

**Icon: Réal Charette, 1919-2002**

Friday May 11, 2007

Written For: Ski Press, by Lori Knowles

By Lori Knowles

If you've ever taken a ski lesson, you probably owe it to one man... Réal Charette.

Chances are your ski pro, or your ski pro's ski pro — or your ski pro's ski pro's ski pro — was trained by this guy.

Charette was a big cheese in the Canadian Ski Instructors' Alliance (CSIA). In 1954, he was among the first three to achieve Level IV status. He was an Alliance president for three years. He was chief examiner 17 times.

In CSIA World, the cheese doesn't get much bigger than this.

Charette got his start in WWII as a winter warfare trainer for Canadian and Scottish troops. When the war finally ended, he beelined it back to Quebec, landed work as a ski pro at Gray Rocks Inn and began climbing CSIA's status mountain.

He trained under the disciples of Hannes Schneider, inventor of the Arlberg Technique. By 1948 he was promoted director of Gray Rocks' famous Snow Eagle Ski School... and believe it or not, that's where his story starts.

Charming, proactive and very, very smart, Charette came up with an idea — a dazzling idea — for filling up Gray Rocks' inn and ski school during les semaines lentes, its slow weeks. He called it The Ski Week.

Charette warmly and personally invited skiers from across the Eastern Seaboard — Baltimore, New York, D.C. — for all-inclusive learn-to-ski weeks at the Gray Rocks Inn. Food, fun and a lot of frolic — plus lessons from debonair, French-accented, sun-tanned ski pros — were promised and delivered.

These were heady, hedonistic, post-war days in the 1950's Laurentians. Life was good. La vie était belle. And M. Charette knew exactly how to set a scene, stoke a party, make things happen.

The party's still going, and not just in the Laurentians. So if you've ever been to a ski week, you owe that to him, too.

--Lori Knowles