

John Guresh

John Guresh was born on March 13, 1914 at the family homestead in Still Creek, Pennsylvania. John being the youngest of the eight children in his family became the family caretaker when his older brothers went off to war. His father was quite ill so he had to stay home and care for his mother and sisters.

In 1928, John began working as a water boy for the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company (LC&N) when they began building the Still Creek Dam. By the time the Dam was completed in 1932, John was a mechanic and bulldozer operator. John continued working for LC&N until the canal era ended and the company decided to build a resort on property they owned in Lake Harmony.



In 1939 John used the same bulldozer he used to build canals to clear a road from Rt. 940 to the site of the future, "Split Rock Lodge". In 1941 he helped build the lodge. In the spring of that year he married Anna Kershner of Tamaqua.

In 1947 he became the Construction Forman for the Big Boulder Ski Area and helped build the first lodge at the base of the Big Boulder slope. Big Boulder became the first commercial ski slope in Pennsylvania. In the summers John worked for Split Rock as Maintenance Forman and in the winters he worked as Mountain Manager at Big Boulder Ski Area.

In 1950 Big Boulder bought snowmaking equipment from the Tey Manufacturing Company of Milford, Connecticut. The equipment was installed on the slopes, but unfortunately the process that first season of operation was considered a failure. The system was scrapped and John took a maintenance job with the Pennsylvania turnpike.

Big Boulder decided to try snowmaking again in 1955. They bought equipment from Larchmont Engineering in New Hampshire and asked John to come back to help them with this new system. This time he took it on himself to make the project work. He would often tinker with the machine for an entire night; go home for an hour's nap and return to the mountain. Other Big Boulder employees told him that they thought he was nuts for trying. "I wouldn't give up," said John, "I knew that it was possible."

John found the right mix of water and air, and then he came across compressors big enough to push the mix. The last part of the puzzle was a circulation system that stopped the water from freezing. Through trial and error and his ingenuity, John believed that he had solved the problems with the snow making equipment. He called the Tey Manufacturing Company to come back to Big Boulder. He showed and explained to them the changes he made, especially with the circulation system to prevent freeze ups and the water pressure, air pressure and temperature combinations he calculated. The process was finally being perfected. In the winter of 1956-57, a machine that resembled a lawn sprinkler was coaxed into emitting crystals that looked and acted like the real thing. "It was the first snowmaking machine in the world, to the best of my knowledge," he said.

The Tey Manufacturing Company wanted John to work for them. John chose to continue working at Big Boulder, making snow, trouble shooting the ski area's day-to-day mechanical and other operational needs. No doubt, giving up a great deal of recognition and monetary benefits with his decision. John also responded to many outside inquiries about the snow making process and taught his men and others 'how to make snow'. John never reaped any benefit other than his paycheck for his invention. Melanie Murphy, general manager of Big Boulder, said that someone heard about the invention and copied his idea. John was a pioneer. His processing ideas were used and commercialized throughout the entire country. The irony here was John did not ski because of a bad knee.

John later helped to install the first snowmaking machines at Camelback in Tannersville, Pennsylvania. He also gave tips on snowmaking to the owners of Elk Mountain Ski Area in Susquehanna County. In January 1976, at a party to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of snowmaking at Big Boulder, the Pocono Mountain Vacation Bureau honored John as being “the originator of the snow making business.” In January 1997 the Carbon County commissioners, in honor of Big Boulder's 50th Anniversary, paid tribute to John's ingenuity in making snow. In April of that same year, Governor Tom Ridge honored John at a special presentation in Harrisburg for “pioneering the man made snowmaking system in Pennsylvania.”

John retired in March 1979. He spent his retirement years visiting with his five grandchildren and three great grandchildren. He enjoyed fishing and camping until his legs that traversed the ski slopes countless times would no longer take him to his favorite places. John succumbed to cancer January 21, 1999.