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KUED The Alta Experience

ONNO WIERINGA

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1 PROCEEDINGS

2 A. -- everything's filled in nicely, as they
3 say.

4 Q. So how much time do you have?

5 A. Oh, I've got some Forest Service guys
6 showing up right before noon.

7 Q. Oh, okay.

8 So --

9 A. We can talk.

10 I can't talk any longer than that anyway.

11 Q. Great.

12 First thing that I'd like to have you do is
13 say and spell your name, so we get that correct.

14 And then -- when we're -- when -- your eye
15 line is towards me, so --

16 A. Okay.

17 Q. -- you don't worry about looking directly
18 into the camera.

19 A. Okay.

20 The name is Onno Wieringa, O-N-N-O
21 W-I-E-R-I-N-G-A.

22 And I'm the general manager here at the ski
23 area.

24 Q. And tell me a little bit about your history.
25 How did you come to Alta? And, you know, just kind of

1 talk me through --

2 You were first a patroller, and then snow
3 safety, and then eventually worked your way up to the
4 top.

5 So talk a little bit about that.

6 A. Yeah. When I graduated from college at
7 Montana State, I did some snow study work there. And
8 Alta always came up.

9 And I had a good friend that was a ski
10 patroller here in the -- in the late '60s. And he said
11 every college graduate should come to Alta for a while
12 after he got out of college. And so I came here in --

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Can we pause for a
14 moment? I've just got to pause --

15 A. Oh my gosh.

16 And there's only about two drops in the sky.

17 Q. We'll put a big Alta snowflake over it.

18 A. Yeah.

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay go. So if you
20 want to start.

21 Q. So just starting back from coming back
22 after, you know, every college graduate.

23 A. Every college graduate should be -- come to
24 Alta for a year or two.

25 And so I checked into the ski patrol here,

1 and met some guys. And got a job first year as ski
2 patroller here, and worked on the ski patrol for seven
3 or eight -- six or seven years, or a while.

4 And -- and then our snow safety director,
5 Dave Hammry, who was our first snow safety director.
6 One day he came to me and said, These mountains aren't
7 big enough. I need bigger and better and --

8 So he said, I'm going to Alaska. You can
9 have my job. And it wasn't exactly like that, but
10 that's pretty close.

11 And so he went up there, and he's still --
12 he's kind of our founding snow safety guy, and figured
13 out so much of our stuff here. It's just great.

14 So then I was the snow safety director from,
15 I don't know, late '70s until '88.

16 And then Chick Morton, about the mid '80s
17 there, Chick Morton decided I should help him do some
18 front office stuff. And I was the -- kind of his
19 assistant for a while.

20 And then in 1988, I became the general
21 manager. And I was lucky enough to have Chick Morton
22 stay on as president of the company for several years,
23 and so I had all the -- all the advantage of having him
24 around, but -- and -- as I worked my way into being the
25 general manager. And I've been the general manager

1 since.

2 Q. So in '88, was -- was Joe Quinney still
3 alive then? Didn't he die about '88 or '89?

4 A. He died right about then, yeah.

5 He was -- he was one of our great founders.
6 And I was lucky enough to get to work a little bit with
7 him right at the end of his time with us, and down at
8 Ray Quinney & Nebeker.

9 Q. With that, let's step back a little bit.

10 In the snow safety job, for a long time snow
11 safety was done by the Forest Service, and with -- in
12 conjunction with Alta, or was it --

13 A. Well, it started out with the Forest Service
14 doing the snow safety work in the ski area. And then
15 the ski area guys slowly started to help the Forest
16 Service do it. And -- and then it just slowly evolved
17 to where finally the ski area guys and girls, boys, men
18 and women, were doing the work, and the Forest Service
19 was helping us.

20 And then, Forest Service slowly, in the
21 '80s, moved into a role where they wanted to not do
22 things. They wanted to monitor. And they took on a
23 monitoring role. And they monitored all of our
24 programs, and monitored our permit. And helped us if
25 we wanted help, and needed help, but that was their

1 Forest Service collection.

2 And then we slowly took over all of the
3 control work in the ski area.

4 Q. And that, also, and even stepping back a
5 little bit, let's talk about some of those -- some of
6 those pioneers that really, you know, put Alta on the
7 map as far as snow safety.

8 I mean, you can go back as far as you want.
9 From Felix Cozio to -- I mean, those are people,
10 obviously, you didn't know.

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. But, you know, they kind of set the
13 groundwork for still things that get done today.

14 A. Yep.

15 Well, I think Spherry Engen was the first
16 snow ranger here. First Forest Service snow ranger.

17 And then people, in my generation, that were
18 most influential was Jack Herbert. Although he wasn't
19 a snow ranger here, he worked for the Forest Service,
20 and he loved Alta, and he was from Ogden. And he --

21 And one of his sons, Jack, was a ski
22 patroller here for a long time. There's still a chute
23 up here named after Jack.

