

**MOUNTAIN MEN** Sepp Ruschp Ski School members, 1941-1942, from left, Ruschp, Clem Curtis, Otto Douglas, Kerr Sparks, Lionel Hayes, Howard Moody, and Norm Richardson. Hayes was the first person from Stowe to be in the ski school in 1939.



NORMAN RICHARDSON, COURTESY OF MIKE LEACH

STOWE SKI & RIDE SCHOOL AT 90  
**KEEP 'EM TURNING**

STORY / MARK AIKEN

**PARTY TIME** The Stowe ski school's "Clipper Club Party," circa 1942. The party was likely held in the Toll House or next door at The Lodge.



NORMAN RICHARDSON, COURTESY OF MIKE LEACH

**T**his winter, Stowe celebrates the 90th year of its Ski and Ride School. “Every time I put on the uniform and look up at Vermont’s tallest peak, I can feel the weight of that legacy,” said Mike Chick, Stowe Mountain Resort’s newly promoted director of skier services, who served for the last three years as the resort’s senior manager of the Ski and Ride School. “I just try to do my best to keep it moving forward.”

A key takeaway from Stowe’s ski school history: Don’t be afraid to take a chance when it comes to following your dreams. Take the letter below, for example:

*Dear Sir, I have obtained your address from an American Ski-ing Association (sic) and kindly request you to let me know if any club or hotel in your district would be interested in taking an Austrian state-certified ski-instructor for the coming winter 1936-37. I am 27 years old and have been an Austrian state certified ski-instructor for five years.*

Sepp Ruschp sent this letter to the Washington Ski Club in Seattle in September 1936 along with 90 others to ski clubs across the United States. He sensed bad times coming with pre-World War II political unrest at home, and he sent the letters

against the wishes of a father who counseled him not to throw away his good job and despite having been married for just one year.

“I assume the Mt. Mansfield Ski Club received a very similar letter,” said local ski historian Mike Leach, who coached racing here for over 30 years.

Leach’s assumption is a strong one; the Washington letter is in the Vermont Ski and Snowboard Museum, and none of the others are known to still exist. However, Ruschp received five replies from his hopeful “can-I-have-a-job” campaign, including one from Frank Griffin, president of the Mt. Mansfield Ski Club. Corresponding by mail, the club offered to cover his fare to cross the Atlantic, a salary of \$500, 50 percent of lesson sales, plus whatever money Ruschp could make on the side—presumably coaching local college racers, although the tradition of instructors finding supplemental income lives on in the 21st century. Less than three months after sending his initial batch of letters, Ruschp became a ski instructor at Stowe.

He eventually founded the Sepp Ruschp Ski School. He partnered with one of his ski school students, insurance magnate Cornelius Vander Starr, who founded American International Group, to consolidate separate lodging, skiing, food service, and lift operations into one company. Later, Ruschp served as the president and CEO of that business until 1977.

**PEP TALK** Ski and ride instructors gather for their morning meeting at Stowe.



STOWE MOUNTAIN RESORT

## Club bylaws

Ninety years is ancient in terms of modern ski and ride schools but just a blip when you consider that Mt. Mansfield, known as Mozodepowadso to the Abenaki people, who never officially ceded lands, an important acknowledgment when we look at Stowe history, is 450 million years old.

For the purposes of Ski and Ride School history, however, we'll fast forward over the first few hundred million years and note that the history of the Stowe Ski and Ride School is closely intertwined with the histories of Mansfield, Stowe, the Stowe Ski Patrol, and modern skiing itself.

No discussion of these histories is complete without Craig Burt, visionary and promoter of skiing in the area. Burt used home-built skis to tend to outdoor chores and his logging business; he helped start annual Stowe Winter Carnivals in the 1920s to celebrate outdoor winter sports; he turned his logging camp into the area's first ski lodge and slopeside accommodation. Now you can see a sign where his Ranch Camp stood on the Bruce, Mansfield's first ski trail. Burt, along with others, started the Stowe Ski Club, which became the Mount Mansfield Ski Club. It changed names again in 2023 to Mount Mansfield Academy.

It is well-known that the club was central in establishing and expanding Stowe ski trails and in establishing one of the first American ski

patrols, but its earliest bylaws, presumably written by Burt and other early pioneers like Charlie Lord and Frank Griffin, also express a commitment to teaching and instilling a love of skiing. In addition to providing, maintaining, and improving skiing facilities, the bylaws state this mission: "...to further the technical skill of members; to promote ski competitions; and, generally, to cultivate an interest in skiing."

To achieve these ends, Griffin brought Ruschp to Stowe. Ruschp also had a competitive background in Austria, and he and other Stowe pros worked with club athletes until 1960 when the ski club brought in the first dedicated racing coaches.

