

# THREDBO ALPINE MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

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Photo Credit - Greg Hughes - Main Range 1957

## Presidents Report

This past year has been another good one for Thredbo Alpine Museum (TAM). We have run three fabulous and well attended events with the first two featuring Brad Spalding and the history of the Thredbo Ski School. We returned to the RAHS House for our Sydney reunion and for the first time met in the newly renovated Schuss Bar on the Saturday of the June long weekend.

The TAM Faces of Thredbo dinner was a most interesting evening hearing about many aspects of Thredbo history and honouring the Deseo Family who built and managed Candlelight Lodge and Robin Dyke who was the architect of around 140 buildings in Thredbo Village. Their speeches can be viewed on YouTube:

**Mark Davidson**

<https://youtu.be/6YsV-122Cc0?si=1ddsPzu3axtWCOVa>

**Andrew Fairfield-Smith**

[https://youtu.be/\\_-QG5cwyUVw?si=QH9PrSc28KnE4iuR\](https://youtu.be/_-QG5cwyUVw?si=QH9PrSc28KnE4iuR\)

**Helen Najar**

[https://youtu.be/u9t17Pq1igg?si=iGVLDNhfc\\_1bJKtu](https://youtu.be/u9t17Pq1igg?si=iGVLDNhfc_1bJKtu)

The Kosciusko Thredbo company greatly helps TAM by offering a room for our Museum and season passes that are used to secure volunteers to work in the Museum. We work closely with KT Conferences for our events and the Media department to promote the museum.

One day we might have a new venue but for the immediate future, we are concentrating on improving our existing Museum and making the TAM website more interactive. It is a huge job to feature all of TAM's collection on the website but we are working on it.

Alan Fredricks has just retired from TAM after being a member for 20 years and President for half that time. Many things were accomplished during his time including improving the Museum, funding from Grants, increasing awareness of what was then the Thredbo Historical Society and establishing the Faces of Thredbo. Thredbo owes a lot to Alan and we thank him very much.

If there is anyone who would like to be involved with TAM please contact us.

**Randy & Errol**

**TAM Presidents.**

# 'Thanks for the memories' Words from Alan Fredericks - TAM President of 20 Years!

Following my resignation from the TAM committee this year, I have been invited to prepare for the newsletter, highlights, achievements and challenges during that time from my observations.

My introduction to Thredbo came through my home town of Kiama forming a ski club in 1958 to build a now 30 bed lodge in Buckwong Place. I served as President of that club for 24 years from 1985 to 2009.

I joined the Thredbo Historical Society (THS) committee in 2009 at the request of Graeme Holloway, THS Founder. Interestingly, my first official duty as President, was to attend the opening of our "physical" museum. This involved the presentation ceremony by Thredbo General Manager, Kim Clifford, of a symbolic wooden key (made by Frank Prihoda) to Sasha Nekvapil – a very pleasant experience.

Shortly afterwards we produced a promotional video for the museum featuring Frank Prihoda, Graeme Holloway and myself.

As the museum grew in visitation numbers, we needed to "grow" our list of volunteers to open the museum.

We were very fortunate to have the Company's (Kosciuszko Thredbo) support in our endeavours.

Some of the other progressive developments I was able to see achieved were:

- The holding of an annual Sydney function for our Sydney members hosted at the RAHS in Macquarie St. This continues to be very popular.
- The introduction by our committee in 2014 to establish the annual "Faces of Thredbo" awards in honour of those who have made significant contributions to Australian skiing and/or Thredbo in particular.
- The formation of the Australian Alpine Ski History Association (AASHA) in 2014. Having learned from Graeme Holloway, TAM Life Member, about what had been achieved by the USA, I took the initiative to contact Michael Monester, President of NAMA, Mt Buller, to get his support and cooperation in hosting the inaugural meeting in 2014. AASHA is now made up of the following Historical Societies: Thredbo & Perisher (NSW), Mt Buller & Falls Creek (Victoria) and Ben Lomond & Southern Tasmania (Tasmania).
- Thredbo Historical Society decided to produce a book to celebrate Thredbo's 60th Anniversary in 2017. THS Member, Chas Keys, was approached to be the author and the book, "Thredbo – Pioneers, Legends, Community" was launched at a 2017 winter function at History House in Sydney by Marta Dusseldorp. It was to receive in 2018 the "Skade Book Award" from the International Skiing History Association.