24 But Jack Herbert just helped us behind the
25 scenes tremendously. He -- he never really gets

1 mentioned enough.

2 But the -- you know, Ed LaChapelle is the
3 obvious, kind of stand out hero of the day. Did so
4 much research and helped us figure out so much of our
5 core stuff.

6 Bink Sandall, Peter Leff, Jim Head. Our
7 early snow rangers that -- that I came and worked
8 under, and with.

9 Through -- when I got here, they all did
10 tremendous amounts of helping us figure out how to map
11 out this mountain, and deal with it, and make it a
12 modern snow safety program. And it is.

13 Q. Let's talk a little bit about what it takes
14 to get the -- get the ski area going in the morning on
15 a really big snow day. Or even a -- you know, an
16 average snow day. A regular Alta snow day, let's say.

17 A. It's -- it's quite a deal.

18 I mean, the -- the first part is obviously
19 the road.

20 And when we talk about Highway 210, it's
21 a -- really a collaborative effort between the --
22 Snowbird, the county sheriff's, the Alta marshals.
23 Forest Service is always in on all of those parts and
24 pieces. And our ski patrol at -- and workers that
25 essentially do the control work over the highway for

1 UDOT.

2 Did I forget to mention UDOT?

3 Liam Fitzgerald and -- and his UDOT
4 forecasters oversee the forecasting and control work on
5 the road. And we essentially work for them, and do the
6 control work over the road.

7 So there's all of that effort that goes in
8 to doing the control work. Getting everybody off the
9 road. Making sure that all happens.

10 Doing the control work, evaluating it,
11 cleaning up the road. Doing all of that.

12 And then, at the same time, we're doing
13 control work in the ski area. A little different kind.

14 We -- we don't do too much artillery work in
15 the ski area anymore. But we use Avalunchers, and ski
16 patrollers out, going into the starting zones,
17 evaluating, using explosives, doing ski cutting, and
18 identifying the hazard and reducing it down to a level
19 that's acceptable to put skiers out there.

20 That's our main tool, for control work. And
21 then that effort is followed up by skiers, just like
22 you, that then come out, and keep up with the storm,
23 and create skier compaction, which is our biggest
24 avalanche control tool that we have.

25 But we can't really let skier compaction

1 start without some advanced control work.

2 Q. Right.

3 So, with the -- that's changed quite a bit
4 over the years, as far as skier compaction.

5 Do you think that things are getting skied
6 now, too, that probably, maybe even ten years ago,
7 weren't, you know, skied as much, or is it just --

8 A. No. I think, in all the time I've been
9 here, I think we've -- we, and the skiers, skied
10 everything that's skied now, but it's just how often
11 and how intensely it gets skied now compared to then.

12 You know. And we might get into some spot,
13 once a week, that an occasionally get in there, that,
14 you know, people get into every day now. And the
15 equipment, and the technology, and the ski abilities,
16 has allowed -- you know, we've had that many people
17 around here, in those days. But better skiers now,
18 with better equipment.

19 So now, our current snow safety director,
20 Titus Case, that took over the job from me, and his
21 assistant, Dan Howlett, they have a whole different
22 deal that -- than I did, when I was snow safety
23 director.

24 There's -- because of the way skiers are.

25 And skier's expectations have changed.

1 Those -- you know. In my day as snow safety director,
2 we took -- we got rid of the big hazards, and it didn't
3 bother us as all to leave a few small pockets for guys
4 like you to ski off. We'd go, Ahh, that's just part of
5 the deal. And people expected that, and it was kind of
6 okay with them.

7 Really wouldn't be that acceptable today.

8 Q. Right.

9 Yeah, because I literally remember, you
10 know, 15 years ago, some sluffy things that you'd
11 always get a little -- you know, you'd get a little
12 sluff and a little ride, and, you know. It seems that
13 there's, I guess more debris --

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. -- in less places.

16 A. Yeah. And that's the skier expectation, and
17 the -- and, you know, society's changed. They don't --

18 And people are paying their money. They --
19 they're going to hold you accountable if there's any
20 risk out there. So we -- it pretty well gets minimized
21 before we turn skiers loose now.

22 Q. All right.

23 How about, as far as skier expectations.

24 You have kind of an interesting ski area here.

25 A. Thank you.

1 Q. In that -- you know, you look at Big
2 Cottonwood, you look at Park City, you look at some of
3 your contemporaries close by, and the industry as a
4 whole. There's a certain group of skiers that get a
5 skier -- a season pass here every year, and have been
6 doing it for the past 20, 30, you know, you probably
7 have some 40-year passholders. And they have an
8 expectation of what Alta is supposed to be like. But
9 if you try to implement any change, or try to do --
10 change things up, do you have to really like think long
11 and hard about what the skiing public's going to -- how
12 this is going to be accepted, or how this is going
13 to --

14 A. Sure. It's not -- if it wasn't for our
15 skiers, we wouldn't have a ski area. You know?

16 And if our skiers don't like what we do, and
17 they all leave, well, we won't have a ski area, and we
18 won't have a job. So absolutely.

