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From left: Blue Mountain Resort president Dan Skelton, from left, former chairman George Weider, and former CEO and chairman Gord Canning are part of the legacy of Blue Mountain Resort. **John Edwards/Metroland**

**“He flipped a coin:
heads Canada, tails
New Zealand.”**

George Weider

Ski mogul carves out success

JOHN EDWARDS
jedwards@simcoe.com

A cornerstone of South Georgian Bay was determined by the flip of a coin.

Jozo Weider had owned a chalet in his native Czechoslovakia where he carried out mountain climbing, skiing and photography expeditions.

He left the chalet behind when he fled the country in advance of the Nazi occupation. It was in London in 1938, while on a tourism mission, he made a decision

that would change his life and the lives of thousands in a small community more than 5,000 kilometres away.

“He flipped a coin: heads Canada, tails New Zealand,” said son George Weider.

It was heads.

Jozo Weider came to Canada and eventually founded Blue Mountain Resort, which is celebrating its 75th year this ski season.

The Weider family settled in British Columbia before moving to Quebec where Jozo was work-

ing as a ski instructor at Alpine Inn and Chateau Frontenac.

“He met a businessman from Toronto, Peter Campbell,” George said. “He was a terrific entrepreneur and very generous.”

Campbell, who later became a senator, backed Jozo in building the first lodge at Blue Mountain’s north end, where Mountain Springs Lodge is now located.

What started as a single lodge has developed into the largest ski resort in Ontario and a four-season destination, employing 1,800 dur-

ing the peak of the winter season and attracting millions of visitors.

Blue Mountain Resorts Ltd. was incorporated in 1941 and reached an agreement with Blue Mountain Ski Club on a 999-year lease for a portion of the land that is now home to Blue Mountain.

They sold the first lodge in 1956, buying a piece of land at the southern end of the resort and installing the first pole lift.

“From there, they just gradually expanded the area,” George said.

See JOZO, Page 19

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Jozo Weider fled Czechoslovakia, founded resort in 1941

● **Ski**, from Page 1

Jozo added five more chairlifts and had plans to expand the resort to include homes.

Gord Canning, Jozo's son-in-law, was hired in 1968 and recalls seeing a map Jozo had of potential development.

"He had single family dwellings from one side of the resort to the other," Canning said. "He had a community."

George said Jozo also had plans to expand the resort to include summer activities such as music and a scenic chairlift.

"I think he had enormous, incredibly powerful vision," George said. "Some of his projects didn't work. The critical mass wasn't there for concerts."

But before Jozo's vision could be implemented, he died in a car crash in 1971.

Gord said the family took a step back, which included putting a \$500,000 investment in snow-making on hold.

While Blue Mountain is synonymous with the Weider and Canning names, a key figure in the resort's history was Bill Skelton.

Skelton started work at the resort when he was 17 and was heav-

ily involved in the development of snow-making.

"Bill was the real contributor," said Canning. "We didn't have the expertise for snow-making and lifts."

In 1972, a year after Jozo's death, the resort installed the snow-making system, which was a huge step forward.

"That was a tremendous investment," Canning said.

Years later, Bill went to an open house at a ski resort near Pittsburgh and learned about technology that is still used in snow-making.

"He discovered these tower guns," Canning said. "And this gun revolutionized snow-making."

Canning said the '70s was a major growth period for the resort, as the baby boomers were young, energetic and full of disposable income.

"It fit right in with what was going on demographically," Canning said.

"Young and energetic. They could party Saturday night and ski all day Sunday. They just kept coming."

In 1977, they also developed the Slide Ride, which was a way to attract summer visitors.

"They loved the thrill of that slide ride," said Canning.

It was the Great Slide Ride,

where Bill's son, current president Dan Skelton, got his start.

"I was 13, picking up garbage in the parking lot of the Great Slide Ride," said Dan.

The resort continued its expansion in 1980 when the Blue Mountain Inn increased to 100 rooms from 20.

Over the next decade, Monterra Golf Course and the Blue Mountain Conference Centre would be added.

Dan said the real "game changer" was when Intrawest bought a 50-per-cent share of the company in 2000 and began building the Village at Blue Mountain.