My role in our museum operations was significantly supported by TAM Life Member, Chrissi Webb, who has contributed an enormous amount of time and effort as our Museum Administrator. Also, I was blessed with a very supportive group of vice presidents.

Thank you

*Alan Fredericks*



Alan and Kate Fredericks and Family

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# Faces of Thredbo Dinner

## Helen Najar - Guest Speaker

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### Thredbo Ski School – The Untold Story

The First 20 Years of Women in the Early Days of the Thredbo Ski School

Researched and written by Helen Najar – Winter 2025  
Presented at the "Faces of Thredbo" Dinner – September 2, 2025

The research that produced this article was undertaken during the winter of 2025. It reflects the information available at the time, yet it is not intended to be a complete account. Gaps inevitably remain—not because the stories were unimportant, but because they were tucked away in memory, lost in the bustle of a mountain village, or simply forgotten through the passing of time.

The Thredbo Alpine Museum welcomes any further information, corrections, or personal recollections that may help expand, refine, or enrich this historical record.

### Introduction: Why I Began This Journey

When I first set out to explore the early history of women within the Thredbo Ski School, I secretly believed I already understood the storyline. Like many people, I assumed I would uncover a history of exclusion—of talented women held back, silenced, or relegated to the margins while their male colleagues took centre stage. After all, that's a narrative we've heard in many industries and many eras.



Thredbo Ski Instructor 1977 – Helen Najar

But as I delved deeper—through interviews, archives, fading photographs, and memories told with equal parts pride and laughter—I realised something quite different.

Yes, there were few women on the Thredbo Ski School in its first 20 years. Yes, they often found themselves tucked away on the beginner slopes, far from the high-profile terrain of Kozi or Crackenback. And yes, there were rules and biases that would sound absurd today.

But absence is not the same as exclusion.

These women weren't being held back. The opportunities were there for those bold enough to take them. They simply belonged to a generation of Australians for whom skiing was still new, foreign, and—for women in particular—unusual. Those who did find their way to the mountain tended to be adventurers, travellers, linguists, free spirits, and highly skilled athletes who brought overseas training and international teaching experience straight into the heart of a fledgling Australian ski industry.

This story is about those women: pioneering, resilient, quietly determined, and far more influential than many have realised. Their experiences formed part of the foundation of one of Australia's most respected ski schools. And their legacy shaped the opportunities available to women like me, who came after them.

### A Personal Beginning

Nearly 50 years ago, in the late 1970s, I was a young instructor on the Thredbo Ski School. These were the early years of Merritts, which had opened a decade earlier in 1968 and soon became the home of beginner and intermediate classes—relocating them from the Basin, where early lessons had once been held.

Back then, for reasons nobody explained (and probably nobody questioned), women did not teach on Crackenback—known at the time simply as "Crackenback," the jewel of Thredbo's slopes and the terrain most associated with serious skiing.

In 1979, during my final season in Thredbo, something happened that changed the trajectory of my memory of that time. I had been teaching the three daughters of a very proud father. He wrote a letter to Arnold Conrad, the ski school director, praising my skills. That letter was read aloud at the weekly Sunday night ski school meeting—an event that was both nerve-racking and thrilling for any instructor—and when the roster was unveiled for the week ahead, there it was:

I was rostered to teach adults on Crackenback. At the time, everyone treated it as a first, a breakthrough, a moment of pride. And I felt exactly that—immensely proud.

# Cont....Helen Najar - Guest Speaker

But as I began researching the history of women in the ski school, I stumbled across earlier stories, earlier names, earlier achievements. And with every discovery, I felt a small wave of imposter syndrome wash over me. I realised that the story of women teaching on Crackenback did not begin with me—not by a long shot.

And that is why this research became something far more personal and far more meaningful than I expected.

## A Snapshot from 1969: Life on the Slopes

To understand the early years of the ski school—and the women who were part of it—let's step back to 1969.

Picture a young woman standing somewhere in the back bowls of Thredbo. Snow blankets the ground; the wind is sharp. She is teaching a group of beginners—often children—because that was considered the most suitable assignment for female instructors. The idea of women teaching high-level lessons was still seen as improbable, even though many were more than capable.