19 We -- we try to think -- you know, it's kind
20 of a blend of how do we remain competitive enough to
21 stay in the business, because if we can't stay in
22 business, then there won't be a -- you know, it's kind
23 of a chicken and egg deal.

24 But, you know, first consideration, I think,
25 you know, goes to the skiers.

1 If it's not good for the skiers, it's not
2 good for us.

3 And, you know, people go, Oh, what I love
4 about Alta is it hasn't changed. Well, it's changed
5 tremendously. I mean, we've made big changes in the
6 last 15 years. And -- but they've been careful,
7 measured changes. Skiers in mind. And for the most
8 part, they've worked.

9 You know, some people would disagree with
10 that, but most people think, Well, the changes are
11 okay, and they've been fine, and they recognize that we
12 have to be somewhat competitive.

13 But the core thing about Alta, I mean, we
14 have our ski operation. And, you know, we're
15 essentially in the uphill transportation business. And
16 skiers come here, not because of what we do. I think
17 they come here more because of maybe what we don't do.

18 They still come here for the core reasons,
19 that it's a beautiful place, it's got great terrain,
20 and it gets a lot of snow.

21 And they look to us to kind of keep them out
22 of trouble, reduce the hazards, and let them get at
23 that. They want to get to the top, they want to see
24 the sights, they want to ski.

25 And that's -- that's what makes us unique.

1 It's not -- doesn't really have anything to do with our
2 operation.

3 I quite often tell our people, I go,
4 Don't -- you just stay out of their way. They want to
5 go uphill, you get them uphill. They need some fuel in
6 the middle of the day, they need a few things, but
7 basically they come here because of the terrain, the
8 snow, and the beauty. And let them go do that.

9 Q. What's nice, to me, too, is that if you
10 think about -- I think of the resort as having -- it's
11 almost like, you know, you have Supreme and Albion is
12 like one resort. You've got the Collins Gulch is
13 another resort, and the Ho and -- and Wildcat is kind
14 of another area.

15 So there are certain areas that suit certain
16 styles of skiers.

17 A. Yeah.

18 And -- yeah. And they're so loyal to those
19 sides. I mean, you know. A couple of weeks ago when
20 we had a lift problem on Supreme, and all of those -- I
21 was -- it's kind of humorous, almost, to watch the
22 Supreme skiers in the middle of winter have to come
23 over on this side and ski for a day or two. They -- I
24 mean, it's kind of like they're in a new ski area.

25 Like you say, there's three different pods

1 of --

2 You know, that's what's kind of cool about
3 the whole Alta/Snowbird thing. I mean, and we've
4 partnered up with Snowbird to have some greatest skiing
5 thing on the planet. You know.

6 By the time you go from the west end of
7 Snowbird to the east end of Alta, you go through about
8 six different ski areas, or seven or eight. You know?
9 And they've all got their unique character, and unique
10 look, and feel, and --

11 Yeah. It's good.

12 Q. Yeah, that's what -- I mean, that's what, I
13 guess, keeps people coming back too.

14 Also, you know, if it hasn't snowed in a
15 couple of days, you can see what's out over there, or
16 see what's over there, and you've got every aspect.

17 If you know what you're doing, you can
18 generally find something worth skiing.

19 A. Sure.

20 Q. What I would like to talk a little bit about
21 is that at -- and however much you want to talk about
22 this. Is kind of the --

23 You always hear, you know, like Joe Quinney
24 wanted to make sure that Alta is a place for skiers,
25 and local skiers. And if the out of towners want to

1 come, well they're welcome too.

2 And then there's the -- you know, you hear
3 quotes of Jay Lauchlin wanting to keep the prices
4 reasonable, and stay, you know, just in the ski
5 business. You know, there's certain quotes. Well,
6 whatever they're charging down at Snowbird, they can
7 certainly do that, but we won't do that up here.

8 Do you think that there is, you know, some
9 of that thread of the original management style that
10 kind of comes through? That --

11 Do you keep that in mind, or is it just kind
12 of a culture that has evolved?

13 A. Oh, we keep -- we absolutely keep it in
14 mind. Because it was successful. Successful for our
15 company, because we're 69 years into it, and still
16 alive and well. And successful for our skiers. They
17 still like it, they still show up.

