



Clockwise from top left: Jeff Knaub, circa 1991; Lone Peak on a bluebird day; Bruce, Carolyn, Tyler and Taylor Erickson on a Big Sky family ski day; Claude Erickson with friends; Tyler Erickson; Kristi Knaub Borge Big Horn Downhill; Bruce Erickson. PHOTOS FROM KNAUB AND ERICKSON FAMILY COLLECTIONS

# This Pivotal Moment

## CELEBRATING THE JOY OF WINTER IN BIG SKY

Youth ski racing has been part of the fabric in Big Sky since the 1970s, when strict Austrian ski instructors—some of them former World Cup racers—coached local kids, many competing in weekend NASTAR races below the Explorer Lift.

“There was a headwall between the outrun of Mr. K and Lone Wolf, which was called NASTAR Knob,” said Jerry Pape, Jr., a participant at the time.

Those instructors demanded perfect execution, Pape said, requiring kids to stop if they made even a small mistake and hike back to the top of the course.

“It got to the point where if I was skiing down Mr. K recreationally and I made a bad turn, I would stop, take my skis off, hike back up to the top of the headwall, and do it again.”

Then in the 1980s, ski instructor Sarah Doyle convinced ski school director Robert Kirchschrager to start a separate team.

“Sarah pestered Robert long enough that he said, ‘OK, give it a try. But you have to do it all,’” said Hans Schernthaner, who succeeded Kirchschrager.

At the time, Big Sky was a small, remote place with only a handful of kids around. Still, there was enough interest that Doyle rallied parents to buy the equipment that the ski school couldn’t supply—gates, a drill, bibs and team hats. The Mad Wolf Ski Team was born.

As the team grew, the resort hired Red Lodge native and hotshot coach Scott Zahn as a ski instructor and part time ski coach. Soon, they were traveling to races around Montana, and in 1993, Zahn and a group of volunteers incorporated the nonprofit Big Sky Ski Education Foundation.

Grassroots as it was, the team’s inception was a cultural milestone for Big Sky. It was the start of a program that’s

since had upwards of 1,500 participants, some of whom have gone on to race for the U.S. Ski Team.

Today is another defining moment. Thanks to the hard work of many, Big Sky has key community and economic structures including the high school, hospital, arts center, hotels and the new community center. Now we’re celebrating our first ever winter carnival, Big Sky Winter Fest. This is a stake in the ground that establishes us among the ranks of legendary ski communities like Steamboat, Whitefish and Stowe. And with impeccable style and incredible heart, the event will donate proceeds to our local nonprofit ski team, BSSEF.

At American Bank, we couldn’t be prouder. Our founding family, the Ericksons, have been skiing Big Sky Resort since it opened in 1973, and we’ve had a branch in Big Sky since 1999. Our logo has graced every team jacket since the original Spyder coats of the late ‘80s, and we’re thrilled to continue supporting BSSEF’s more than 250 kids today.

For us, 2022 is also a defining moment: 75 years since our founding in Livingston in 1947. Today, we’re as committed as ever to our role as a foundational support structure for our communities and a key partner for our customers, ultimately in support of a healthy economy.

In Big Sky, that means celebrating the transformative power of skiing and the pure joy of winter.

**See you at Winter Fest.**

