



Lifestyle

Section B

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mobile Derby and Eagle River's Derby Track.

No stranger to the North Woods, Wolf made his first visits in 1967 and '68, when he raced his grandfather's 1967 Polaris snowmobile in the Hodag Race.

Wolf, 74, has been sledging since he was 12, when his grandfather hand-built a snowmobile. It's a tradition that's been passed down from Wolf's grandfather to Wolf's six grandchildren.

"I've been around snowmobiles my whole life. I just love snowmobiles. It's a big thrill," said Wolf, a fan of trail riding in Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Wolf was involved in racing as a teen, starting with his grandfather's 1964 Ski-Doo.

In 1968, Wolf and his dad bought a Skiroule dealership in West Bend, setting out their shingle as H.J. Wolf and Son. Wolf raced 650 and 800 Skiroules, ultimately making it to the 1971 snowmobiling World Series in Bloomville, N.Y., on his 800.

"My belt broke. I did not finish," he recalled.

After graduating from UW-Milwaukee with a Bachelor of Science in architecture, Wolf served in the U.S. Army in 1971-'72 and then, worked for his father in the construction business in West Bend, his hometown.

Enlisted in the Army Reserves from 1972-'84, Wolf rejoined the U.S. Army full time, serving until 1999. Rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel, Wolf would be posted to Stuttgart and Karlsruhe, Germany, in rear-area operations war planning in the 1980s. In the 1990s, he was posted to the Army National Guard in Madison as director of logistics.

After retiring from the Army, Wolf worked for Kingsway Homes, a high-end custom home builder in Milwaukee, until his 2013 retirement and subsequent move to Eagle River in September 2013, where his wife had vacationed as a youth.

Wolf, a born raconteur who loves the conviviality and camaraderie of sledgers, joined the Sno-Eagles his first winter living in the North Woods.

"I want to snowmobile until I croak. Eagle River is the home of snowmobiling. You want to go snowmobiling in Wisconsin, you go to Eagle River," said Wolf.

Wolf was elected club president in March 2016, serving until March 2022.

The inspiration for the book came when Wolf ran across nearly 25 large Rubbermaid storage totes in the Sno-Eagles groomer barn.

"They were full of meeting minutes, newspaper clipping and photographs," he recalled. "Some of it was organized and some of it was stuff in a bucket. I took a bucket or two home and I'd dump everything out of it. As I'm going through it, I'm taking notes going 'This is really interesting. I'm gonna find out how this club started.' So I started writing this stuff down. Once I got into it, it was so interesting. I thought 'This needs to be written down so other people can understand the history of the club.' That was just so exciting for me."

The end result of his dive into Sno-Eagles history was the book, which Wolf calls an assemblage of notes on the club's 50-plus year history.

"It was enlightening to learn about the history of snowmobiling in Eagle River and the people involved," said Wolf. "Part of it is like the military; I'm proud to be associated with the club because of the history and what they did."

Wolf collaborated with Sno-Eagles Board Director Carole Linn, who edited the book, and Cole Publishing graphic designer Matt Van-Skyhawk, who laid out the book and did the artwork.



Wolf displays a copy of his new book, now available.

A total of 1,000 copies were printed by Eagle River-based Hahn Printing. The book was released in early January.

Wolf said the importance of sledding to the economy and the larger North Woods has loomed large since the snowmobiles came to town in 1964, with the inaugural derby on Dollar Lake.

"Snowmobiling is a big boost to the economy," said Wolf. "Snowmobiles are synonymous with Eagle River and that's the economy in the wintertime. The silent sports are great, but they're not bringing the tourism dollars into the area. How many bicycles do you see parked on trailers out in front of a hotel or something? You don't. They come up, pack their lunch, bike for a day and go away; whereas snowmobilers are buying gas, cocktails and food. They're staying overnight. There's money being spent."

For Wolf, telling the story about the rich legacy of snowmobiling in Eagle River is important, not the writer behind the book.

"I didn't do this book to make a name for myself," said Wolf. "It's not about this guy; it's about snowmobiling in Eagle River, how it really put Eagle River on the map. That's what's important. The book is to promote snowmobiling and Eagle River. I'm so happy to live here. I'm living in the Snowmobile Capital of the World."

Reviews of the book have been positive.

"I really enjoyed going through it, reading the history," said Hartford resident Mike Nagel, who has a rare, limited production 1978 Ski-Doo RV on display in Eagle River's International Snowmobile Hall of Fame (ISHOF). "I love vintage sleds. He did a real great job compiling a lot of good history. It's an interesting book. I had a good time reading, sifting through it. Snowmobiling is a great sport."

Another fan of the book is ISHOF's Vice President Jeff Schwaller of Wausauke.

"I've enjoyed it very much. Being involved in snowmobile clubs my whole life, and knowing what it takes to maintain a trail system and all that stuff, I could totally relate to everything I was reading. What's in that book could be the identity of many clubs," he said.

"A Frozen Journey: The History of Snowmobiling in Eagle River, Wisconsin" is available for purchase at the chamber of commerce and World Snowmobile Headquarters in Eagle River, and the Snowmobile Hall of Fame in St. Germain for \$25. The book also is available at the Sno-Eagles club store at snoeagles.org.

All proceeds from the sale of the book support Eagle River's Sno-Eagles Snowmobile Club, which grooms 79 miles of world-class sledding trails with the assistance of 12 club groomer drivers who collectively log more than 1,200 grooming hours each sledding season.

"It's expensive to operate that iron out there to groom the trails; 100 gallons of diesel fuel costs \$400, \$500, and it's three, four days and you're filling it again," said Wolf.

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Not that you asked, but...

By Eric Johnson



Rusty gold

"His No. 1 hobby in life was snowmobiling. He'd go home for the weekend, and come back and say 'I started the snowmobile.' And we'd say 'But there was no snow' and he would say he just wanted to smell the smoke." —Brett Bailey

While Vilas County's 500 miles of state-funded and club snowmobile trails closed for the season March 18, Mother Nature's lingering icy grip on the North Woods has many area residents still in a wintry state of mind.

For those with visions of snowmobiling still dancing in their heads, a good spring read might be Eagle River resident Howard "Rusty" Wolf's three-year labor of love "A Frozen Journey: The History of Snowmobiling in Eagle River, Wisconsin."

A resident of Eagle River since 2013, Wolf, the longtime former president of Eagle River's Sno-Eagles Snowmobile Club, has compiled a thick and lavishly-illustrated history of how the snowmobile and the sport of snowmobiling, including snowmobile racing, transformed Eagle River from a desolate North Woods winter town into the world-renowned Snowmobile Capital of the World®.

The book, Wolf's first, documents the formation and development of the storied 52-year-old Sno-Eagles, established in 1965, by Eagle River sledgers Doc Doyle and Rudy Spiess as the Northwoods Sno-Mo Club, as well as the history of the World Championship Snow-

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