18 So, you have a model like that, you just
19 don't want to ignore it.

20 And so they -- you know, it's tempered a
21 little bit now. When some of that original philosophy
22 was started, there were -- there really wasn't
23 competition. There was, you know, people happy that we
24 were here. And if they could get here, they -- you
25 know, they were going to show up.

1 And now, in this mobile society, and -- you
2 know, it's a whole different game.

3 And if Jay and Joe had seen our competitive
4 situation in this day and age, they would adjust
5 accordingly, because they were -- they understood
6 business, and they understood that we had to stay
7 alive.

8 So -- you know, everybody goes, Well, if Joe
9 or Jay was here, he wouldn't -- they wouldn't be making
10 these changes. Well, I disagree. They were smart
11 businesspeople, and they would look at the things
12 today, and they'd do things -- maybe not exactly like
13 we do it now, but they had a whole different situation
14 back then.

15 Q. Would that -- let's talk about the -- the
16 snowboard issue.

17 However much you want to go into it.

18 A. Sure.

19 Q. I don't even know if I'll use it, or even
20 address it in the show --

21 A. Sure.

22 Q. -- but it would be nice to have it.

23 And, I mean, I'll tell you my point of view.
24 I'm a -- I'm a recovering snowboarder.

25 A. Hmm. Good for you.

1 Q. When I first came out here, you know, it was
2 Flagstaff pole, and that was pretty much all you could
3 do. None of the ski resorts allowed them.

4 As they started catching on, and as I
5 started getting a clue, I realized that skiing was
6 actually better. And I really do, personally, think
7 that, you know, I like the fact that Alta is a skiers
8 only mountain.

9 A. Mm-hmm.

10 Q. Talk a little bit about that.

11 A. Well, it's interesting to hear you say that
12 you think snowboarding is better.

13 Well, we tried to never make any judgements
14 about what's better, snowboarding or skiing. And
15 snowboarding is a great sport. I mean, I'm happy it
16 came along. There's a whole element of people that are
17 out snowboarding now, that are outside. It's a great
18 winter sport.

19 It's -- it's more in the tradition of
20 surfing. I mean, it's got all of the components. It's
21 got speed, acceleration, carving, being outside. It's
22 a great sport. It's just a different sport than
23 skiing, and.

24 You know, our -- the basis for our decision
25 to be a ski area only is because it works for us, and

1 we can do fine selling skiing.

2 The Forest Service doesn't make business
3 decisions for us. And they're content to let us sell
4 skiing.

5 And so we -- you know, and it works for our
6 skiers. Enough skiers show up that like what we do.
7 And it doesn't have anything to do with whether we like
8 that, or how it -- you know?

9 It's just a business decision that we've
10 made as part of our strategy for how to stay alive, and
11 remain competitive, and create a product that our
12 skiers like.

13 And so that's all it is. I'm -- I like
14 snowboarding. And I think you probably should --

15 You know, the people that I think are
16 greatest are the people that snowboard and ski.
17 Because some days, snowboarding, in some conditions, in
18 some places, it's the best thing to be doing. And
19 other days, skiing's great. You know?

20 Some days tubing is, and some days, you
21 know, going out on snowmobiles. I mean, it's multi --
22 multiple-use land that the Forest Service has, and that
23 we Americans use, so.

24 It's all good.

25 Q. Yeah, I think so. I totally agree.

1 I think one thing that makes Alta extremely
2 special, to me, is like the friends, and just some of
3 the people that you meet up here. And probably some of
4 the characters that you've met over the years.

5 And it seems -- you know, you've got a
6 really loyal work force. You see people that have been
7 here for, you know, 20, 30 years.

8 How many years have you been here now?

9 A. 35 or --

10 Q. Yeah.

11 A. -- something now.

12 Q. So half -- pretty much half the -- half the
13 time the resort's been in operation?

14 A. Yeah. And I know. And I'm starting to add
15 those years up, and I go, Wow. That's just --

16 You know, it's a big chunk of my life, too.
17 More than half of my life.

18 Q. But with some of those -- you know, some of
19 those folks that --

20 I guess what I'm getting at is you think of
21 the friends that you've made over the years up here.
22 Employees, or just -- you know.

23 Although Alta has great terrain, great snow,
24 it's really, you know, great people too.

25 A. It is great people. And, you know, I think

1 everybody likes -- I mean, skiing is a social sport.

2 Everybody likes to be around friends, people
3 that they know. I mean, if -- if we gave you the whole
4 mountain one day and said, you know, You're going to be
5 the only guy here, you'd go, wow, that's great. And if
6 we did that for two or three days, you'd finally go,
7 Well, I'm going to go down to Snowbird, because that's
8 where all of my friends are today.

9 And, you know, if I didn't have any lift
10 op -- everything was robotic and you were the only one
11 here, it would be good, but you want to be around
12 people that you like.

