

## New Mexico Ski Hall of Fame

2017



# Walter Ruegg



Walter Ruegg was born in Switzerland in 1935 and spent his early youth in an apprenticeship as a machinist with a cable car company. In the late 1950s, the company was contracted to build a gondola in Alberta, Canada and Walter, eager to travel, asked to go and assist with the construction. He ended up building several other gondolas and lifts throughout Eastern Canada.

In 1961, at age 26, Walter signed on with the Stadeli company in Oetwil, Switzerland when they sold a chairlift to Taos Ski Valley. He supervised the installation of the first version of Chair 1 at Taos. Mickey Blake has famously said that Walter came in the first Stadeli box that was shipped to TSV. After the '61-'62 season, Walter went back to Switzerland and then proceeded to build lifts all over the East Coast for Stadeli.

He returned to TSV in 1965 to build Chair 2 and then worked on the construction of the Sandia Peak Tramway and a Stadeli chair at the Peak. During that time, Walter took flying lessons and earned his commercial pilot's license. He left Stadeli intending to find a job in the airline field, but could not find an opening in the Southwest. Ernie Blake eventually hired Walter to work on the

lifts at TSV in 1967, but he ended up maintaining anything that moved. Ernie fired him in 1971 and Walter reluctantly moved to Colorado to take up aircraft mechanics. A year and a half later in 1973 Ernie invited Walter back to run the lift maintenance department and managed every lift installation since then to 2006 when he retired. Walter was famous for fixing anything mechanical, making replacement parts and was one of the few qualified cable splicers in the U.S.

Walter has said "I feel awfully lucky. I didn't know what to do for a few years after I did my apprenticeship. Then I get into this field. I couldn't find a better place to work and live."



Walter Ruegg, the first lift mechanic at Taos Ski Valley, takes a break on hill during the 1961 season.