



"You gonna pull them goggles or whistle Dixie?"  
PHOTO: GRANT GUNDERSON

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# RAW RETAIL

## YEAGER'S SPORTS OFFERS ONE-STOP SHOPPING, MOUNT BAKER STYLE

THE SAD TRUTH IS THAT MOST SKI SHOPS CATER to a platinum-card clientele. From the branded showcases that strategically adorn base-village strolls to suburban mega-chains heavily SKU-ed with inventory, ski retail has become less random and more like a science. Neatly dressed sales professionals, tasteful build-outs, and co-op concept shops are now the norm because they target the right demographic. Three-bill softshells have replaced

flannel and denim on four-way racks, and shop interiors are polished to sterile perfection, making it increasingly difficult to find a case of Schmidt's, a box of 12-gauge shot, and a pair of Teneighty Guns under the same roof.

This transition has left the everyday skier—always a few bills short of an Andrew Jackson—looking for a place that actually cares about their summer scrapings of cash. Yet at Yeager's—a sportsman's emporium in the shadow of



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F A L L L I N E

Where the ski tech is always right.  
PHOTO: GRANT GUNDERSON



Mount Baker, Washington—everyone from chainsaw-wielding rednecks to Subaru-driving lifties gets an equal amount of respect.

Founded in 1921 by legendary guide Ira Yeager—who reputedly taught Eddie Bauer how to fish—the Bellingham landmark has peddled sporting gear for over eight decades. The present store has been in its current Northwest Avenue location since 1950, when fresh elk carcasses were hung from the exterior to dry. Game no longer encircles the shop, but walking through the front door is a rare and welcome throwback to an earlier era of retail.

First-time shoppers who are not distracted by the stocked gun wall, 10-aisle Carhartt section, or basement toy department will discover Bellingham's hometown ski shop tucked in the back corner. Flavored with an eclectic wall-to-wall mix of elements—such as Yeager's original handgun case which had to be cleaned of blood stains from a long-forgotten in-store shooting, and a backshop wall masterfully cut-and-pasted with *Maxim* models—the space instantly feels like your own personal gear room.

In this setting, manager Ryan Horrell fosters a low-pressure tone, boasts the best tune in town, and staffs the duct-taped sales floor with a consistent roster of top-tier locals who help skiers of all abilities without attitude. The staff's approachable demeanor has cultivated

loyalty with a diverse customer base that ranges from third-generation Yeager's families to local college students, ski industry pros, and veteran Baker rippers.

"It's definitely a family store. We try to keep it that way," Horrell explains. "A little bit of everybody shows up. We're not a specialty store in any way. We bring in the hunters and fishers but we still get the suburban family that wants to go skiing together."

Like any nugget of retail resistance, Yeager's true charm lies in its lack of uniformity. Glitzy POP displays, name-tagged employees, and immaculate backshops have no place in this weathered-wall location. Instead, the brick-and-mortar store has chosen to present itself plainly—with rough edges intact—to generation after generation of Baker's skiers. Whether it's repairing your worst core shot, trading predictions about tomorrow's deepness, and selling you a sixer—or a six-shooter—on the way out the door, the shop remains a comforting seasonal constant. By embracing its identity and cutting through the tired retail hype, Yeager's has built a connection with the on-hill community that remains strong even when trends shift. As Horrell says, "Our store's been around for so long we're obviously doing something right!"—**Dan Kostrzewski**