13 And this just attracts great people, because
14 it's a great ski place.

15 Q. As far as -- so you grew up in Montana?

16 A. Mm-hmm.

17 Q. So you've been around mountains?

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. Talk a little bit about just maybe your
20 impressions the first couple of times that you came up
21 Little Cottonwood Canyon.

22 A. Well, I -- my first time here was when I
23 came to work here.

24 I mean, I rolled in on November 1st. I'd
25 heard about High Rustler, and I looked up, and I went,

1 Huh. I thought it was going to be bigger than that.

2 And I don't know why I had that in my mind,
3 but, I mean, it's a great, huge, long run. It's a
4 wonderful run.

5 And, you know. And after I'd been there a
6 few times, I went, Well, it's plenty big.

7 And then I went, Well, this is good. And
8 then it started to snow a couple of days later.

9 And we opened, I think, on the 9th of
10 November, and I went, Well, this is the coolest place
11 on the planet. Rolled in here and a week later it
12 snows enough to get the thing open and start skiing. I
13 was totally impressed.

14 And to this day, you know, you're sitting
15 here having a little trouble with the wind today,
16 because it's windy, and starting to snow. Wow. That's
17 what makes this place so great.

18 And it always snows, and there's always a
19 weather story. And there's hardly ever any boring
20 times when nothing changes.

21 And I've been around here for huge
22 avalanches, and big wind events, and rain events, and
23 every -- you know, I don't want to be around here for
24 an earthquake or anything, but just -- it's never dull
25 around here, because of the weather, and the mountain,

1 and the environment.

2 Q. Well, that's one thing that -- like my
3 favorite days up here are the days where it's dumping
4 so hard that we pretty much have to switch to
5 instrument navigation to get where we're going.

6 And, you know, you can go and get, you know,
7 a waist deep powder shot that refills by the time you
8 come back. And you're no one -- you know?

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. And all the -- all the pikers have gone in.

11 A. Storm day skiing at Alta is -- is a
12 phenomenal thing. And it's got its own cult as -- as
13 you know.

14 And, you know, there's those guys that have
15 the hats with the lightening snowflake on it. You
16 know? That's storm day skiing cult -- group there.

17 And just one of the unique things here.

18 Q. I think, as you kind of think about Alta,
19 and your time here over the years, what do you think
20 just makes Alta -- what makes Alta Alta, I guess?

21 A. All of the things we've talked about. But
22 the core is the mountain, and the snow, and the
23 terrain.

24 And, like I say, the people that come here,
25 but -- and that's it, I think. I don't -- I don't

1 think there's much else to the formula.

2 It's a nice simple formula.

3 Q. Perfect.

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. Well, let me look in my little list.

6 A. Okay.

7 Q. To make sure we've addressed pretty much --

8 You have to think really good and hard about
9 where you're going to ski, but then, as you get -- you
10 know, as the -- as the winter progresses, and, you
11 know, you're sitting at the end of the season, and
12 you're watching the shadow go across the racehill, you
13 know.

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. Then you get swept, and you have to go down
16 to the parking lot, but. You know?

17 You know, I think --

18 And there's some days that I really think
19 that I'm glad that you shut the lifts off, because
20 of -- I would not know when to stop.

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. You know? It's kind of one of those -- you
23 know.

24 And I'm definitely not know -- I don't think
25 I'm very unique in that.

1 A. Yeah. I think --

2 You know, and some days, you go, Ahh sheesh.
3 I should just let people stay up there. And then we
4 end up having to deal with them, if they get hurt. And
5 we might not be able to do that as --

6 You know, and that's the whole damn
7 liability thing. You go --

8 Q. Oh, yeah. Well that's --

9 Well, and we don't -- I mean, we're not
10 going to go into this on the show, but --

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. You know, while I've got you here, that's
13 one of those things that really must be kind of a -- a
14 difficult aspect of the job.

15 You know, you're -- you're basically -- you
16 know, you don't send anyone down there --

17 I remember when I first started snowboarding
18 at Stratten. You know, they used to make you take a
19 little skills test, and see if you could do it before
20 they put you on the hill. Anyone can grab a pair of
21 skis, or a snowboard anywhere, get on a lift.

22 I could hike -- you know, hike right up to
23 the top of the Baldy's, if they're open, and try it.

24 A. See, and I -- I mean, people ought to be
25 able to do that too. Because I think -- you know, this

1 is America. And one of the cool things is you -- you
2 can go be as adventuresome or as foolish as you want to
3 be, and. You know. And it kind of weeds itself out,
4 and we -- the strong survive, and the weak quit, or get
5 hurt, or go home. And many days, man, I want to let
6 that be our guideline.

