

2010 SUMMIT OF EXCELLENCE AWARD

PETER FUHRMANN

MOUNTAINEER, ALPINE GUIDE, AND RESCUE SPECIALIST



In August of 1971, a call came in to Banff Park wardens of an army cadet who had been hit by falling rock while climbing on Mount Edith, a peak within sight of the town of Banff. The wardens had been training that summer for the first time with helicopter rescue, techniques that had been brought to the Rockies from Europe by Peter Fuhrmann, a local mountaineer, alpine guide, and rescue specialist. Without the helicopter, the rescue would have taken hours, and put rescuers and the cadet, suffering from serious head injuries, in danger. With the helicopter, a sling, and a stretcher, the cadet was flown off the mountain within 20 minutes, bypassing heavy tourist traffic in town, and deposited at the Banff Mineral Springs Hospital.

Crucial to the development of equipment and training for alpine and avalanche rescue, a past chairman of the Alpine Club of Canada, founding member of the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides (ACMG), and a dedicated member of the Bow Valley community for almost six decades, Fuhrmann will receive the 2010 Summit of Excellence Award at this year's Banff Mountain Film and Book Festival.

A mountaineer who has led high alpine ascents in Peru and the Himalaya, Fuhrmann immigrated to Canada from Germany in 1955, and helped create the ACMG in 1963. In his early work for Parks Canada, he helped build important outposts in remote backcountry areas - Balfour, Bow, and Peyto huts, all part of the ACC's hut system. He is recognized for modernizing rescue training techniques within the mountain parks, introducing the helicopter sling and taking generations of young wardens on grueling training missions that they called "Fuhrmann Sanctions." He also introduced the idea of helicopter bombing for avalanche control, and many of his rescue techniques have since spread to rescue teams throughout North America.

Fuhrmann is also widely credited with saving the ACC in the 1980s, modernizing it and attracting enough new members to revitalize the organization, building and restoring alpine huts, strengthening management, and eventually partnering with Hostelling International to create the Lake Louise Alpine Centre, a jewel in the crown of hostelling in Canada. His involvement with the Town of Banff's hospital board led to the relocation and expansion of the Mineral Springs Hospital. During a months-long nomination process open to members of the mountain and Bow Valley communities, Fuhrmann's nomination for the Summit of Excellence received resounding support from mountaineers, alpine rescue specialists, current and retired Parks Canada personnel, and citizens throughout the valley.