director, Mary Naylor. "He was there all the time—he was a wonderful man."

Not only did he leave behind a legacy as a great American skier, as witnessed by his induction into the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in February 1973, but, more important to him, as someone who helped shape the lives of young skiers.

"I've lost count, but I think my dad coached something like 15 or 16 national champions—and I was lucky enough to be part of that," Dave Engen said.

BECOMING THE FUTURE

Two recent developments this year promise to shape Brundage for decades to come—one was a relatively straightforward business transaction, and the other, a long, complicated exchange that promises to virtually reinvent the resort.

On May 1, the J.R. Simplot Company sold their 50-percent ownership in the resort to DeBoer, his wife Diane, and their family. With the transaction, the DeBoer family claimed sole ownership of Brundage Mountain Resort and Judd DeBoer assumed the position of Chairman of the Board of Directors.

The buy-out was amicable with DeBoer voicing his appreciation for the long held partnership and Simplot's 40-year commitment to reinvest all profits back into the resort.

The Simplot Company, for their part, wished, "the DeBoer family every success."

From the outside, it looked to be purely a business decision.

"Simplot is a big company and their main focus is on food processing, so I think they wanted to narrow their focus back to that and not have a small business that they had to be concerned about," DeBoer said.

However, J.R. Simplot's advanced age, at 97, and his reportedly frail health could have played a part. Or, perhaps



Brundage skier takes advantage of a photo op.

more likely, the sale was tied to the seismic shift that happened three months later.

On August 3, the forest service completed a land swap with the Brundage Mountain Company that granted to the resort ownership 388 acres around the base area.

In exchange, the forest service received two separate parcels of private land within their holdings—159 acres at Squaw Meadows north of McCall and 190 acres at Reed Ranch, located along the South Fork Salmon River.

For the first time in its history, the resort owns part of the land it uses—but it wasn't a simple or quick progression. Negotiations began as early as 1992.

The company has spent several times its original investment building the resort to complete the dizzying array of bureaucratic, financial, and especially environmental, requirements for both the land exchange and the planned expansion to the ski hill.

"Land exchanges are difficult, lengthy and expensive," said DeBoer. "But the reason we were ultimately able to do it is because this [exchange] is an environmental plus for the forest."

What the exchange brings to the resort is the needed equity to finance new lifts and other improvements as well as allowing control over the base area. With this money and

flexibility, Brundage could add overnight accommodations—giving the resort more of a destination feel.

Although plans will not be available until next year, there is talk of a lodge, condominiums, and possibly, homesites.

The resort is also moving forward on the ski hill expansion, which has already been approved through the forest service.

The first phase calls for five additional chairlifts that will increase skiable acreage by over 50 percent. There are also plans for a mid-mountain restaurant and warming huts.

DeBoer is soliciting bids on the first two lifts this fall with the goal of breaking ground on them in the summer.

"We're excited about the future," said DeBoer. "We think there's great potential given the resort's famous snow and the kind of terrain—the glade skiing, the trees, and the fact that we have a pristine location."

It's difficult to imagine that Brown and Engen would have dreamed up all this when they first had the idea for a new resort nearly fifty years ago. **MM**