7 And we let people do some pretty amazing
8 things here. And, you know, I think you have to do
9 that. I mean.

10 And, of course, we have to balance that with
11 what happens if that doesn't go so well, and the whole
12 liability thing.

13 But so far it seems to -- we've struck a
14 pretty good balance.

15 But if you want to go be foolish and go jump
16 off something, go for it.

17 Q. It's there for you.

18 I guess another nice thing that is -- that
19 Alta does is the Ski For Free After Three, to get --
20 you know.

21 Let's talk a little bit about teaching
22 people how to ski, and making it a place where people
23 want to come and check it out.

24 A. You know, that thing is such a great
25 program. I mean, I looked at our place, and I went,

1 You know, Joe might want to stay up here late, but most
2 people are tired, or want to go home, or get ahead of
3 the traffic, or do something by three o'clock, and
4 we've got -- we're still running the lifts, got some
5 capacity. I said, Let's give it away and let people
6 come up here, try it out, try it out again, bring
7 somebody up, or that -- and do every manner of thing
8 that goes on over there.

9 And it's just been such a great program for
10 people, coming up. They can get an hour and a half,
11 and it gets 'em started. Takes away that financial
12 click, and lets them decide whether they want to come
13 back and be skiers. And just takes away --

14 And it doesn't bother our operation at all.
15 I -- I love that program.

16 Q. And you talked a little bit also, I guess
17 what's nice -- I guess these two kind of things, that I
18 know, kind of seem to show up hand in hand is also the
19 Fun Patrol, and kind of the -- you know, the Mountain
20 Ambassadors.

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. That kind of keep people -- you know? Pick
23 them up, and put them back together, and that kind of
24 thing.

25 A. Well, you know, that happened just about the

1 same time, because I said, in -- and this was all
2 because I had -- my wife, Tana, and I had kids. And
3 then we had to teach them how to ski. And all of a
4 sudden I spent a whole bunch more time over on that
5 side of the mountain than I ever had. And I went,
6 Well, it doesn't work very good over here.

7 We -- and so we made tremendous strides to
8 making that be a good learn-to-ski side of the
9 mountain.

10 And -- and then I'd spent all of that time
11 over there picking up my kids, and I'd go, Whew. We
12 should be over here helping some of these people that
13 need a little basic help.

14 And they, you know, and all of those things
15 sort of evolved into the Ski Free After Three program,
16 and the Fun Patrol going over there, just to help
17 people. Ride up the lift with them, answer a few
18 questions. Help them, give them a ski tip, help them
19 stand up.

20 I mean, first time you ever fall down,
21 you've got skis on your feet. Just learning how to get
22 back on your feet's a big deal. And we just help
23 people do that.

24 Q. I think, also, do you think that it's helped
25 people come back to skiing, learn to ski --

1 A. Absolutely.

2 Q. You know, also maybe, from the idea that,
3 hey, this is pretty neat. I'm going to come back and
4 see what this is all about.

5 Have you had any -- any feedback as far as
6 people who have taken advantage of it, and told you --

7 A. Sure.

8 When I go to the city, on the occasions that
9 I have to, far and away the thing more people talk to
10 me about, than anything, is Ski Free After three. And
11 how they've got somebody started again. It's how they
12 got their kids started, and how they got their
13 neighbors started.

14 And people -- more people use it. And
15 just -- even if those people never convert to being
16 full-time regular skiers, it's absolutely worth it.

17 And -- and we've done studies, and collected
18 their names, and know that a lot of those people turn
19 into skiers, and the next year they'll buy a season
20 pass, or do something. And it works that way, but.

21 You know, and that's one of its intentions,
22 is to be conversion product, and get people to be
23 skiers. But just so many people that have a good time.

24 You go over there at three o'clock, and, I
25 mean, there's times I want to cry. I see so many

1 grandpas with their grandkids, and parents with the
2 kids. And neighbors, and friends, and --

3 And some days you go over there at
4 three o'clock and you barely hear English spoken. I
5 mean, every nationality shows up. And they -- I don't
6 know how they learn about it, and hear about it, but
7 they've all figured it out, and it's a great program
8 over there.

9 Q. It's nice.

10 I think one thing, as you talk about your
11 kids, think about, you know, there are generations of
12 people. You know, you've got guys on the ski patrol
13 whose dad was on the ski patrol.

14 You've got people -- you know. I mean, I
15 talked to, you know, like at one time, like when Buck
16 Sasaki was still here, you know, he had 14 cousins, and
17 kids, and all kinds of people, you know, in his
18 family --

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. -- that were here.

21 Talk a little bit about maybe -- although I
22 wouldn't call it a mom and pop operation, it's kind of
23 an inter-generational family operation.

24 A. It is. There's lots of generations.

25 I -- you know, the early Alta Powder News,

1 one of the more famous issues, the title on the cover
2 page -- this was, I don't know, in the '70s somewhere,
3 I guess.