## Humble beginnings

In fact, ski teaching was happening prior to Ruschp's arrival. According to Mt. Mansfield Ski Club newsletters from 1934 and 1935, people could buy a 10-pack of lessons for \$4 dollars.

The original instructor was Jim Trachier. "Not much is known about him," said Leach, who found Trachier's photo in University of New Hampshire yearbooks. "He appears to have only attended freshman year and the first semester his sophomore year, and the club may have hired him away from school." Was this the start of another time-honored tradition—cutting school to ski?

**FAB FOUR** From top left: Several Austrian ski racers were recruited to teach in the Sepp Ruschp Ski School in the 1950s and 60s. From left, Othmar Schneider, a 1952 Olympic gold medalist, director Sepp Ruschp, and Karl Farhner. Kerr Sparks, manager of the ski school after Ruschp, proves his boast that Stowe's famous ski school could teach anyone to ski. Sparks helps J. Fred Muggs of TV fame—who shows solid form—during the National March of Dimes kick-off on Jan. 4, 1956. Dave Merriam has directed the ski school since 1995. Peter Ruschp led the ski school from 1975-1995.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ALPINE STYLE 156.COM; COURTESY OF MIKE LEACH; STOWE MAGAZINE ARCHIVES; TROW ELLIMAN

Another newsletter mentions an instructor named Dr. Ernst Wagner, but, again, little is known. “There was an interest in getting an authentic Austrian instructor to teach club members,” Leach said.

From the start, top skiers populated the school.

“Jacques Charmoz was a French Olympic team member,” Leach said. Over the holiday run in 1938, Ruschp, Charmoz, and another instructor, Ali Mauracher, taught 500 lessons. Lionel Hayes became the first Stowe native to teach skiing around 1940.

One feature that defined the school was that, whenever possible, Ruschp brought in comrades from Austria like Othmar Schneider, who won Olympic gold in 1952. “The Austrians were such beautiful, elegant skiers,” said Tricia Kules, a current Stowe pro who got her start as an instructor 50 years ago. “They were treated like royalty; they were great skiers, and they had great personalities.”

## Through the years

For the first 75 years, Stowe had just four Ski and Ride School directors: Ruschp (1936-1948), Kerr Sparks (1949-1975), Ruschp's son, Peter Ruschp (1976-1995), and Dave Merriam (1995-2021).

Everyone I spoke with remembered Sepp Ruschp as kind and polite.



“He tried to teach me German,” Kules said. He was also tenacious, both in building a ski school and individually. In 1938, he fell in a national championship ski race on Nose Dive. Despite breaking his ankle, he got up and still finished.

Kerr Sparks, a member of the 10th Mountain Division, was a large, gruff leader who likened his school to a military operation. “We had mandatory Monday morning clinics,” Kules remembered, noting that Sparks originally hired her. “He made us stand in perfect lines for lessons.” He once fired an instructor who had the wrong color long underwear under his ski pants.

In those days, the school was based in the Toll House, where many lessons were taught.

“The Austrians got most of the private lessons,” Kules said, adding that many of those privates were taught at Spruce, which opened in 1954, and Mansfield. That doesn't mean others never got up to the main mountain. Kules recalls occasions when, after teaching a morning lesson at the Toll House, she'd be summoned to Spruce or Mansfield. Back then, there was no Over Easy lift, and buses looped around once an hour.

“They'd say, ‘Be there in 15 minutes!’” she said. It was standard for Stowe pros to shuttle themselves in their standard-shift personal vehicles—wearing their ski boots.

**BIG AIR** A Richardson postcard of Sepp Ruschp, legendary founder of the ski school in Stowe. Ruschp was a key builder of the American ski industry and long-time president and general manager of the Mount Mansfield Company.



STOWE MAGAZINE ARCHIVES

## Modern ski, ride school

Under Peter Ruschp, a former U.S. Ski Team member, the school began to look more like the current Ski and Ride School. Its headquarters shifted to Spruce, and Peter had an easier demeanor than his predecessor, his own father. “We were a much looser, much happier ski school,” said Brian Lindner, another Stowe historian and current Stowe ski patroller who instructed from 1973 to 1989. Under Peter, the name changed from the Sepp Ruschp Ski School to the Stowe Ski School and, eventually, the Stowe Ski and Ride School.

Speaking of riding, longtime director Dave Merriam, who first served as training manager under Peter, recalls a run with Peter, then-CEO Gary Kiedaisch, and early snowboarding pioneers Lowell Hart and Bud Keene. At the time, snowboarding wasn’t allowed on the Front Four trails on Mansfield. “It was deemed too dangerous,” Merriam said.

Merriam, Peter Ruschp, and Kiedaisch watched Hart and Keene shed their way down Lifeline and National. Later that season, snowboarders were allowed everywhere. “It must have been 1991,” Merriam said. Some of the first snowboard instructors in the Stowe Ski and Ride School were Mark Garon, Ted Fleischer, and Jeff Wise.