She works seven-hour days in cold, wet conditions. Her uniform is a spongy red jacket—always too big because, of course, it was designed for a man. Down the sleeves run the iconic white stripes, and despite the size and stiffness, she wears it proudly.

Remember, this was the age before Gore-Tex. Before breathable waterproof textiles. Before everything was windproof, seam-sealed, and scientifically engineered. Her answer to the elements?

A green garbage bag under her jacket. Pink dishwashing gloves under her mittens. And a grin that said, "Nothing can stop me."

These early instructors worked hard. They mucked in. They dealt with snow, slush, wind, and rain. But above all, they taught—joyfully, passionately, and with a love of the mountains that transcended the discomfort.

## The Unspoken Rules

Unwritten expectations shaped much of mountain life in those decades.

Women were not allowed to teach on Kozi or the Supertrail—two of the most visible and prestigious slopes. When the Antons T-Bar opened in 1978, it became a small liberation, allowing female instructors rostered on Merritts to venture slightly further afield. But even then, they weren't permitted to ski back to the village via the catwalk or the intermediate slopes.

And if they did ski home down Supertrail or take the Kozi Chair? They were told to turn their jackets inside out.

Why? Because a woman slipping on the ice—and being seen slipping—was considered more "unprofessional" than a man doing exactly the same thing.

It seems laughable today, but those attitudes were not malicious. They were simply part of the social landscape.

Mountains were male-dominated spaces by tradition, not by policy. Women were rare, so people made assumptions about their capabilities—assumptions these women quietly, steadily, and skillfully demolished.

The irony, of course, was that the women proved, exceptional, disciplined, dedicated outstanding communicators.

Highly respected by both students and senior staff.

When a woman were rostered on Kozi, it wasn't tokenism. It meant she had earned a place at the very top—literally and figuratively.

## The First Woman in Thredbo: 1965

So who were these early female pioneers?

The Thredbo Ski School was founded in 1958 with two Austrian men as the inaugural instructors.

Then in 1965—seven years later—the first female instructor arrived.

### Margot Thatcher

Not that Margaret Thatcher, but Margot Thatcher, an adventurous Aussie who had trained and taught in Canada before coming to Thredbo.

Margot stayed for five years, bouncing seasonally between Austria and Australia. She became something of a local legend—not just because of her teaching talent but because she managed to juggle three careers at once:

- Ski instructor
- Occupational therapist
- Australia's original importer of Bogner ski clothing

There is a delightful interview on YouTube with Randy Wieman in which Margot reminisces about her days in Thredbo. She speaks warmly of Leonard Erhart, the ski school director, and admits—somewhat sheepishly—that she often taught in her sleek Bogner outfit instead of the regulation spongy red jacket. And somehow, she got away with it.

Her story alone could fill an entire chapter of Australian ski history.

### Sylvia King (now Beddow)

Next came Sylvia King, another Australian who built her teaching foundation overseas. Sylvia spent three seasons instructing in Austria—at Igls, Alpbach, and Saalbach—before returning home.

By 1969, she held a Canadian Level 1 certificate and brought genuine international experience into the Thredbo Ski School.

# Cont....Helen Najar - Guest Speaker

Sylvia was a trailblazer not because of any particular moment of rebellion or defiance, but simply because she represented something new: Australian women stepping onto the international stage of ski instruction.

## Marion Murrie

Then there was Marion Murrie, originally from Tasmania. Her recollections of exact dates are hazy, but her memory of the director was crystal clear. When I asked, "Was it Leonard Erhart?" She replied instantly, "Yes! I remember him—the tall, skinny, bad-tempered one!"

Marion lived in Thredbo for many years during the 1970s.

She spoke fluent French, German, and Italian and later became certified through the French Alliance. She spent years escorting groups on ski holidays across Europe, sharing her passion for travel and the mountains.

## Christine Smith: Olympian and Instructor

Then came Christine Smith, a Cooma local, Australian representative at the 1962 Commonwealth Games and the 1964 Winter Olympics.

Sylvia King recalls working alongside Christine in 1979. Christine also taught for Perisher at one point.

