

Willi Klein

Willi Klein is an entrepreneur who was born to ski. A racer in his youth and later an instructor in his native Austria, he became an honored retailer of skiing equipment in America.

He started his skiing career at the age of four. As a junior he raced for the Kufstein Ski Club, winning numerous races. Later he raced internationally as a member of the Tyrolean Ski Team. Willi attended the famous Austrian Instructor School in St. Christoph under Professor Kruchenhauser, considered by many as the father of modern skiing. After graduating he taught skiing for the Arlberg Ski School in Lech.



In 1960 Willi was asked to join the Penny Pitou ski school in Gunstock, New Hampshire. Little did he know that coming to America to teach skiing for one year would change his life forever?

He became involved in all aspects of the ski industry – coaching junior racers, starting programs for all levels of skier and promoting enjoyment of the sport. In 1963 Willi joined Northland Ski Company as a sales representative in the territory from New Jersey to Pittsburgh and down to South Carolina. Covering such a large territory, Willi was soon exposed to the need for quality equipment and clothing. In 1964 he opened a small ski shop at Indian Lake in Pennsylvania.

Willi's dream was to offer a specialty shop with an uncommon commitment to make skiing enjoyable for skiers of all ages. What he didn't know was that the dream included learning how to splice a rope tow, run lifts, run the rental shop, sell lift tickets and teach skiing. Year after year he spent countless hours traveling to ski clubs and schools and talking to everybody who would listen – to introduce them to the incredible experience of skiing.

In 1967 Willi and his wife Linda opened a second shop in Donegal. Three years later they sold it and moved to Pittsburgh, where they opened the first Willi's Ski Shop. In the next eight years they opened four more shops in the area and another at Seven Springs Resort.

Willi's goal was to give the Pittsburgh area the most pleasant, informative and helpful shopping experience. The response from area skiers was so overwhelming that it earned him a place of distinction in the skiing industry. Twice, Ski Industries of America named him Ski Retailer of the Year and his shops have been frequently named "A Gold Medal Shop" by *Ski Magazine*.

His stores have always been a family business and Willi is proud that his oldest son Greg and daughter-in-law Kjerstin are continuing on in the business with the same spirit of commitment.

Willi has remained active in the ski business and is still an avid skier; he tries to get in as many days on the slopes as possible. His passion for the sport is as intense as it was so many years ago. Once when asked how he felt about the years of hard work, Willi remarked, "How many people get to do what they love every day?"