Under Sepp Ruschp’s direction, the school taught the Hans Schneider technique, which focused on stepping and stemming movements. Schneider was a mentor who originally certified Ruschp in Austria. Under Peter, the school adopted the American Teaching System of

instructing what is still used today and endorsed by Professional Ski Instructors of America and American Association of Snowboard Instructors. The American Teaching System emphasizes student-centered, outcome-based lessons and student goals. Peter’s school also prioritized children’s lessons and guest service.

The current school has strong female representation with several PSIA-AASI examiners on staff. The earliest women to show up on ski school rosters were Joan (Stent) Sparks and Mary Mather in 1945. Mather instructed for 25 years after she earned her pilot license to ferry bombers to distant places during World War II.

In a Burlington Free Press article, Rita Buchanan, an instructor in the 1950s, observed that there weren’t many female instructors because “Sepp was not big on women instructors.” She noted that she got her job one day when there were 15 students at a lineup and no instructors. “I asked if I could help out, and that’s how I got started,” she told the Free Press. She also noted that she, another female pro, and two male pros from Stowe traveled to New York in 1958 for instructor certification tests. The women passed, and the men did not.

One female instructor who made a lasting impact on the Ski and Ride School was Sally Smith, who worked to overhaul the children’s school under Peter Ruschp. “It was called Pooh Corner for years,” said Lindner, noting that different Winnie the Pooh characters made up different levels.

Stowe’s Ski and Ride School has been at the forefront of innovation

**SKI SCHOOL** The Tollhouse served as the original location of the Mt. Mansfield Ski School for the 1934-1935 season. The club would later switch management from the Mount Mansfield Ski Club to Sepp Ruschp and be renamed the Sepp Ruschp Ski School. Inset: An instructor transports some young charges uphill, 2013.



COURTESY OF MIKE LEACH; GLENN CALLAHAN

since the beginning, and that seems to include adaptive lessons. Norm Richardson was an instructor and photographer, who was responsible for many early photos of Stowe instructors. One series of photos from the early 1940s shows him coaching a blind skier—very likely the first adaptive lesson ever taught on Mount Mansfield.

“He learned by being placed in proper position ... An explanation and directions shouted to him as I skied alongside of him,” Richardson wrote. The current school has its own adaptive program that works closely with the nonprofit Green Mountain Adaptive Sports to make lessons available and accessible for all.

Another change for Stowe was the sale of the resort from American International Group to Vail Resorts in 2017. Vail is no newcomer to the block, having officially opened in 1962, but the parent company certainly recognizes Stowe’s historical relevance.

“Stowe brings a deep heritage of excellence and leadership in both instruction and mountain safety,” said Mike Giorgio, vice president and general manager of Stowe. “The Ski and Ride School and ski patrol are not only historic pillars of the sport, but they also set a standard for guest experience and mountain culture that enriches the entire Vail Resorts network.”

The longest tenured employee at Stowe is Bill McManis, a retired state employee, who used vacation time to work holidays for 60 winters as an instructor and one winter as a member of the race department. Preparing for his 62nd winter, he reflected on what’s changed. “In 2025, instructors no longer wear their uniforms to the bar and hustle lessons,” he said.

“Equipment improvements have made skiing easier,” McManis said. But really, much is the same. “The camaraderie of instructors hasn’t changed, and you still have to watch students ski and explain movements.”

Everyone who comes to Mt. Mansfield will have—or hear—stories of the way things were. “We have instructors who absolutely shred, skiers

and riders who train hard, teach with passion, and push each other to be better every day,” Chick said, noting that Stowe has 20 PSIA-AASI examiners and education staff members. “Stowe is widely recognized as a training mecca for instructors pursuing certification and career advancement. If you’re serious about growing as a teacher and athlete, this is the place to be.”



While the current staff is aware and generally reverent of the deep history of the organization, most focus on their own experiences on Mansfield and the experiences they share with guests. Chick’s focus is on creating opportunities to build careers, investing in instructor training and leadership development, and adapting to industry changes while preserving the Ski and Ride School’s unique identity.

Chick acknowledges that “90 years” is an approximation. “Sepp arrived on Dec. 10, 1936. So, Dec. 10, 2025, will be the start of our 90th season. And we’re celebrating all winter.”

The winter’s celebrations will begin with an annual gathering of Stowe pros at von Trapp Lodge and Resort on Dec. 10. More gatherings will be announced as will patches and pins.