And yes, the rumours are true: Christine Smith taught the Beatles to ski.

She trained them for the film *Help!* and even appeared in the movie. Her presence in Thredbo added a touch of international glamour, further enriching the diversity of the women who shaped the ski school.

## The Europeans Arrive

By the mid-1960s and early '70s, a number of European women joined the emerging Australian ski scene. Some were passing through; others stayed for seasons at a time.

Nick Dean swears he took lessons from a French woman around 1964. I have searched high and low for evidence of this mysterious mademoiselle. Thus far, she remains elusive—perhaps a dream, perhaps a memory blurred by time. But history is always evolving, so if anyone knows more, I'm eager to hear it—and eager to save Nick's reputation!



## Ursula Berchtold: The Swiss Powerhouse

Among the most respected early instructors was Ursula Berchtold, a Swiss-born former alpine racer who represented Switzerland in her youth. She joined the Thredbo Ski School from 1970 to 1974.

Highly qualified and fiercely skilled, Ursula advanced quickly. Like everyone else, she began in the beginner bowls, but she was soon coaching local junior racers—naturally placing her on Crackenback long before most women reached that terrain.

Ursula's presence added depth and professionalism to the ski school, and many local kids trained under her guidance.

## The Local Kids Join the School

In those days, local children trained primarily through the Thredbo Race Club. If they didn't progress to higher-level competition, they often found themselves recruited into the ski school—especially during school holidays.

It was, in many ways, a rite of passage.

Two such instructors were Jane Lucas and Kerry Clifford. Kerry, in particular, loved teaching and stayed for several seasons. She rarely taught adults, but she fondly recalls one memorable week when she and Rod Dunning were rostered to instruct the Army boys. Competitive to the core, Kerry proudly skied her soldiers down High Noon at week's end—claiming victory with a smile.

## The First North American Woman: Karryn Karries

"Canadian Karryn," as many knew her, arrived in 1975—possibly the first North American woman on the Thredbo Ski School. She arrived during the explosive rise of skiing's popularity in Australia and joined a ski school eager for experienced instructors.

Karryn brought something new: freestyle.

She competed in bumps, aerials, and ballet—making her an invaluable addition during the early Hot Dog days. She was joined by Sydney's own Katy Buckland, another female freestyle talent.

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# Cont....Helen Najar - Guest Speaker

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## A New Era: Late 1970s

Leonard Erhart retired in 1977.

**Arnold Konrad (Austria) and Maurice Flutie (New Zealand) stepped into leadership.**

The culture shifted.

Arnold recognised the potential of local talent, and by the late 1970s, more Australians—particularly young men—began joining the ski school.

And, of course, where the boys went, the girls followed. The ratio of women on staff rose to around 10%. Today, it sits closer to 40–45%.

## My Own Story

I joined the Thredbo Ski School in 1977. Our small group of women remained fairly consistent over the next few years:

- Canadian Karryn
- Lucy Neville from New Zealand
- Kinsey Rose from Scotland
- Katy Buckland from Sydney
- Debbie Goodwin, who joined in '79

Like Margot and Sylvia before me, my teaching career began in Europe. At 18, full of enthusiasm and hungry for adventure, I travelled to Austria and found myself in the small village of Kolsass-Weer in the Tyrolean Valley.

The ski school director, Claus Schosser, saw something in me. He invited me to return the following season—he would teach me how to teach.

It was a life-changing moment.

My father, however, was horrified. I had been invited to study at the Conservatorium of Music, and now I was turning it down to become a ski instructor.

But I did return. And skiing became my world.

My time in Thredbo was shorter than some—just three years—but meaningful. I was proud to be an early APSI adopter, passing the Associate level in 1977 and the Full Certification in 1979—becoming the first Australian woman to do so. At last, my father forgave me for abandoning the Conservatorium.

## Before Thredbo: The First Australian Female Instructor

Before closing, I must acknowledge one more extraordinary woman—Patricia "Patsy" Finlayson.

On May 1, 1941, The Sydney Morning Herald featured her on its front page, announcing that Patsy had been appointed the first Australian female ski instructor, teaching at the Kosciusko Chalet at Charlotte Pass.

She trained in the Swiss Alps, competed in major European events, and studied at the famous Hannes Schneider School.

