

LARRY PEASE

A Passion for the SKI PATROL

Written by **Sara Mullins**
Photo by **Lance C. Bell**

*"I'm surprised to be here.
My friends made bets that
I wouldn't survive past 25."*

SO SAYS LARRY PEASE, who has managed to reach age 76 after an adventurous life that includes 53 years of service with the National Ski Patrol. Most of those years passed with the Wisp Ski Patrol at the Wisp Resort near Deep Creek Lake, home of Maryland's only ski area. He often sports a black jacket emblazoned with the Wisp group's mascot, a black bull adorned with a red cross, and the group's motto: "You fall, we haul." The jacket was a gift Larry received in recognition for 50 years' service with the National Ski Patrol, most performed on a volunteer basis.

About 15 years ago, Larry and his wife Gail, also a member of the Wisp Ski Patrol, purchased a condominium adjacent to Garrett Community College. From the large, picture window in their living room, the couple enjoy a view of the Wisp's slopes. They also maintained a home in Silver Spring until relocating in 2004 to Jamaica, Va.

Larry's journey to the Wisp began in the Pacific Northwest, where he was born in 1933 as one of four children of college-educated parents living in Yakima, Wa. "I was a Depression baby," Larry says. After five years in nursing, his mother left her job to raise her children while his father gradually built a successful business as a grocer. Eventually the family settled in Corvallis, Oregon, where Larry's dad had purchased a grocery store. As Larry went through



elementary, junior and high school, he found kindred spirits, joined the Boy Scouts and fell in love with the outdoors.

® A Boy Scout camping trip in 1949 to Willamette Pass Ski Area provided Larry with his first experience on skis. "The first day was spent getting familiar with the skis and frequently falling into the snow," he recalls. "We tried the rope tow on the second day, which resulted in a lot of face plants." That night, the troop's tents collapsed upon the sleeping boys due to a dumping of heavy, wet snow. Undaunted, the boys attempted another round of skiing until, soaked and exhausted, they returned home.

After graduating from high school, Larry enrolled at Oregon State University but soon realized that college was not for him. He found work at Boeing in Seattle, where he was part of the team that built the first B-52 bomber. In his free time, he explored mountains in Oregon and Washington. While enjoying a recreational ski trip to Snoqualmie Pass with a friend, he first saw members of the National Ski Patrol in action when a friend broke his femur.

At this point, the National Ski Patrol (NSP) was a relatively new organization. Founded in 1938 by Charles Minot “Minnie” Dole, its members follow the creed “Service and Safety” by providing the ski and outdoor recreation community with emergency rescue, care and education services. Members must be accomplished skiers committed to ongoing emergency care training. The United States NSP does not charge ski areas or skiers for services rendered. During World War II, Dole established the famous 10th Mountain Division of the U.S. Army; many of its veterans have made significant contributions to the sport of skiing. Because of its altruistic legacy, the NSP was recognized with a federal charter by the U.S. Congress in 1960, an endorsement shared by only a few other American institutions including the American Red Cross, YMCA and Boy Scouts. The NSP reports directly to the Congress on an annual basis. Today more than 26,000 members serve over 600 patrols.

It wasn't long before Larry joined the ranks of the Ski Patrol, specifically the Santiam Pass Ski Patrol that serves the Hoodoo Ski Area, after being persuaded by some friends who were part of the organization. At this point he had returned to Corvallis for graduate study at the University. Initially his father was not pleased but Larry eventually won him over. He later became Patrol Leader.

Eventually Larry decided that earning some money was more of a priority than pursuing a graduate degree and so he returned to Seattle. He was hired as a National Park Ranger, served as a fire guard for a year, joined a summer rescue team at Mt. Rainier and joined the Stevens Pass Ski Patrol, where he served as a ski trainer and instructor on the proper use of toboggans for transporting injured skiers.

Some work for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) at Mt. Rainier, where he helped scout sites for hydropower dams in Alaska and Montana, eventually led to a job offer at national headquarters in Silver Springs, Maryland. Larry bought a car and headed to the Beltway. With assistance from a mathematician he was dating, he began using a computer to perform calculations for his job and after

convincing his boss of this newfangled technique, became the first computer system analyst for the USGS.