4 It says, Nepotism Works at Alta.

5 And, you know, we're proud of it. Heck,
6 lots of people working here. Joe's -- Buck's cousins,
7 and friends, and everybody. And that's all good. You
8 know? I mean, that's all part of the family that
9 makes it go.

10 And, you know, whether it's families that
11 are working here, but all of those generations that ski
12 here.

13 One of my favorite times is -- you know,
14 sometimes I can't help but poke into what's going on,
15 thinking that I probably know more about what's going
16 on, and maybe I can help. And it doesn't always work
17 for me, but.

18 One day I was over on the Alta Lodge rope
19 toe hill. And there was a guy out there with a couple
20 of his kids. And these kids were grabbing onto the
21 rope, and getting pulled on their nose, and falling
22 down. And he's dragging them back, and standing them
23 up.

24 And I went over and said hi to him. And I
25 said, You know, if you'd -- if -- maybe you might want

1 to take your kids and go over here on this cross toe
2 that goes. I said, it goes by a little slower, and
3 it's got a softer rope, and it doesn't go up as steep a
4 hill, and you can kind of get the feel for standing on
5 your skis. And then come back, and then ride here
6 where there's a little more hill.

7 And the guy turned around, and he looked at
8 me, and he said, My dad taught me to ski on this hill.
9 I'm teaching my kids to ski on this hill.

10 And I went, I understand completely.

11 Sorry -- sorry I interrupted.

12 And I just kind of meekly walked away.

13 And that's just the way it was. He could
14 have done it different, but it's a generational thing.

15 Q. Yeah, that's great.

16 A. Ahh, it was great.

17 Q. Well, we had a really funny experience up
18 on --

19 A. Just turn. Just turn. And they yell at
20 them, just turn.

21 Well, they've got to have no idea what that
22 means. Just turn.

23 Q. Yeah. I don't know how to "just turn."

24 A. That's why you go to the ski school.

25 Q. Yeah.

1 Well, I don't know if I have anything else
2 to cover. I --

3 A. You know, I should say something about the
4 ski school.

5 Q. Oh yeah, let's do.

6 A. Because, you know, there's --

7 Q. That's a huge --

8 Well, it's also been an integral part of the
9 history, too.

10 A. Oh, yeah. And -- and you can't talk about
11 the ski school without talking about Alf Engen. You
12 know, one of the world's greatest people. One of the
13 biggest optimists that ever walked the planet. Never
14 had a bad thing to say. Always saw the sunny side of
15 everything. Could inspire anybody to have a good day.

16 And, you know, he's part of what the whole
17 Alta thing.

18 I mean, he -- that makes Alta be whatever it
19 was.

20 I mean, so many of us, that came in the
21 '70s, were lucky enough to get to spend ten years with
22 Alf.

23 And you couldn't have a bad day if you ran
24 into Alf. You know? I mean, he always had something
25 bright to say, and got more people into skiing, and

1 taught them how to ski, and how to be inspired, and --

2 And he passed that on to the ski school
3 that's there today. I mean, half the ski schoolers
4 over there know -- knew Alf, or got to spend time
5 around him, or had been inspired in some way by him.

6 And David Robinson, and his ski school, are
7 as great as they are be -- in part because of Alf, and
8 that feel and passion for skiing that carries on.

9 Q. Yeah. I mean, I never -- I never met him,
10 but, you know, you always kind of knew of him. You
11 know? It's almost like -- I wouldn't call him, you
12 know, like there's a ghost of Alf here, but there is a
13 feeling of Alf here.

14 A. Well, there is a feeling of Alf here.
15 And -- and it -- it will always persist, because Alf
16 loved the scenery, he loved the terrain, he loved the
17 snow, and he loved to ski. He just loved to ski. You
18 know? He was just always happy out skiing.

19 And you go, Wow, I want to be like Alf. How
20 can you go wrong?

21 Q. With that, I do want to -- did you know Jay
22 Lauchlin very well?

23 A. I did.

24 Q. I'd like to talk a little bit about him,
25 because -- I mean, it seems like his family keeps a

1 pretty low key. It seems like he was pretty low key,
2 from what I've read.

3 A. Right.

4 Q. But as I've read about him, I was extremely
5 fascinated about the whole publishing thing. You know,
6 the Jones and Lauchlin Steel Company, and how he kind
7 of -- you know, he -- you know, you read that account
8 of how he went to the furnaces when he was a young man,
9 and --

10 A. Didn't like it.

11 Q. -- didn't want to have anything to do with
12 it.

13 A. Right.

14 Q. Let's talk a little bit about Jay. You
15 know, I mean, he had some pretty interesting ideas too,
16 about the hut system that he wanted to put in, and --
17 and I think, you know -- I don't -- I have a lot of
18 people that I would want to talk about Joe Quinney, but
19 I really want to talk about Jay Lauchlin.