Her story deserves its own dedicated research and will be told another time.

## Conclusion: What This Research Really Revealed

I began this project expecting to uncover a history of barriers.

Instead, I found women who broke ground not because they fought the system, but because they simply seized the opportunities before them—opportunities that were available to anyone willing to step forward with courage and conviction.

These women were well-educated, adventurous, and spirited. They fell in love with skiing. They met mentors who recognised their talent. And they discovered that teaching on the mountain was one of the most fulfilling experiences of their lives.

When asked what it was like working in what appeared to be a male-dominated world, their answers were remarkably similar:

From the outside, they may have seemed like celebrities.

On the inside, they were simply doing what they loved. They loved the snow gums. They loved the elements. They loved teaching.

And most of all, they loved the mountain community—where men and women shared mutual respect.

These women carved far more than ski tracks. They carved opportunities. They carved respect. They carved a legacy.

And today, their legacy continues to inspire every female instructor who steps into a red jacket on the slopes of Thredbo.

— Helen Najar

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# Faces of Thredbo Award

## The Deseo Family (Candlelight Lodge)

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### Mark Davidson - Guest Speaker

Mark Davidson, grandson of Suzie and Kornel Deseo.

I'm not sure how many of you knew my grandparents. I know some of you did. But for those who don't, that's what they looked like towards the end. And that's what they looked like a few years beforehand.

That's kind of how I remember them. A little bit older than that, but stylish, fun, modest people, discreet, hardworking, intelligent, caring people. They were interested in everybody having a good life. And these are the people who built Candlelight Lodge in 1958.

Like the other faces of Thredbo, these two people were very remarkable individuals.

But after making it through World War II, he and Suzie decided it was time to leave and in 1949 they made a new life for themselves here in Australia.

They faced tremendous adversity together in World War I. Kornel's grandfather invested the family fortune in war bonds issued by the Austria-Hungarian government, which following its collapse, were worthless. So Kornel had to start from scratch after World War I and he built a life for himself as a very well respected lawyer, with a wide network of support in his home country.

It was Thredbo and Candlelight Lodge which were the beating heart of that new life and that's why this place is so important to them.

But why were they important to this place?

I think it's just timing. There were many smart, hardworking people who had a passion and desire to make skiing work in Australia in those days. They just happened to be here at the right time in the right place.

So, as a result of that, they built a great life for themselves and their daughter and my family. And, that's wonderful to be able to look back on.

Kornel spoke at the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations for Thredbo Village, at the request of Dick Dusseldorf, someone he held in high regard. So important an occasion, he kept a note in his records from Albert Van der Lee praising his and Suzie's attendance.

When he went to that event he gave a speech and I want to quote from him "on the mountain, there are no foreigners on the mountain, everyone is equal". That was really important to him and I think that says a lot about what he thought was important and why he was a good person to be here in Thredbo and helping all the people who were helping to make it happen.

Mum wrote an obituary for him and she summed it up this way.

Thredbo was truly their salvation. They loved it. They worked and skied there for 21 years establishing Candlelight Lodge as a byword for luxury quality and service where Suzie's cooking was legendary.



Candlelight Bar

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## Cont... Faces of Thredbo - The Deseo Family (Candlelight Lodge)

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That was a pretty good summation of their lives. I remember listening in the 70s when I first became aware of memory.

When Suzie would come back from Europe they would show us slides of their annual trip to various exotic places in Europe and America. She was always interested in two things, the food and the skiing.

So she'd come back with some tweaks for her menu at Candlelight and pictures of the ski runs and she'd tell me how great they were. It's just like High Noon but three times as long and with a lot more snow.

Kornel also wanted to ski, but he also wanted to catch up with some old mates. And luckily one of his old mates ran a Ski factory in Austria. So every year when they came back my sister and I would inherit last year's new model skis from our grandparents. That was pretty good. But that was all a long way ahead of them in the 1930s where I want to start talking about them.

Growing up in Hungary in the 1930s, both Kornel and Susie were elite sports people, but being so modest and discreet, I didn't discover until I was an adult. I had no idea.

Kornel was the 50 km langlauf ski champion of Hungary for several years in a row. Suzie was tennis champion. I remember as an adult, my grandmother, we were talking about something and she casually mentioned she'd been invited when she was a junior tennis player to play with an athletics club in England, which I learned was Wimbledon.

