

Tom Wendell – 1951-2013



Tom Wendell will be remembered as a voice for recreation.

Long before economics dictated that recreation must be the focal point of the Lake Tahoe Basin, there was a man shouting from the mountaintops, the bike trails, the lake and everywhere he went that recreation is what Tahoe is all about.

That message will be carried on even though the original voice has been silenced.

Tom Wendell died Aug. 5. He was 62.

Mr. Wendell had been associated with recreation and environmental stewardship for most of the quarter century he called South Lake Tahoe home.

Born in Montreal on April 13, 1951, Mr. Wendell soon moved with his family to Southern California. He grew up in Los Angeles. The family started spending vacations in Lake Tahoe in the mid-1950s. They all fell in love with the Sierra.

Mr. Wendell's environmental influence came in large part from his mother, Inge, who was from Germany. Besides being fluent in the language, Mr. Wendell learned about that country's efficiencies when it came to transportation, cycling and recycling. He brought what he learned during his travels back

to Tahoe.

It was rare to see Mr. Wendell on anything but his bicycle. And he had the scars to prove it. When he was a bicycle courier in the mid-1970s while attending Santa Barbara Community College he was in an accident that resulted in his first knee surgery.

That surgery is what led him to learn how to maneuver a mono ski. It was much easier on Mr. Wendell's knees than the traditional two planks. And this was at a time when fat skis were not available.

Mr. Wendell was often seen skiing at Heavenly Mountain Resort on that mono ski. Within the small community of mono skiers, his abilities were praised.

When Mr. Wendell first moved to South Lake Tahoe full time in 1987 he worked as a certified massage therapist at Lakeside Nautilus, where Sierra Athletic Club is now. He worked at Ridge Tahoe and other places as a CMT, but mostly had private clients.

He perfected an original massage move that with his long arm span went from the client's toes to head in one fell swoop. And for those who experienced it, they remember it still today.

Mr. Wendell also worked for Sports Ltd. starting in 1992 and continued until 2012. He took some time off to care for his ill mother and when the store at the Y closed.

In the early 1990s, Mr. Wendell was the recycling coordinator for El Dorado County. A state law had been passed that required jurisdictions to reduce the waste being taken to landfills.

Mr. Wendell was proud to see people recycle in earnest. He was instrumental in removing the waxy, nonrecyclable material from

phonebook covers.

In 2001, with the help of Bob Kingman, Karen Fink, Peter Fink, Jeff Miner and Gary Bell, TRAC – or Tahoe Region Advocates for Cycling – was formed. The goal of Mr. Wendell and others was to promote on- and off-road cycling, along with safety. Grants were secured to help with bike trail improvements.

This group eventually morphed into the Lake Tahoe Bicycle Coalition, of which Mr. Wendell was part.

Mr. Wendell was usually seen commuting to work and any destination on his hybrid bike. It was more of a road bike, but could handle dirt trails. Weeks would go by without him driving his car.

He had a separate mountain bike he used when he didn't want to be around the masses and especially vehicles. Anywhere in the Cold Creek-Powerline area was a favorite of his.

Kayaking was another big part of Mr. Wendell's life. In the last year he had also learned how to commandeer a standup paddleboard.

Mr. Wendell was on the South Lake Tahoe Sustainability Commission until the City Council's recent disbanding of it. He also helped form Compost Tahoe.

At meetings around the basin he lobbied for more recreation opportunities, more and better bike trails, and for people to live a sustainable lifestyle.

Mr. Wendell's voice of advocacy has finally been heard based on the direction the basin leaders say they want move. Perhaps one day there will be a bike trail named after Mr. Wendell and a plaque to acknowledge the efforts of this man who never stopped fighting for the words "recreation" and "Tahoe" to be synonymous.

Mr. Wendell is survived by his brother, Ted Wendell, of South

Lake Tahoe and an army of friends.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be sent to Sustainable Tahoe, Barton Hospice, Lake Tahoe Bicycle Coalition or TAMBA .

Services are pending.