

## BIOGRAPHY TIMELINE – MIKE WIEGELE

**1938** – Mike Wiegele was born in Feistritz, Austria. While growing up on a farm in Lading Kärnten, Austria, Mike's passion was skiing and racing. Despite his family's resistance and his obligations on the farm, he succeeded in getting his training. He was a ski race competitor in both Europe and Canada during the 1960's.

**1959** – Mike left Austria, the birthplace of skiing, and immigrated to Canada to work as a carpenter. During the post war years Austria was a difficult place to make a living and North America was seen as a place where you could make your dreams come true.

**1960** – Met Hans Gmoser at Lake Louise, the two became friends and Mike describes Gmoser as a mentor to him during his first years in Canada.

**1960** – After moving out West, Mike obtained Canadian Ski Instruction Association Level 4 certification.

**1960/61** – Wiegele was told that if he wanted to make a living as a professional skier, he'd have to move to Quebec. He took a job at Mount Tremblant, working for legendary ski-school director Ernie McCulloch.

**1961/62** – Mike worked at Sugar Bowl Ski School in California with American skiing pioneer Junior Bounous and fellow Austrian ski legend Hannes Scroll. Scroll told Wiegele, "When you go back to Canada, find yourself a mountain with the best snow and build yourself a resort."

**1962** – Met Warren Miller for the first time, only 24-years-old, when he met Warren at Sugar Bowl California. He said he was speechless when Warren asked him to ski in front of his camera with legendary Junior Bounous, at Donner Summit. "He wanted to take some footage myself skiing, so I was very excited about it. I finally met the person that I met in the movies." Mike said he was so nervous skiing in front of Miller's camera, that he fell during filming.

**1962/63** – Mike spent his winters in California ski racing on the US circuit and explored Canada in the summertime.

**1964** – Mike became a Canadian Citizen.

**1965** – Opened the Lake Louise Ski School, became the Director and started a program - he called "World Cup Preparation Training." He coached a number of National Team racers including several national team athletes – Ken Read, Jim Read, Chris Kent, Bobby Allison, Cary Mullen, Mike Irwin and Bill Irwin. Read, became North American's first World Cup Downhill Champion and throughout his career he won five world titles and two Olympic titles.

**1967** – Mike and Bonnie Wiegele get married after meeting in Banff on New Year's Eve, 1960. Bonnie, a National Champion in gymnastics, swimming, synchronized swimming, tandem surfing, and water-skiing is also a fully certified level 3 ski instructor and master racer.

**1967** – In his spare time he would explore the nearby mountains, searching to find the deepest, lightest, powder snow possible.



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**1968** – Mike explored the surrounding mountain ranges, the Canadian Rockies, Bugaboos, Cariboos and the Monashees – including the McBride area.

**1969** – Mike Wiegele published his first advertisement for helicopter skiing in the Cariboo Mountains, outside of Valemount, BC.

**1970's** – With the help of friends, Mike and Bonnie founded the Banff Alpine Races and the Bow Valley Quickies.

**1970** – Mike and Bonnie have a daughter, Michelle.

**1970** – Mike started taking guests out on daily ski trips into the Cariboo Mountains. The first test flight was in March, in a Bell 47 helicopter with Gary Foreman (owner of Yellowhead Helicopters), to Canoe Glacier on Mount Sir Wilfrid Laurier -the highest peak of the Cariboo Mountains.

**1971** – Ernie Moncrieff (client from the Banff Ski School), wanted to ski the high alpine, Mike said, “If you pay for the helicopter, I will guide for free.” Mike was able to explore the area with this trip and by the next season he was ready for his first paying customer – Dentist Dr. Howard Ironstone, from Sudbury, Ontario.

**1970's** – Mike pitched prototype of the first powder ski to Fischer Skis, but the company wasn't convinced of its marketability – everyone thought they were too fat and “ugly.” Wiegele didn't give up on the idea and in the early 90's he tried again, with Atomic.

**1972** – Warren Miller agreed to come to BC and film, after Mike wrote many letters to Warren, describing the powder snow conditions in BC, and invited him to come up for a ride in one of his helicopters, he sent his best cameraman Rod Allin up to Canada to explore and film the powder snow with a small two-passenger Bell helicopter. While the crew aimed for blue sky and powder snow, the weather socked the crew in for three days. On the last day Mike gambled the last tank of helicopter fuel to fly the crew above the clouds to better visibility. Warren described the film test as a great success. “They finally broke out into some of the most awesome and beautiful, never-before-skied-terrain that our cameras had ever documented.” As the word about Wiegele's new heli – skiing haven started to trickle out guests from around the world started to sign up.

**1973** – Truck drivers with snow on their units from Blue River, inspire Mike to scout the Blue River area for better snow quality. Mike arrives in Blue River and meets “Grandma” Molly Nelson an amateur meteorologist. Nelson had kept meticulous records for the previous 34-years of the weather patterns around the Blue River region. Blue River had a poor reputation, because of its heavy precipitation. It was seen as a bad place to live – “it rains, it pours, snowflakes fall down big and straight.”