Skiing had never left his mind and soon led him to a local chapter of the National Ski Patrol, formed by the Ski Club of Washington D.C. to provide weekend emergency rescue services for ski areas. Larry eventually became a National Ski Patrol Regional Director responsible for maintaining standards, and was appointed Training Chairman.

“It was a lot of hard work,” he says. “It became an avocation. My joy was the ski patrol.”

He realized that new ski patrol units needed oversight. Consequently he found himself spending more time working with the ski patrol than with his day job at USGS. He worked with ski areas in Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky, and helped establish ski patrols at Canaan Valley, Blue Knob and Ski Liberty. As the Southern Representative to the U.S. Ski Association, a position he held for two years, he drove to every ski area in his region to “show the flag.” Then the Ski Patrol Division Director, who managed the East Coast territory, asked Larry to be his assistant; so Larry added this job to his current responsibilities.

“I had my plate full,” he says. When attending meetings, he often brought a handful of bananas to the podium and announced that he represented the “banana belt.”

One of those southern ski areas was located in Garrett County, Maryland. In 1963, Larry boarded a train in Silver Spring and headed to Oakland, where he was met by Harold Ashby, leader of the Wisp Ski Patrol. Larry assembled a team to help with training; at the time, the American Red Cross Advanced First Aid was required of all patrollers. According to the Wisp Ski Patrol Web site, “communication was done with hand signals.... The first aid room was a corner of the old ski hut that had no heat, and there was no ambulance service. At that time, with the use of ‘bear trap’ bindings, lower leg fractures were common.”

After the former Oregon Ridge Ski Area near Baltimore closed down in 1967, some members of its former ski patrol came out to the Wisp to help on weekends. By then, the Wisp Ski Patrol had 45 members (10 from Wisp and 35 from the former Oregon Ridge), a new first aid room, Cascade Toboggans and telephones on Beaver, Deer and Possum slopes.

After Wisp earned certification from the National Ski Patrol System as a “senior test hill,” its patrol developed skiing and first aid training programs that served as models for patrols in Western Pennsylvania and the Southern

Appalachian Region. In 1990, the Wisp Patrol moved to its present quarters at the base station— also, as luck would have it, the location of the local Rescue Squad, a situation that allows for considerable cross-training. In 1996, the group was named the Outstanding Alpine Ski Patrol for the Eastern Division of the National Ski Patrol System.

Today the Wisp Patrol has grown to about 105 members (95 are volunteers) who handle over 500 incidents each season. Many have more than 10 years of service, and some continue a multi-generation tradition as ski patrollers. Members must complete 80 hours of outdoor emergency care training, and because the patrol is considered a rescue organization by the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services System, they must be Maryland First Responders.

Although members of the Ski Patrol come from all professions, Larry says, “It’s a strictly maintained rule that nobody refers to anybody by title at the site of an incident. Being on the Ski Patrol allows you to be somebody else for awhile. You can have an alter-ego.” He recalls a comment from a former head of the National Ski Patrol, who stated, “If I had the Ski Patrol as a company, I could run the country.”

“It’s a wonderful group of people at Wisp and everywhere,” he continues. “We’re professionals with a love of skiing and the hope that we can help. We do what we can to make the sport better. We work together and get the job done.”

A Quote from Helmuth Heise, founder of Wisp



Helmuth Heise, fourth from left, with members of the Washington Ski Club. The building in the background is the original base lodge at Wisp.

The Ski Patrol has always been an important force for improving standards of safety and responsibility to enhance the adventure of skiing at Wisp. Our patrollers give us important feedback about conditions and the state of the slopes from the most important perspective, that of the actual skier, so we can groom trails better, developing and maximizing our advantages. The Patrol can be relied on to handle emergency situations professionally and to deal with daily problems, such as unruly rogue skiers and unwittingly dangerous novices, both firmly but kindly.

Larry Pease’s thorough knowledge of the National Ski Patrol literature helped us to take practical advantage of the experience and knowledge contained in those guidelines, in implementing safety procedures as part of our standard practice and daily routine.

They are a great group of people, our Ski Patrollers! In addition to their professionalism and efficiency, the Ski Patrol’s camaraderie and zest for the sport have been good advertising for all to see just how much fun can be had by skiing, and how much pleasure can be gained from doing it at Wisp.

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