Kornel was in the top national water polo team. Suzie took up skiing because the boys she hung out with liked it and she became extremely good at it.

They encouraged my mother in alpine sports. But she took the first opportunity to leave Australia when they built the Candlelight to move to England and become a ballerina. She was a ballerina.

Continuing their lives, Hungary wasn't a great place to be after the war. So, in 1949, Kornel and Suzie decided to take their daughter, Suzanne, my mother, and leave Hungary. Luckily for the family, Kornel had a successful career as a lawyer because at that time the Iron Curtain was still heavily drawn and you weren't allowed to leave Hungary without permission which they didn't have.

Mum remembers the story of their escape because that's what it was.

They were taken by a young man from a local village through barbed wire with search lights. It was very scary. She remembers two things. She remembers the respect with which the young man helped Kornel.

I found out years later it was because in the 20s this boy had been charged with a crime and Kornel had represented him as a lawyer and got him off.

Well, the wheel turns. So 1949 comes and this guy is there to help them get out of the country.

The other thing mum remembers about it is that how often that big guy had had to go off into the bushes to relieve himself because he was very nervous they were going to get caught. Anyway, they made it out to Austria.

When they left Austria they went straight to Australia and they spoke very little English. My grandparents spoke virtually no English and my mother had almost no English. It was a very difficult and challenging start for them.

Kornel was a lawyer, had quite a support group. My grandmother was a sophisticated woman who also had a support group. They had very little here. They had only what they brought with them. And they really found it challenging. He worked three jobs, hard manual labor. Stories of him leaving home in his suit with his silk handkerchief and his briefcase. get to work, take his boiler suit out of the briefcase, change into it, do his shift. But he always had two or three jobs.



Guest Speaker Mark Davidson  
Photo Credit - Steve Cuff

## Cont... Faces of Thredbo - The Deseo Family (Candlelight Lodge)

My grandmother also worked very hard at that time using her skills as a seamstress. There's a little bit of a connection to the the naming of Candlelight from that.

But after a few years, they discovered there were mountains in Australia with snow. And that made everything a whole lot better.

Every winter, my grandfather and grandmother used to go down to Charlotte's Pass and he would be a ski instructor. As an elite champion skier he was able to get the work.

Sasha, a well known Thredbo figure and neighbour to Candlelight was also an elite racing skier but said she had no idea how to teach and learned from a book. Well, if Cornell had that book, he certainly didn't read it.

I remember hearing about one student at Charlottes Pass, he clearly felt it was a bit soft, not putting enough hard work in it. And, I remember watching him smile and nod as my mother told me the story of him pushing this poor unfortunate down the slope, yelling, "Bends the knees forward." And that was that was how he taught.

Anyway, he was luckily quite an attractive young man and made it through each season and was invited back again and apparently had many adoring pupils who flocked around to receive instruction from this charismatic immigrant with the twinkle in his eye.

A few years later in the mid 50s, Tony Sponar asked my grandparents to come and have a look at a spot in the Koziosco area where a few people were thinking about starting a small skiing village. There was spartan accommodation, and no village yet.

But my grandparents looked at this place and just saw the future.

They woke up the next morning. They looked out at Crackenback Mountain and they decided this was where they were going to make their big gamble on life in Australia.



Kornel & Suzie

Kornel went down to the office and said, "What do I do?" and they said just grab a stake, stick it in the ground.

So that's what he did and that's where Candlelight is now.

And that's what they looked at when they decided that they were going to invest every penny they had in building a ski lodge.

A couple of days later after they got back to Sydney from that visit, they ran into Charles Anton and they told him they had decided to make that commitment. He told them it was a bad idea. Don't risk all of your money on this. And he was Mr. skiing in those days. He just thought that was a little bit too much. But they had made their decision.

And luckily for us, they were here in 1956 making that decision instead of in Budapest when the tanks were rolling through.

## Cont... Faces of Thredbo - The Deseo Family (Candlelight Lodge)

I spent every year at Candlelight as a child and summer and winter and I got to play with a lot of village children at many of the lodges, there was Kasees, the House of Ullr, there was Lantern, Kornel and Suzie made their reputation by being great hosts.

