

Fritz Koenig

Fritz Koenig was a piper on skis, surrounded by young ski racers eager to bask in the warmth of his smile and glean any knowledge they could about the exciting sport of ski racing that he made fun for them. The Fritz Koenig philosophies for races were: Was it safe? Was it fair? Would it be fun for the children? His requirements for the young racers to participate were that they smile and have a good time.



At the age of three, Fritz started skiing. By five, he was ski jumping and cross-country skiing with his family. They were members of the Bayerischer Ski Club, near Munich, Germany. It was not long before Fritz was involved in downhill and relay races, cross-country events, ski jumping or mountain climbing competitions. As his ability increased, so did the number of metals he won.

Fritz's father, who was experiencing post WWI inflation, was concerned at what he saw as a troubled future for Germany, encouraged him to immigrate to the United States where it appeared there would be a brighter future. Being handy with machinery Fritz was able to secure passage in exchange for working aboard the ship, an oil tanker, which brought him to America. He arrived the week before the 1929 stock market crash. Before he left Germany nobody told Fritz that the winter sports he loved were alive and well in the United States. He assumed that no mountains existed in this new country. He left his ski equipment in Germany.

Fritz had met Frieda Furtmeier in 1923 at a dancing school where she was the instructor and he along with his relay team were students. Nine years later he learned that Frieda was considering marriage to another man. Returning to Germany on the fastest boat he could find, Fritz convinced her that he was her man. They married and Fritz brought Frieda back to the United States and they settled in Lansdown, Pennsylvania. From their wedding day on, Fritz and Frieda were inseparable.

Fritz found comfort in an unfamiliar land in the camaraderie of the Buck Ridge Ski Club. Joining shortly after its founding in 1946, he later became a life member. Through his affiliation with the club he encouraged many people to enjoy the same winter activities that he so loved. Promoting a junior racing program was a real focus for Fritz within the structure of ski clubs.

Through Buck Ridge, Fritz became involved with the Eastern Pennsylvania Ski Council. He served as president in the 1960's before race planning was spun off to the Pennsylvania Alpine Racing Association (PARA). Being an able administrator and negotiator, he coordinated the sanctioned meets, as the clubs vied to host races. Because of his intense devotion and attention to the junior competitors, it was suggested that EPSC sponsor a Junior Race in Fritz's honor. This annual event is now a PARA event and the Fritz Koenig Trophy Race continues to be held each year at Jack Frost ski area for young skiers interested in racing.

Fritz was a United States Ski Association (USSA) Technical Delegate Emeritus, the highest honor that an alpine official can obtain. Every year he would personally inspect the racecourse. It did not matter that certified USSA Course Setters set the course. It did not matter that the USSA assigned a specific Safety Expert to inspect and sanction the course. Fritz always had the last say. Was it safe? Was it fair? Would it be fun for the children?

He was named the first USEASA racing official in Pennsylvania history in 1965 and was instrumental in getting races sanctioned in the state, enabling both junior and senior skiers to establish ratings for seeding in regional and national ski meets.

The exhilaration of the race never left Fritz. He was an active member of the 70 Plus Ski Club, a national organization with over 2,000 members, and continued to compete well into his eighties. His successes on

racecourses were numerous. Many were after a heart attack at age 72. He was preparing to defend his title as the fastest over-80 year old racer in the United States when he suffered a paralyzing stroke.

Although his personal racing days were over, Fritz demanded of himself that he be at his race at Jack Frost. In a specially rigged snow sled, and assisted by the Jack Frost Ski Patrol, Fritz went through the gates of the racecourse. He then returned to his wheel chair to present the trophies to the winners. Until his death in November 1997, Fritz's enthusiasm for excellence among ski racers, resulted in a substantial number of junior racers achieving a high level of proficiency. Many of whom went on to succeed in ski academies, skiing on college divisional teams, becoming members of U.S. Ski teams and qualifying for Junior Olympic teams.

The Eastern Pennsylvania Ski Council awards the Fritz Koenig Trophy to the club member who has contributed the most to organized skiing during the previous year. It is an honor to receive this prestigious award. Fritz's name will live on through these various events and awards. Because of his life long love of skiing, ski racing, especially his love of children and encouragement to all to enjoy this sport, Fritz will live on in the hearts and minds of all that knew him.