

Sports center will redefine medical care in Tahoe



The multi-million dollar health facility in South Lake Tahoe will treat everyday and elite athletes. Photo/Provided

By Susan Wood

The Robert Maloff Center of Excellence is as much about Tahoe's past as it is building a solid future for sports medicine on the South Shore.

"Since 2003, we started talking about this. It's wellness, fitness and sports performance all in one – something we always needed to do, we just needed to know how to do it," physical therapist and project coordinator Chris Proctor told

Lake Tahoe News. He is also the administrative director of Barton Health's Tahoe Center for Orthopedics.

Proctor has built a reputation by concocting creative means to work different areas of the body that athletes either need to strengthen or fix. They're referred to as the "MacGyver-type" mechanisms thrown together for optimum performance. (This reporter witnessed a creative harness device in which the athlete had to pull Proctor, who stands well over 6 feet.)

Given its one-of-a-kind nature, the center will have leading edge equipment. Touch-screen activation will dominate the sometimes makeshift-style methods of working the muscular-skeletal system.

The Robert Maloff Center of Excellence will have space for elite athletes and include partnerships with the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association. It will be the first to place orthopaedics, rehabilitation and sport performance training services under one roof.

Complementary medicine such as acupuncture, nutrition, meditation and yoga will also have roles in the treatment of the mind and body.

Barton Health is busy constructing the unique, 26,000-square-foot facility that is designed to prevent and treat sports-related injuries in this athletic community. It broke ground Aug. 23 on the east side of Barton Memorial Hospital; the foundation is laid and the footings are going in. It should be done in a year.

Lisa Maloff donated \$10 million to the building of the facility in her husband's name, a rewarding gesture she admitted.

"We all went to Barton," the longtime resident told *Lake Tahoe News*.

She and her late husband, Robert, came to South Lake Tahoe in 1958 “when we didn’t have a hospital,” she said, chuckling.

“He always wanted to give to the hospital, so I did it in his honor,” Maloff said.



Lisa Maloff with Barton Health CEO Clint Purvance at the center’s groundbreaking in August. Photo/Barton Health

The future

In the grand scheme of things, this 12-month period is a short span in comparison to when the visionaries connected to the health care system dreamed up the \$30 million-plus, two-story facility.

The center is designed to focus on wellness and be proactive with an amateur or professional athlete’s health. Memberships to the Center of Excellence will be available.

The second floor will be dedicated to classroom settings for sports performance education.

The health care system will evaluate in the coming months who of the 900 employees and 150 on the medical staff will work there.

Tahoe and orthopaedics

It is a well-known fact that if you have a skiing, biking or running injury – especially those involving delicate knees – you want to be in South Lake Tahoe. Some of the finest orthopaedists alive have graced these mountains.

Terry Orr, for one, has spent years as one of the U.S. Ski Team physicians.

“Part of it is what I envisioned – and it’s a whole lot better than that now,” Orr said of the center. As a renowned orthopaedist, Orr plans to move his practice into the center when it’s ready.

“When someone comes in, we’ll look at the whole body. We’ll see people from start to finish,” he said. The first order of business will be to look at the athletes’ goals and tailor a program to get them to where they want to be physically.

Why is this important?

“People who move up here, live here and visit here – a good proportion of them are here because they want to be active, and they want to stay active. We have world champion skiers at 80 years old,” he said.

On the flip side, there’s a whole other market, too.

“We’ve got a whole group of youth coming up who aspire to be in this active life. These kids are doing big tricks,” he said.

The idea is to strengthen their vital joints ahead of time – and not just during rehabilitation after the fact.

“If they’re stronger, they’re going to be safer,” he said.

At least one prominent South Shore Olympic athlete could relate to that theory.

Olympic gold medalist Jamie Anderson is revered for her death-defying feats of big air snowboarding. She supports a place in Tahoe that strengthens the body more than ever before.

And it’s personal as an athlete prone to injury. She broke her collarbone last December.

“I think it’s an awesome idea for Lake Tahoe. It’s going to bring a lot of good to the community – something we’ve needed for a long time,” Anderson told *Lake Tahoe News*.



The Robert Maloff Center of Excellence will open in 2017.
Rendering/Provided

Tahoe’s medical history

As Barton heads to the future of treating athletes and enthusiasts, it embraces the foundation of its recreation-oriented past.

First of all, it had the early innovative thinking of knee specialist Richard Steadman, who worked alongside the late Paul Fry in their orthopaedist practice in South Lake Tahoe. (Fry donated funds for the Barton Maloff Center.)

Steadman, thought of as a champion for coordinated care,

wanted to build a similar center in Tahoe in the 1980s. He was turned down at the time, but that didn't stop his quest.

He donated his services at what became the first U.S. Olympic training center in Squaw Valley. He also started the nonprofit Steadman Sports Medicine Research Foundation here in 1988.

Steadman became a preeminent source for focusing on disorders of the knee, developing a treatment for injuries to the anterior cruciate ligament. It became known as the "healing response."

The revolutionary ways to get athletes to heal have come a long way from when Steadman would put a hard cast on and have the patient stay still.

Movement is now key.

Steadman moved his expertise in 1980 to Vail to open a clinic bearing his name. There he expanded his level of research and sports clients. Some are famous – as in U.S. downhill skier Lindsey Vonn.

He wishes those involved with Barton's Center of Excellence well and has no doubt the facility will thrive as his has over the years.

South Lake Tahoe's has an even larger wellness component.

"They should have good success with the operation. I think the people who are continuing there are excellent people with the best of intentions," Steadman told *Lake Tahoe News*, mentioning Orr by name.

Steadman insisted there are no hard feelings about wishing Barton would have supported this type of facility in the past. Things tend to work out the way they're supposed to, he said.

"I'm not critical. I think the (Barton) people at that point were not thinking about this," he said.

At age 79, Steadman has recently retired from his clinic, but not from being active. He hikes every day in most seasons and straps on the snowshoes in the winter.

“It used to be that as we advanced in age, people felt we were supposed to just sit down. From my era, we figured out that was not the right thing to do,” he said.

Steadman, who was also pleasantly surprised by his facility exceeding his expectations, fashioned his clinic’s rehabilitation after working to help the athlete “not just get back, but to get back to a higher level,” he added.

The same outcome is what stakeholders of the Barton center hope to achieve.