They were a little bit older than a lot of people who were running the village at the time and perhaps a little bit more experienced and sophisticated in their life and that might have had a little bit to do with it. At first, they did everything, but they we're having a good time.

Kornel spent more time on the business side, and Suzie continued to run the kitchen, where she could always be found. She was a professional chef cooking for 50 people in a bed and breakfast., and ahead of her time, she offered vegetarian dishes. And one of her fondest experiences in Thredbo happened after they sold Candlelight. We came back and rented an apartment, and she got to just cook for five or six people. It was like a holiday.

Candlelight Lodge opened in Easter 1958 so they could start getting some business and of course first winter season 1958 they were the first commercial lodge.

So in October of 1956, the Hungarians took to the streets of Budapest in armed revolt. It took about a month before the Russians came and crushed them. But here, about a year later, we had Candlelight Lodge in existence and designed by Bela Racsko, influenced by traditional European designs and built with traditional alpine materials by a group of Eastern European immigrants led by Rasco.

The reason that the name Candlelight was picked was because when they first started working here in the 50s, Susie made money as a seamstress. She created a fashion label of sorts and she pretty much made everything herself at night by candlelight.

Her mother suggested that, that would be a good name for her fashion label. So she called it Candlelight Creations.

She sold to Farmers, now Myers, DJs, the big department stores and city boutiques. She did pretty well for herself, but she worked hard.



Stuart Diver presenting Mark with The Faces of Thredbo Award on behalf of The Deseo Family.

When they decided, they were going to build this place, they were clearly going to work hard. So, Candlelight Lodge it had to be. Her pieces were high quality; I kept some of them and they are still wearable today.

She died 25 years ago. That's pretty good, so I've got a lot of respect for her ability as a seamstress.

Now Candlelight Lodge was pretty small at first, but they did build several extensions, starting in the 60s as a much bigger concern. There were nooks and crannies everywhere, a heated swimming pool, views that were untroubled by all of the development. Really a much-loved destination for so many people.

Here today, it still has its charm. But their contribution isn't just a building. They brought people together and they helped the village to grow.

Kornel and Suzie were quite the ambassadors for Thredbo initially. There weren't very many people here, so they had to be. There were newspaper articles from the late 50s and the early 60s a Women's Day feature in 1959. This PR really helped the village. That's part of how people got to know about Thredbo through the media.

They supported the community, examples include; their friend Elaine Mitchell, Martin Boyd, the well-known ceramicist who made ashtrays, cups, decorative dishes which they used in the lodge. You could buy a Martin Boyd ashtray with a Candlelight Lodge design. And that extended into the village, they were very discreet, very helpful people.

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## Cont... Faces of Thredbo - The Deseo Family (Candlelight Lodge)

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They didn't blow their own trumpets. They wanted life to be better for themselves and for everybody else.

One of the things I really remember is how they approached things very quietly, speaking directly to the right person to get things done. Whilst Suzie didn't succeed with her goal of a shuttle service in the village she did live long enough to see one start.

More than the building, it's the lives of the people they touched. And I met many couples as a child spending time in Candlelight who I had met at Candlelight as young people, come back every year and now they were bringing their kids. I met people in Sydney who had no idea who I was, but when they found out that I was connected to Candlelight, they were very effusive about their experiences there.

Suzie and Kornel would be very proud and appreciative of my being here tonight.

Finally, Cornell died and Susie died about a year after that but before she died, she made me promise to do something before I died to make sure that they were remembered in Thredbo.

So, I have huge thanks to the committee and the museum for giving me this chance to fulfill that promise.

And thank you very much for listening to me.

Thank you

-Mark Davidson

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## Faces of Thredbo Award Robin Dyke

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At the Faces of Thredbo Dinner, we were delighted to hear Robin Dyke's story delivered by Andrew Fairfield-Smith about his remarkable role in Thredbo's development. Here's a YouTube link to watch it - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_-QG5cwyUVw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_-QG5cwyUVw)

**We look forward to sharing more with you in our next newsletter**

# Faces of Thredbo

## HONOUR BOARD

Recognises those who have made significant contributions to skiing and or the development of Thredbo as an alpine resort.

