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## Skiing Hall-of-Famer still medals at 84

### *White Bear's Tom Chapin skied TCAAP back in the day*

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WHITE BEAR LAKE — An old adage says “Just because there’s snow on the roof doesn’t mean there isn’t fire in the furnace.”

White Bear Lake resident Tom Chapin obviously has both; and for most of the winter he also has real snow under his skis.

At age 84, the lifelong athlete still races regularly in four downhill Ski Challenge leagues at Buck Hill in Burnsville and Wild Mountain in Taylors Falls and still medals under the National Standard Race system.

That’s not all: Highlights of his water-skiing career include four national medals and induction into the Minnesota Water Ski Hall of Fame.

“If I had a learning curve at my age it would be very difficult, but it’s what I’ve always done,” Chapin said of his sports of choice. “I stay in shape. But I don’t actually feel good about myself ... I get upset because I feel I should do better than I do (with race times).”

That being said, Chapin noted that he still has fun competing because he frequently skis with two of his grown children: Evelyn Duvall and Paul Chapin, both of White Bear Lake. His other two sons, Ross and Steve, live in the Seattle, Wash., area.

Chapin taught himself to cross-country ski as a child growing up on Bald Eagle Lake, traversing local sites like Bliens Hill, the White Bear Yacht Club and the Timber Hills neighborhood in White Bear Township. A 1944 White Bear High School grad, he belonged to local downhill clubs as a teen — the Mounds View Ski Club and the North Star Ski Club in Bayport — that favored Barker’s Alps in Bayport and land at the Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant that’s since been leveled. At TCAAP, a local farmer had fashioned a tow rope using the drive wheel on his Buick.

“You just taught yourself,” he remembered. “I didn’t have good equipment — I had terrible equipment — but I did the best I could and had fun. My friends who skied were fairly close friends.”

He also spent considerable time water skiing White Bear Lake with friends Bob and Ollie Washburn, who built their own water skis out of laminated marine plywood. Later, Chapin would use a similar method to craft skis of his own.

Chapin volunteered for and served in the Army Air Force for a year in 1944, acting as a physical training instructor in Amarillo, Texas (he was “slight but had a big voice”) and attending three months of radio school before being discharged and earning a mechanical engineering degree at the University of Minnesota. Before graduating, he spent a winter as a “ski bum” busing and waiting tables in Aspen — then a former mining town and soon-to-be tourist mecca.

“At that time I could have bought property worth multimillions (today),” he noted. “I suppose that’s one of my regrets.”



Tom Chapin makes a turn during a run at one of his favorite skiing locales: Aspen. - Submitted photo

After graduation, he moved to Connecticut to work for an air conditioning firm, skiing New England and brushing up his water skiing skills in Long Island Sound on weekends. That's when he missed his childhood next-door neighbor and sometime girlfriend Anzle Adamson; they were engaged by mail, married in 1951 and moved to Cleveland.

In 1953 they moved back to White Bear Lake, where Chapin worked in engineering for Hamm Brewing Co. for 20 years and 3M for 22 years while he stepped up his competition in both snow skiing and water skiing events. His first water ski competition was the Minneapolis Aquatennial tournament in 1955, where he won five of six trophies in slalom, jumping and overall categories. After that, he entered each yearly competition sponsored by the Bald Eagle Water Club (of which he was a charter member) and competed in national tournaments across the U.S.; of those, he took four first-places in slalom and medaled in several others in slalom and tricks.

Because of his success in and support of waterskiing over the years, he was inducted into the Minnesota Water Ski Hall of Fame in 1991. Between the years of 1971 and 1985 he, Paul and Evelyn were sponsored by CorrectCraft and given free usage of a CorrectCraft ski boat each season; they took it to tournaments and shared it with others as part of a promotional program.

Though his accomplishments in snow skiing competitions haven't been as lofty, he said he still enjoys competing. He bought a condo in Aspen several years ago and has skied there several weeks per year ever since, often joined by his four children and their families. He's also traveled to many famous ski slopes across the world.

"I like the exhilaration of mountain skiing ... the high-speed carving and the steep runs," he explained. "With water skiing, it's more about the camaraderie with other skiers."

That camaraderie resulted in some close friendships through the years, Chapin said, noting that he still regularly sees local water skiing friends from back in the day.

Chapin said he's been seriously hurt while skiing a few times; twice he broke a leg, once a water ski slammed him in the chest at 32 mph and a month ago he fell on his chest snow skiing, bruising some cartilage.

He was also a member of the Wild Mountain Ski Patrol for 25 years.

Anzle died in 1995 and Chapin married his current wife, longtime White Bear Lake resident Ida Batroot Chapin (a snowshoer and cross country skier) in 1999. These days, the grandfather of six skies in leagues with his children about four times a week. Paul and Evelyn both still compete nationally.

His five-year goal? "Just staying healthy and active. We do ski quite a bit. You just have to keep moving."

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