

Tom (Corky) Denisson - 2020



A lifetime member of the St. Paul Ski Club since 1952, CORKY DENISSON learned to ski from one of the Club's cornerstones, father Pete, at age 2 at his dad's Norski Hills Ski Area, which Pete operated from 1947-65. Norski was the site of many jumping tournaments in the 50s and 60s. The novel ski area offered both Alpine and Nordic skiing. Jumpers could ski to the tow line and get off on top then ski down and back to the top of the jump, Pete's clever design... never having to take their skis off! The 40 meter hill as well as the whole Area, had the first lights in the Central Region for evening tournaments!

In the early 50s, Cork and his brother and 2 neighborhood kids comprised the ENTIRE SPSC for Juniors. Corky was the President while the other 3 also held office, despite what the members thought! Pete would build 2 jumps right next to their home near Lake Phalen, as well as one in the back yard. Corky jumped continually as a Junior (1961 Jr. Natls in Lake Placid/1962 Jr. Natls Steamboat) and his son, Kip, also skied in 3 junior nationals in his era.

In 1962 Corky went into the Senior Club and skied one of his favorite hills, Westby. He would begin a streak that same year and ski Westby for the next 30 years...receiving a special medal from Doc Bland in 1992. He became one of Ed Brisson's pilots. Even when warm weather or winds cancelled the meet, Ed counted on Cork to take a jump and test the hill for sure. It was Eldredge French who gave Cork a couple nicknames...initially "plain Tom" (not Thomas), but also "Smooth Tom", Ed counted on Cork often to set tracks and test the conditions for other skiers. Quite an honor shared by only a few!

In 1966 Cork made the CUSSA A Team. And in 1970, it was more than just chance than put him in bib #1, to open the meet at Copper Peak Ski-Flying! A memorable honor, with quite a story to tell.

Another unforgettable event that highlighted Smooth Tom's talent was when he and his sister and her husband decided to ALL ski at Carvers. Kim, a top ranked FreeStyle skier on the 1981 Womens Tour, and Rick an excellent Alpine skier too...maybe...decided to jump for their first time ever! They watched Cork take the first jumps (sound familiar Ed?). But still the butterflies were humming. So brother Cork wanted to take one more and show his sis how "smooth" and safe the hill really was.

Later Kim phoned brother Tim: “So your brother pulled a fast one on Rick and me to get us to actually take a ride at Carvers today! After taking a couple nice rides, he felt our hesitation still and went up to put our nerves to bed. He was on top and after yelling SHINOLA! for clearance, in a heartbeat...this is your crazy, real crazy Norski brother Tim! He comes down ON ONLY ONE SKI! He landed, his right boot behind his left boot! And like nothin he hardly moved a muscle! He made it look soooo easy!”

In 1991, Odnos Norway International Masters Championships, Cork earned a Bronze on the K90m Hill for his first international medal. But it was in 1993, while training for the IMC in Kuopio, that a very serious injury occurred to change his long national and international participation. Skiing in Ely and in poor light towards the end of training that day, a fall would med vac him back to St. Paul where eventually over a dozen surgeons conferred to save his leg. He would be placed in an external fixator and wear it on his lower injured leg for the next 18 months. The other bad news was the specialists said his jumping was pretty much over.

In 1997, at the National Masters in Madison, Cork wanted to change his fate...and came from behind in the first round to win the Gold.

Cork's Bio Summary

1952 Lifetime member SPSC: officer-volunteer-competitor	Builds Carvers Chalet (1986 Natl Bricklayer of the Year)
5 decades membership/competitor USSA	1992 Westby honors Corky for 30 straight years of skiing!
1961 Jr Natls in Lake Placid-1962 Jr Natls in Streamboat	Foundation of SPSC Junior Program
1966 CUSSA A Team	1970 Copper Peak Ski-Flying-bib #1
CUSSA Training Camps throughout the 60s Washburn!	1991IMC Odnos NOR Bronze on the K90
1991 US Masters ALONE ski Holmenkollen-Timo's b-day!	Son Kip attends 3 JO's then skis the K120 circuit
1985 Inducted SPSC HOF	2006 Inducted Natl Masters HOF
Innovates ski bindings and ski tip designs	First to hit golf balls off Westby
Learns to ski on 2 or 1 at Norski and jumps Carvers on One	Does Rapid Fire with Smitty and Hornet K120s
1962 Recruited by Al Merrill Dartmouth Ski Team	1960 Trains on famous Roller Jump on St. Croix River
Takes brother on ski vacation Christmas 1965	1960-1990 SPSC Softball Golf HorseShoe Tournaments
1968 builds weight training device for take-off move	1984-Fearless 14 take 4pm ride after Pine Mtn cancels meet in fierce winds Winny and Nipper flag winds (Masters Timo and Corky are 2 of the 14) “Whew!”