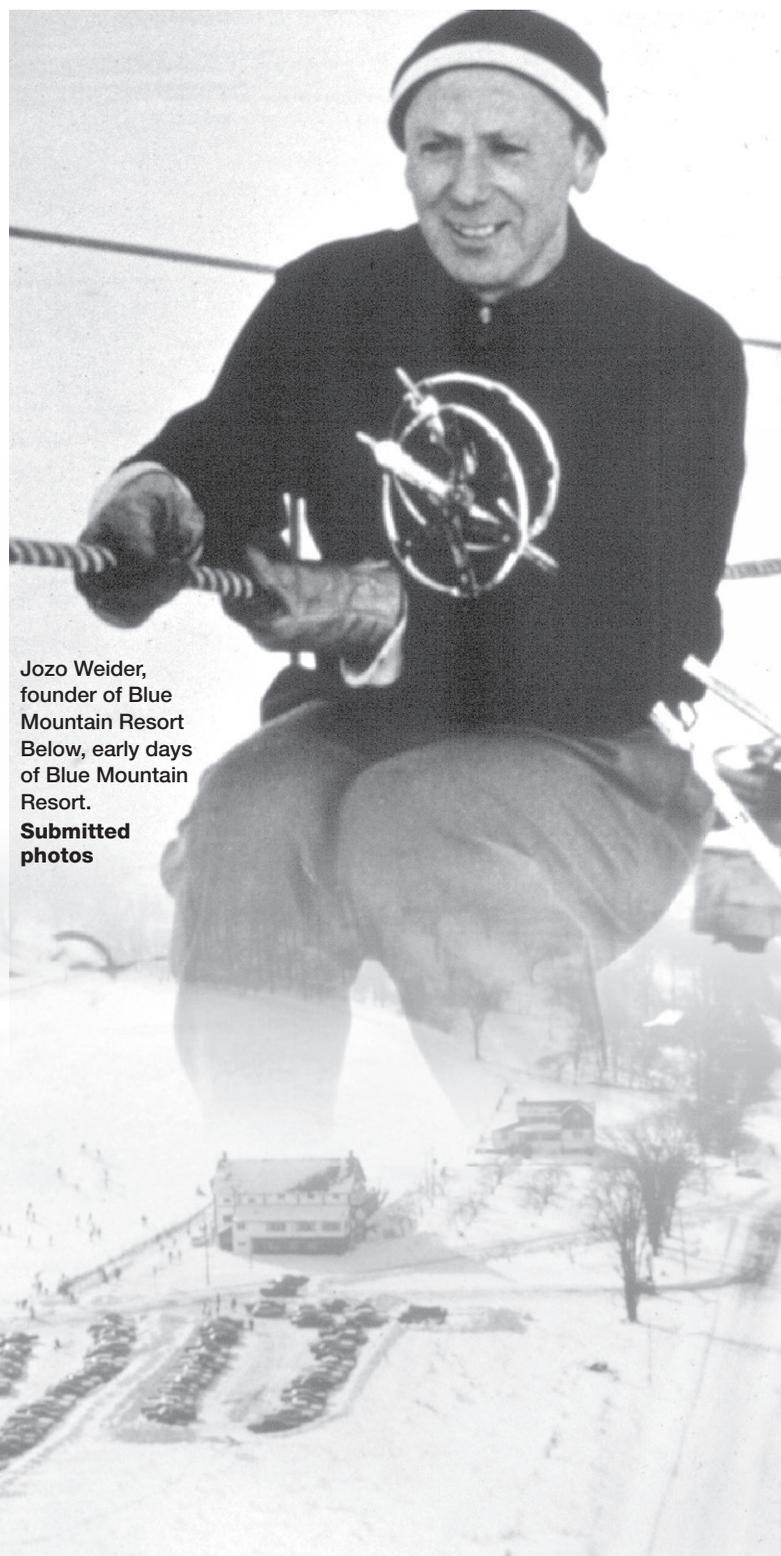
"It made us a destination ski resort in the vein of Whistler and Tremblant," he said.

Canning said Blue Mountain Resort had sold a piece of property in 1985 and spent the proceeds on planning for what would become the village.

"We envisioned the village, but we didn't have \$200 million to build it," said George.

George said Jozo would be happy with the direction the resort has taken and how it's become a destination.

"There was always the vision but he didn't get around to develop the non-winter aspect," he said.



Jozo Weider, founder of Blue Mountain Resort Below, early days of Blue Mountain Resort. Submitted photos



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