



Warren Olney -- on his way to Southern Oregon

Olney joins Timberline's proud alumni

Timberline Lodge can place Warren Olney on its list of proud alumni.

Commencement, you might say, is taking him from his position as Timberline Lodge administrator in the Zigzag Ranger District to public information officer for the Siskiyou National Forest in Southern Oregon.

There's a spirit of ownership and pride among those who have worked at Timberline Lodge. It's the kind of spirit that extends throughout Oregon for the rustic Mt. Hood lodge.

"You talk to the people on the streets of Portland and you get a definite feeling that there is a soft spot in their hearts for Timberline," Olney said. "Timberline is part of Portland."

Olney, who has worked with Timberline Lodge since he first came to the Zigzag Ranger District in 1970, has learned to appreciate the massiveness and strength of the structure built during the Depression.

"You feel very comfortable inside the lodge — snug and secure — even though

outside may be blowing a whale of a storm."

During his stay, he's seen the lodge increase in popularity and national recognition.

"We see more and more people in increasing numbers every year," he observed.

During his years at Timberline, Olney has seen it named a National Historic Place and most recently a National landmark.

One of Olney's major projects has been working on the Environmental Impact Statement for the lodge and Mt. Hood area. "That pretty well set the pattern for development on the mountain."

He's quick to give others credit. "None of this is all my doing," he said. "I never did everything by myself."

The C.S. Price wing of the lodge was built while Olney worked at Timberline. The Forest Service will soon start work on a new day lodge designed to take

heavy ski use out of the lodge.

"When I first came, we received \$1,000 so the Visitors Information Service could conduct tours through the lodge," Olney remembered.

That money was split between the lodge and Trillium Lake Campground.

"Three years ago we got this place recognized as one of three Forest Service Visitors Centers in Oregon," he added. With that designation came funding for an expanded program to inform the public of Timberline's history, flora, fauna and geology.

All this not only reflects the renewed public interest in Timberline, but also renewed interest on the part of the Forest Service.

Prior to about 10 years ago, the Forest Service didn't pay much attention to the Mt. Hood lodge, Olney noted.

"It was built in the Depression and turned over to the Forest Service, which was kind of a reluctant recipient," he said.

The Forest Service works in a landlord-tenant relationship with a private company which operates the lodge. Timberline, Inc. held the special use permit to operate the structure until about 1955 when present permittee Dick Kohnstamm came along and formed RLK and Co.

"Dick and the people he hired almost single handedly put Timberline on its feet," Olney said.

The Forest Service has now started to pay more attention to the structure which differs from most Forest Service projects. "It's the kind of operation the National Park Service would have," he said.

When you have a place like Timberline, it's either very special or a pain, Olney said.

"And I'll tell you that every day Timberline is becoming more special in the eyes of the Forest Service."

The rent money generated by RLK and Co. — approximately \$60,000 to \$70,000 a year — goes back into the maintenance of the lodge under the provisions of the Granger-Thye Act. That federal act stipulates that rents generated from government owned buildings can be used for maintenance.

But even that isn't enough to keep the lodge in top shape.

"The old girl's got hardening of the arteries," Olney says of the 40-year-old structure built by the Works Progress Administration. "It's just like a person. It requires more attention the older it gets."

With increased use and public recognition has also come more money for maintenance.

"When I first came there was little money — nothing on a sustained basis."

"Now the government chips in \$110,000 a year — upping the total to nearly \$200,000. And with continued heavy use Olney predicts that the maintenance budget is soon going to need expanding again."

Olney also recalls some dramatic rescues from the popular mountain climbing.

"It's a tough old mountain to climb," he says. "It's not always friendly."

Some of the searches and rescues have made national news.

"Some have ended very happily, some very tragically."

And there are lots of searches that never make the newspapers. "During the ski season someone is lost almost every day," he said.

"We find them all over the place," Olney continued. "Some people are even found at home. We call home and they answer."

Another not uncommon occurrence is that a skier or mountain climber will end up in a location such as Zigzag Canyon.

The natural tendency for a climber is to think that Timberline is straight down from the top, Olney said.

"But it isn't where you think it should be," he added. You need to veer hard to the east to stay on course.

Some of the most dramatic survival stories on the mountain involved two men from Eugene who survived three days in a winter storm, and three teenagers who came out unscathed after 16 days on the mountain.

It's those who know something about winter survival who come out alive.

"It's virtually impossible to find someone during a severe winter storm," Olney said. "But once the storm subsides they pop out."

Olney, 43, was raised in Pasadena, Calif., and gained his first exposure to the outdoor life through the Boy Scouts. His father had an ex-schoolmate who was with the Forest Service and Olney learned about that life through discussions with him.

"It looked like a good way to go," he recalled.

He was graduated from the University of Idaho in 1959 with a degree in forest management and from there went to the Wind River Ranger District in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

He started out in a timber management position and worked up to a job in sales administration. He was there 6½ years and then went to Mt. Adams — still in Gifford Pinchot Forest. He served as a resource assistant during his 2½ years on that district.

"I've done just about everything," Olney reflected. "It's been fun."



Admiring craftwork of lodge

Story/photos by Sue Lafky