20 A. Yeah.

21 Jay was great because he loved Alta. He
22 loved the mountains. He loved touring. He liked hut
23 systems. He liked everything. And he wanted to be
24 involved here, because it was such a great place. But
25 he didn't want to -- because he -- of his involvement

1 in -- in his ownership level, he didn't -- he didn't
2 ever want to come in and start telling you how to do
3 things. He -- he knew he wasn't here all the time,
4 and -- he never imposed his ways upon how things ought
5 to go.

6 He had some core beliefs that it ought to be
7 a great ski area, and it ought to remain for skiers.
8 And as long as it was profitable, and stayed strong,
9 that's -- was -- that was his main concern. But he
10 wanted to be able to come here like everybody else, and
11 go skiing and enjoy the mountains.

12 And so he was -- his influence was very
13 supportive to the core value of skiing, and the core
14 value of having a company that survived.

15 But it wasn't telling us -- or telling
16 anybody how it should be done. It was being a good
17 strong supporter.

18 Q. Then, one more character, I guess, is -- was
19 Chick.

20 A. Oh, yeah.

21 Q. You know, people loved that guy.

22 I -- you know, he was not -- I never met
23 him. He had passed on before I ever came -- was on the
24 scene, but.

25 You know, talk a little bit about -- you

1 know, you worked under him, and then worked fairly
2 closely with him, and then --

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. -- kind of took the reigns over.

5 And Chick, being a beloved character,
6 when -- when being the new general manager probably had
7 some moments.

8 A. Yeah. Yeah.

9 Q. And you could go into as much, or as little,
10 or --

11 A. Oh, yeah. I mean, Chick's absolutely -- you
12 know, the -- there's been three general managers. Fred
13 Spire. And, you know, Fred was really from the time
14 when men were steel and towers were wooden, and then
15 Chick was kind of in the interim, when there was still
16 a few wooden towers, and he started building steel
17 towers.

18 And -- and I'm kind of a steel towers kind
19 of guy, in this end -- this end of the spectrum.

20 But Chick -- Chick helped us get through all
21 those years when our business was so marginal. There
22 was -- you know, skiing was going, but we had so many
23 road problems, and so many times when people couldn't
24 get here, and our visits were low, and trying to figure
25 out how to build our first lifts, and pay for 'em, and

1 be -- make the economics of a fledgeling industry work.

2 And those were tough times. Many places

3 never made it. And we were --

4 Our company was a stand-out just because we

5 survived. And that was due in great measure to Joe

6 Quinney and Chick Morton.

7 I mean, those two together figured out how

8 to make us survive, and how to pay the bills, and how

9 to find the money to get together to build our

10 infrastructure.

11 And without Joe and Chick, we would have --

12 maybe somebody else could have done it, but you'd be

13 hard pressed to find a team like that. Could get us

14 through.

15 And by the time I got here -- got a hold of

16 it, it was a good strong company, with money in the

17 bank, and a lot of the infrastructure built, and --

18 thanks to Joe and Chick.

19 Q. Last question.

20 It seems to me that, as a general manager,

21 you're a pretty good steward of -- you know, it's -- of

22 taking something that works and not screw it up.

23 A lot of -- that's sometimes harder than it

24 is -- than you'd imagine. And I commend you for it.

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. There's -- you know, you could put lifts in
2 places, and you could probably come up with a master
3 plan and figure out a couple more places to put lifts,
4 so everyone could go everywhere.

5 Is there a -- a -- kind of a thought in
6 your -- in the way that things are done that, you know,
7 it's okay to have to hike the High Notch? It's okay
8 to have to go out to Catherine's, you know, and put a
9 little sweat equity into getting it?

10 A. Well, I -- I think that boils down to
11 trying -- making sure you listen to your skiers. And
12 you go out and ski with your skiers, and see where your
13 skiers go, and hear what they say. And then try and
14 build around that.

15 I mean, you know? It's what an outside
16 master planner can't do.

17 I mean, they can look at your terrain and
18 figure out where you should have lifts, and how it all
19 ought to go. And then you have to go, Well, that's
20 fine, but let's see where people really like to go, and
21 how they like to get there.

22 And, yeah, it's --

23 Earlier we talked about it. I mean, you
24 can -- you've got to be careful with the changes you
25 make around here, or people might not like them. And

1 then they might not ski here. And that's not a good
2 thing.

3 So, yeah, it's a delicate balance, of just
4 being careful, and being sensitive to the skiers.

5 Q. Well, I've pretty much got everything I
6 need.

7 A. Okay.

8 (Whereupon, the recording
9 was concluded.)

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