

The Snowmaker

Alan Wheeler

Interviewed by **Meghan McCarthy McPhaul**

AGE: 69

LOCATION: Cannon Mountain, New Hampshire

ROOTS: Alan Wheeler splits his time and profession by the seasons: summer as a trap fisherman off the tip of Rhode Island; winter in the mountains of New Hampshire, where he makes snow full-time and skis the backcountry any chance he gets. His co-workers and ski companions, often a few decades younger, have to push to keep up, but he's everything you could ask for in a work mate or ski buddy. "He can fix anything and he can ski anything," says John DeVivo, Cannon Mountain's general manager and Wheeler's ski partner. "He's a tough old bastard with a great heart."

- Whether it's fishing or skiing or making snow, if it's not going to be fun, it may as well be dangerous. It's just life, so to speak.
- Hauling floating fishing traps has the same mentality as making snow: You be careful, you stay awake, and you reap the benefits of nature.
- I learned to ski at Diamond Hill in Rhode Island. They had a couple of rope tows. My parents bought my skis like they bought my clothes: way too big.
- I was a season-pass holder for a while, and I started backcountry skiing with Irv Looke. He's a lift mechanic at Cannon. I like to go to Mount Washington, Great Gulf, Mount Monroe. There's a slide off Kinsman that's really good. I like the Cannon Ball. There's just a gajillion places to go.
- Then Irv said, "Hey, Wheeler. You're cheap. Why don't you make snow two days a week and get a free season's pass?" That plan went badly, because pretty soon I was working 40 hours a week making snow. I'm into it for 15, 17 years, something like that. It's been a long time. Time goes fast when you're having fun.
- Snowmaking's exciting. You come out one day and the ground is brown. You turn on the guns and come out the next day, and you've got whales the size of houses. And you get to ski 'em.
- We've had some rain this year. The problem is not the rain. It's that re-freeze after the rain. It's really dangerous. It's your job to get some snow on top of this pond ice and get it back to where the groomers can get it groomed in again.
- I usually ski about 90 days a season, give or take. I get a lot of those days when I'm working. While you're making a gun check, you're skiing. If the slope is open and we're making snow on it, we're adjusting the guns so the customer gets the best product possible. So, our runs are product testing. It's a self-serving racket for sure.
- What do I love about skiing? Powder. I love wild snow. It can be cream-cheesy snow or knee-deep champagne. That's what I like about the East. We get so many different types of snow. It's hard to beat.

