

Benjamin Liss

Rib Mountain Ski Club

Scholarship Essay

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Shepherd and Schallers: A Local Gem

Wausau's local ski shop, Shepherd and Schallers, offers an extraordinary window into the history of skiing in the Central Wisconsin area. Still standing amidst a great many fallen competitors this special outdoors sporting goods store is the local base camp for any and all necessities regarding wintersport – especially snowshoeing, skiing and snowboarding. If you grew up in Wausau, you grew up with Shepherd and Schallers Sporting Goods because the store has been in business for over 70 years. It is no exaggeration to assert that Shepherd and Schaller is the best ski shop in Wisconsin, and perhaps the entire Midwest. A family-owned landmark, Shepherd and Schaller sporting goods has served as a foundation for the Wausau community. As a young kid and even now I marvel when I walk in the store at the wonderfully fun and exciting possibilities Shepherd and Schallers' outdoor equipment and clothing offer. Because of my personal connection growing up utilizing so many of the products from this store and the recommendations from the expert salespeople and friends who worked there, I chose to write my Rib Mountain scholarship essay on Shepherd and Schallers. For this essay owner Robb Shepherd was kind enough to sit down with me and recount very interesting details of the historical evolution of this local gem. This essay will concentrate on the store's history, its unique goods

and expert salepeople with a personal touch, the store's long history and Shepps as a force today.

Brothers-in-law Alan Shepherd & Stan Schaller opened the store in 1949 at 212 Scott Street, which is several hundred meters down the road from store's current location. The two served together in World War II and upon returning home they decided to open a store that catered to their personal love of the outdoors. The original store was only a few hundred square feet but it was big enough to stock what folks in the area wanted. Robb Shepherd states that the original store was an all-around sporting goods depot for hunting, fishing, camping, skiing, diving, bowling and general athletics (baseball, basketball, football and the like). The evolving growth of Granite Peak as the premier ski resort in the state drove business at Shepps in the direction of downhill wintersport. Alan and Stan were pillars of the community and knew their customers by name. The business became integral to downtown Wausau and the community as a whole. The owners took leading roles in the local Rotary Club, Alan Shepherd chaired the Wisconsin Merchants Federation, and Stan Schaller served a stint as the director of the National Sporting Goods Association. The Shepps building is 120 years old and Robb Shepherd notes that it was once home to the first JC Penney store east of the Mississippi. The only reference to Shepps in Wikipedia calls attention to the possibility that the building is perhaps haunted because of a gory murder scene. Current owners Robb and Theresa Shepherd took over in 1989 and have since has added several thousand square feet of space three floors of merchandise.

Shepherd and Schaller's Sporting Goods is a unique shop – very distinct from big box store competitors and different from anything nearby with respect to small specialty shops. Shepps has managed to carve out a niche market locally, but also does a significant amount of its

business both statewide and nationally, as well. Shepps had to negotiate the changes in commercial technologies and compete with internet marketers that could undersell in price and volume. The personal touch with expert salespeople who all excelled in the sports for which they sold equipment served as the Midas touch for Shepps. Expert skiers and snowboarders, as well as highly skilled mountain bikers and campers, who knew inside and out the equipment quality provided the ticket for loyal customers from one generation to the next. The wide-range of equipment, fun clothing and accessories, the personal touch and the high level of expertise of its employees goes some way towards explaining the staying power of this business for seven decades. At a basic level, the success of Shepherd and Schallers' functions through the relationships built across the community.

According to Mr. Shepherd, the dungeon sale was a rather special evolution in ski sales. The original owners actually simply maintained a trade-in system that returned a small percentage of the value back to the customer. Robb Shepherd sought to give back to the customer a significantly higher percentage of the used product's value. In addition, the implementation of a dungeon sale really increased public participation in the seller-buyer process. Many of the products in the dungeon sale were Shepp's skis, boots and snowboards from the previous years' rentals and demos. Some were new. The dungeon sale made skiing ever more affordable, even in the realm of specialty racing skis and boots. Interestingly, the development of the dungeon sale paralleled the ski swaps for the Rib Mountain Ski Club and the downhill and cross country ski teams. Robb Shepherd views the clubs and teams as integral members of the local community and enjoys working with members at local swaps where he is always present. My family has both sold and bought equipment at the dungeon sale. The store

gives significantly discounted rates for measuring and mounting bindings and restructuring equipment bought at the dungeon sale and even at the local ski swaps. This is quite important I feel for the local community's enhanced possibilities for enjoying the wonderful local wintersports.

Shepps continues to cater to Wausau's wintersport activities by providing state of the art equipment sold by 10 full-time employees. However, much in the world of commerce has changed in the 71 years since Alan and Stan opened up shop. Today's Shepps maintains a significant internet presence. Shepps sends its equipment all over the country. In my interview with him, Robb Shepherd gave special attention to the role of rental equipment as a dominant revenue stream in the business. Because of the niche market combined with the expertise of employees Shepps can carry a very high level of ever-changing modern rental equipment tailored and adjusted to fit the customer's preferences. Clothing serves as a very significant source of sales revenue, particularly high-end quality based products. Brands such as Patagonia, Kuhl, Solomon and the like create a nuanced atmosphere of quality, quite distinct from other stores. Such quality is expensive but the upper level of the store is dedicated to discounted clothing and shoes and certain sales make high quality clothing quite affordable. Summer sports equipment, especially mountain biking and camping, round out the store's products for Wausau's changing seasons.

In this essay on Shepherd and Schaller Sporting Goods, I focused on the store's history, its unique goods and expert salepeople with a personal touch, the store's dungeon sale and Shepps as a force today. Robb and Theresa Shepherd have owned and operated the store for over thirty years. They, like their predecessors, are pillars of the Wausau community. However,

they are reaching retirement age and the future of the store is by no means certain. I felt compelled to write my Rib Mountain Scholarship essay on this store because it has been so special to me, my family and the entire Central Wisconsin ski community. It seems odd to feel nostalgic and sentimental about a store. But the magic I experience skiing was conjured in this store. I bet on some level it was the same for you too.