Those honoured are recognised below

### **2014**

Leonhard Erhartert  
Barry May  
Michael Milton  
Sasha Nekvapil  
Frank Prikoda

### **2015**

Charles Anton  
Dick Dusseldorp  
Cees Koeman  
Tony Sponar  
Tommy Tomasi

### **2016**

George Freuden  
Geoffrey Hughes  
Andrew Thyne Reid

### **2017**

Elyne Mitchell  
Rudi Schatzle

### **2018**

Albert van der Lee  
Bela Racsko

### **2019**

Ludwig Rabina  
Wayne Kirkpatrick

### **2021**

Kim Clifford  
Bob Arnott

### **2022**

Michelle & Heinz Reichinger

### **2023**

Steve Breathour  
Ian Foster

### **2024**

Ron Finneran  
Kurt Lance

### **2025**

Robin Dyke  
The Deseo Family  
(Candlelight Lodge)

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# Thredbo Alpine Museum (TAM)

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## Did You Know

### Why is Friday Flat called Friday Flat?

Drovers moving cattle through the Thredbo Valley often rested at a riverside clearing. On one occasion, a boss drover, frustrated by the late arrival of extra stockmen, sarcastically referred to the older man as "Robinson Crusoe" and the younger man as "Man Friday". This led to the clearing being nicknamed Man Friday Flat, which was later shortened to Friday Flat.

Source: Accordians In the Snow Gums, Thredbo's Early Years by Helen Swinbourne 2006.

*We thank our team of community volunteers that have enabled Thredbo Alpine Museum's doors to be open 85 days throughout Winter 2025.*

# Events

## EVENTS 2026

### April 14

#### Committee Meeting

Thredbo 11am

### May 12

#### Guest speaker: Greg Hughes

Discussion topic: his father's recently discovered documents regarding the creation of the Thredbo lease.

6-9pm Royal History House  
Macquarie Street, Sydney

### June 6

#### Early season TAM get together

Local Olympians talk about their time in Italy.

Schuss Bar

### June 16

#### Committee Meeting

Thredbo 10.30

### October

### AGM

TAM Annual General Meeting

Thredbo

### August 30

#### TAM Faces of Thredbo Dinner & Awards

Recognizing women who have contributed to Thredbo.

Thredbo Alpine Hotel  
Kosci Room

## TAM Committee

### Co-Presidents

Randy Wieman 0408 453 632

Errol Hanlon 0439 646 313

### Vice President

Wayne Kirkpatrick 0184 766 484

### Secretary

Maureen Roberts 0490 365 987

### Treasurer

Raylene Jarvis 0414 679 409

### Committee

Andrew Koczanowski 0401 958 321

Judy Lenne 0419 973 306

Brian Farmer 0428 619 788

Robyn Price 0423 778 155

Julie Pearson 0408 838 339

### Newsletter editors

Randy Wieman, Errol Hanlon, Robyn Price,

Kris Laird Hardman

If you have a story for the next newsletter  
email it to us now via  
[thredbomuseumnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:thredbomuseumnewsletter@gmail.com)

# Membership & Opening Times

## Become a TAM member today

Individual, Family, Lodge & Corporate memberships available.

## TAM MEMBERSHIP FEES 2025/26

### Individuals

1 year \$45  
5 years \$225  
10 years \$450

### Family

1 year \$60  
5 years \$300

### Group/Club Lodge

Annual \$220/year

### Corporate

Gold: \$1500/yr  
Silver: \$1000/yr  
Bronze: \$500/yr

### Membership payments direct deposit

Thredbo Alpine Museum

BSB 032 728 Acc. 106314



<https://www.thredboalpinemuseum.org.au/membership-payment>

## Summer Opening Times

**12 – 4 pm**

**GROUP VISITS PLEASE CONTACT US**

**TAM Membership 2026**  
**support our local**  
**Thredbo Alpine Museum**  
**Join or renew your**  
**membership now.**

**Business/Corporate Membership is available too!**

**Become a TAM member today** online

<https://www.thredboalpinemuseum.org.au/membership-payment>

### INVITATION

Contributions for the newsletter from the TAM membership are very welcome.

Please forward contributions by email to [Thredbomuseumnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:Thredbomuseumnewsletter@gmail.com)