**1974** – After exploring the different mountain ranges and weather patterns for 3-years, Mike decides to move the business from Valemount to Blue River, where there is much more snow (30-plus feet average snowfall) and less wind creating the world's best powder snow conditions. At this time, he started to buy land and develop a full-service resort.

**1976** – Bonnie and Mike started the Banff Quickies and Banff Alpine Racer Program in 1976 - which grew from seven children to 500 children during the first 5 years. Bonnie also started the Banff Gymnastic Club, which grew to 55 competitive gymnasts within the first two years and still continues today.



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**1980** – The first Powder 8 World Championships are held in Blue River and the first guest chalets are built next to Eleanor Lake, in Blue River.

**1980** – Warren Miller's Seven Days in Paradise was filmed.

**1980's** – Bad economics and slow building for the resort.

**1988** – The main guest lodge opened which contains the Powder Max Dining Room, the Silver Buckle Lounge, the Guide's Room, the fitness centre and stretch room, as well as the massage therapy clinic.

**1990** – Mike founded and developed the Canadian Ski Guide Association (CSGA) to train ski guides for the mechanized ski industry.

**1990** – Mike received Bravery Award for the Governor General of Canada and the Marshall Award for Excellence from the Canada West Ski Areas Association for outstanding contribution.

**1990** – Initiated avalanche research with the University of Calgary – this is a co-operative with the Federal Government to gain knowledge and expertise. All operators now participate in it.

**1991** – Bavarian House was built by Matthias Maresch (and purchased by MWHS in 1997).

**1992** – Mike approached world-class racer Rupert Huber (the race department boss for Atomic), about his concept for the world's first powder ski. Huber made a test pair to Mike's specifications in the race department at night. Mike brought the skis back to Canada to test. The skis were a joke, until Mike beat the top racers on them. Mike paid to have 36 pairs of skis to be made and when they arrived people were literally fighting over them in the ski shop.

**1992** – MWHS Resort started summer operations with activities such as heli – hiking, biking and fishing.

**1993** – Matthias Maresch, a longtime friend and guest donated the money to build the Grizzly Hut. The hut was built to support avalanche research and development. The research was a co-operative with both the University of Calgary and the Federal Government to gain knowledge and expertise. The Grizzly Hut also serves as an emergency shelter and an education and training center for the Canadian Ski Guide Association and a resting place for summer hikers.

**1995** – The Thunder Ridge Centre was built to accommodate the administration staff at the Resort. It includes a reception area, a large meeting room upstairs, and a front desk check-in area.

**1996** – The Guides Haus was added to the Resort to provide the ski guides with better conditions to prepare each day for skiing with the guests.

**1996** – Eleanor Lake Estate was built.

**2000** – MWHS received approval for Mike's Saddle Mountain Resort project - a powder-skiing resort, with a special combination of extensive alpine skiing and riding terrain development, serviced by a comparatively low uphill capacity. Guests skiing at Saddle Mountain will be able to experience and enjoy lift-accessed powder skiing all day long.



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**2000** – Elected to the Canadian Ski Hall of Fame. Inducted into the Canadian Honour Roll of Canadian Skiing for outstanding contributions to the growth and development of skiing in Canada by the Canadian Ski Instructor Alliance (CSIA).

**2003** – MWHS received approval of the 8 Peaks plan comprising 45,000 hectares of premium terrain that will provide safe and consistent skiing opportunities in close proximity to the Blue River base of Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing.

**2003** – Awarded Austria's prestigious Gold Medal ("Goldenes Verdienstzeichen") by Austria's Ambassador to Canada, the honourable Wendelin Ettmayer.

**2004** – The Albreda Lodge was built. The Lodge is located in Gosnell, British Columbia, just 28 miles (45 km) north of Blue River and offers 18 rooms for 20 guests, a dining room, lounge, sauna and ski shop. Albreda Lodge is built from repurposed timbers from the Drumheller Grain Elevator – transported from Drumheller, Alberta. The first guests arrived in January of 2005.

**2005** – 25th Anniversary of hosting the Powder 8 World Championships.

**2005** – 35th Anniversary of successfully operating MWHS celebrated with 50th Anniversary of Warren Miller Films.

**2006** – Michelle Wiegele and Jonas Guinn announce the birth of their son, Mike and Bonnie Wiegele's first grandchild, on December 26th – Charlie Roy Guinn.

**2006** – Inducted into the Banff Sports Hall of Fame.

**2007** – Official signing of the Saddle Mountain Master Development agreement.

**2010** – 40th Anniversary of successfully operating MWHS.

**2015** – Awarded by the Canadian Rockies Ski Racing Hall of Fame in the Honoured Builder category.

**2017** – MWHS backs a new generation of Alpine Ski Racing, by sponsoring Canadian Alpine Champion Erik Read (son of Ken Read).

**2017** – MWHS expands tenure back north into the Valemount area, with service into the Rocky Mountains: total terrain tenure area including expansion 604,454 (Ha); 6044.54 (km<sup>2</sup>); 1,493,638.36 (acres).

**2019** – Thompson Rivers University awards Mike with an Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree.