“For me, this anniversary isn’t just about looking back,” he said. “It’s about looking forward, honoring the people that built it, and continuing to invest in those that are going to carry it forward.” ■

*Thank you to Mount Mansfield Academy and Mike Leach for granting access to their archival photos.*



COURTESY PHOTOS

# COMING HOME

JOSI KYTLE REFLECTS ON STOWE'S HOUSING CRUNCH

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED AND COMPILED / MARK AIKEN

**A graduate of Stowe High School, Josi Kytile went to Middlebury College,** worked corporate jobs in New York City and London for companies like British Airways, JWT, Avis, and Hilton, and eventually resettled in Stowe. “I’d say 70 percent of my high school class lives here,” she said. “Ten of us went out for drinks a few nights ago.”

Having played collegiate tennis at Middlebury, Kytile stays active—skiing, mountain biking, and pickleball. She considers herself lucky to have returned home in 2013. “If I tried to move back now, I wouldn’t be able to afford it,” she said. “I am sad for the generation of people like me who wouldn’t have the opportunity to experience this.”

Kytile has, in part, been able to remain financially viable because she renovated a room in her Stowe home that she can rent on Airbnb. Still, she sees short-term rentals as a problem in Stowe and serves on the community’s housing task force. She runs Yoga for Cancer, the nonprofit her mother founded, and she works as a socially ethical entrepreneur.

**What is your favorite time of day to ski Stowe?**

I am a morning skier. I really miss the 7:30 a.m. chair.

**What does it mean to be a socially ethical entrepreneur?**

I like starting new businesses and coming up with new ideas. Socially ethical means I’m not just there to make lots of money. Some business decisions would not be consistent with my moral compass. If being an entrepreneur is about maximizing profits, then it means I’m a “dumb” entrepreneur.

**What is Buttermilk LLC?**

Buttermilk is a development firm that was going to take a derelict site in Richmond, Vt., filled with chemical contaminants and turn it into a vibrant, walkable, fully net-zero, clean site that could offer people housing and jobs and inject dollars into the town’s tax base. No other developer would touch the site. It was the state’s first-ever project under the Brownfield Revitalization Program, and it was the one of the fastest cleanups the state has ever witnessed. The cleanup had lots of state and federal support, but we also had to raise private funding.

After the cleanup, we built one multi-use building. Then two challenges arose. First, for over a decade, Richmond’s regulations and zoning stalled progress. We couldn’t move forward on further development because of unrealistic requirements. Only this summer did some of the barriers finally get removed. Second, during all the delays, the costs of new construction have skyrocketed, like by 200 percent.

The situation showed how you’ll have well-meaning people in positions of power like selectboard members or people on subcommittees who don’t understand development. The good news is that the experience helped me understand our challenges in Stowe.

**What is the housing situation in Stowe?**

Different than Richmond, which had rules that hindered development, Stowe has added 1,000 residential units in the last decade. None of these new units—zero!—has gone to long-term housing or full-time residents. Stowe created a housing task force whose one-year job was to gather data so that we could really understand the issue. Everyone should read the housing report that came out of this effort. The Stowe Selectboard unanimously

voted to keep this group going to try to get things done, and everyone on the task force signed back on.

The first thing we did was get a short-term rental registry to collect real data. We found that 23 percent of short-term rentals are owned by people who live in Stowe. So, 77 percent are owned by individuals who do not live here. A large majority of people are profiting off our beautiful town, amazing infrastructure, and they are paying a lower base tax rate than full-time residents. Homesteaders pay higher taxes than non-homesteaders.

A few other stats. There is a term—“Zombie Town”—when the percentage of housing stock lived in by full-time residents falls below 21 percent. It’s when people can’t afford to live and work in a place. A decade ago, Stowe was around 36 percent. Now it’s 26 percent. The housing report also found that to afford to buy a home in Stowe you would need to have \$700,000 in the bank. What 20- and 30-year-olds coming out of college have that kind of savings and could live in Stowe?

**What do we do about the housing crisis?**

Unfortunately, there is no silver bullet. We do need to incentivize people to convert and offer their units to long-term housing. What Stowe needs is housing that is affordable to people who want to be full-time residents and live here. We are also looking at other towns—Jackson Hole, Wyo., Aspen, Bar Harbor, Maine, Martha’s Vineyard, Lake George, N.Y., and others—that have already felt the impacts of these issues so that we can see what policies they tried, what worked, and what didn’t.

We did a disservice to our community and to investors who came into our community and bought property by failing to make any decisions about how to manage this. We may have tough calls to make in the future. If we want our sons and daughters to be able to come back here to live, if we want seniors to be able to afford to downsize and continue to live in Stowe, if we want people like teachers or lifties to be able to move and live here, if we want our schools to continue to have enough students, we have to roll up our sleeves and get to work. ■

Read the Stowe Housing Task Force Housing Needs Assessment report at [bit.ly/4my1zm6](http://bit.ly/4my1zm6).



**SPEED RACERS** Miso Fast Stowe ski bum race teammates, 2015, from left, Kristi Brown Lovell, Josi Kytile, Pascale Savard, and Alison Beckwith.