

TOCCATA ready for Winter Fest

The 10th Tahoe Symphony Orchestra Winter Fest begins Feb. 8.

There will be four performances with Elizabeth Pitcairn on the red Mendelssohn Stradivarius.

The symphony will be playing Feb. 8 at 3pm at St. Theresa Church in South Lake Tahoe, Feb. 11 at 7pm at Shepherd of the Sierra in Carson City, Feb. 13 at 7pm at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Reno, and Feb. 15 at 3pm at Cornerstone Church in Incline Village.

Tickets are \$40 for preferred seating, \$30 adults, \$25 senior, \$5 students ages 19-23 and free for those 18 and younger. To buy tickets or for more info, go online.

Weeklong program targets entrepreneurs

JumpStart Lake Tahoe is offering an intensive crash course in entrepreneurship March 25-29 at Lake Tahoe Hard Rock.

The program is comprised of a combination of lecture and peer-to-peer and group learning.

The real-world curriculum consists of 60- to 90-minute segments that cover a multitude of topics including understanding the key characteristics of successful entrepreneurs, the viability of a business idea, how to get started, and how to achieve sustainable profitability. Additionally, participants will get hands-on experience using a real or fictitious business as a case study.

The cost of the program, which includes lunches and dinners, is \$1,495 or \$1,195 if attendees register before midnight March 1. Discounted lodging rates are available.

JumpStart Lake Tahoe is a collaborative partnership between JumpStart Enterprises, a business mentoring collective located in Reno, Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce and Tahoe Mountain Lab.

For more info, go online.

Hotels are tracking the towels you steal

By Suzy Strutner, Huffington Post

There's something utterly delicious about hotel beds... and towels... and robes. They're so decadently fluffy and epically cozy, we'd totally steal them if we could.

And much of the time, we do. Towels are among the most-stolen items in hotels, The Telegraph reports. We could've guessed that.

But we never would've guessed that hotels can tell when you've stolen a towel (or robe or duvet cover for that matter). It's all thanks to a tiny, M&M-sized tracking device that thousands of hotels have embedded in their linens – a device that lets them know where their towels, robes and bedsheets are at all times.

Read the whole story

Rice delivers more than a ski experience



John Rice is the man credited with making Sierra-at-Tahoe a success. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

TWIN BRIDGES – Two guitars, skis, books, cards and pictures in an office that looks toward Grandview chairlift tell a colorful story of the leader of the band at Sierra-at-Tahoe. John Rice is a fixture in these parts – a quasi cross between a Tony Robbins and Deepak Chopra for the ski industry.

He appears to have come out of the gate in his 20th year at

the resort with the same level of enthusiasm, playfulness and philanthropic nature that he had on Day 1.

Even though the ski resort lies 12 miles away from South Lake Tahoe, Rice connects year-after-year with the town in his own impressionable way. If anything, the numerous people who have worked for and broken bread with him sing his praises and attribute much of their successes to the man who provided them with that foundation to carve their own path.

He gives back with his time on boards for Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care and Lake Valley Fire Protection District. He runs a widely successful campaign that started in 1997 to give ski passes to students who carry a 4.0 grade point average. He snickered when reflecting on a time when his boys buckled down to get straight A's – feats Rice didn't know for sure would happen.

Rice is loved, revered and honored in the hearts of those who have graced his slopes, his offices, his community and his home. Some may be lucky enough to hear a self-composed song, which exemplifies his roots. His mother, Jane, is a professional singer, and daughter Delaney is following in their footsteps. His late father, Jim, was a professional baseball player, a talent and desire he has passed down to his two sons.

Rice experienced his "field of dreams" with Brandan and Ian when they played 54 innings over four days in a men's league in Arizona; with the trio hitting each other home. Rice enthusiastically ran the slide show of pictures with John Fogerty's "Center Field" providing the harmony for their precious time together. He had the gleam of a proud father, never too tired of watching his sons.

The show reminded Rice of the time when in his 40s he hit two home runs off Vida Blue at AT&T Park for a Budweiser-sponsored event.



Former employees frequently keep in touch with John Rice and thank him for his leadership. Photo/Kathryn Reed

'Family, faith, friendship'

That is Rice's mission statement, and it shows every day, according to Megan Waskiewicz. She worked for Rice between 1995 and 2001. She described coming on board at a pivotal time when she first moved to South Lake Tahoe for a ski season. She sold lift tickets. She left as the spokeswoman for the resort.

"I stayed because of John. (He) is all about people, the relationships, the customer service. He connected with me, and I took that relationship focus to Alpen Sierra," she said of the coffee company she helps run with her husband, Christian. She recalled adapting principles including customer service training meetings at Alpen Sierra.

Waskiewicz now works for Lake Tahoe Community College in the Connect Ed division.

"John has been instrumental in my career," she said.

She is one of many staffers who have gone on to advance their careers in a big way.

"He brought a fresh perspective to leadership. He's very different than the leaders that come up through the ranks of mountain operations and ski patrollers," said Casey Blann, who

runs Vail's Kirkwood Mountain Resort as general manager. Blann was Sierra-at-Tahoe's mountain operations manager under Rice.

"He's a great guy and fun to work with. I learned a lot from him. He led during tough times," Blann, singling out the Highway 50 shutdown in 1997, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "He has an HR (human resources) mindset where you put people first."

Brittany Clelan knows this.

As his human resources manager, her tenure with Sierra-at-Tahoe under Rice has led her to work for Squaw Valley.

"He focuses on what's right. That's what makes him special. He leads from the heart, and it comes across in his style of management. I call him every month to get my 'John Rice fix'," she said of his spiritual side.



Having fun, creating "pray for snow" calls – it's all in a day's work for Sierra's general manager.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Praise from employees

"Here's a guy who was beyond enthusiastic, not just about Sierra, but human resources as well. My philosophy moving

forward in all my HR roles after Sierra was to bring that same level of enthusiasm to each position. Well, that was John Rice, and that is how I wanted to always feel about human resources, and thanks to John, I do," said Lorraine Turner, Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel chief administrative officer.

At its peak, the ski area employs 850 people and 50 year-round. Rice tries to make a connection with all of them.

"There's no one in Tahoe quite like John Rice," said his former food and beverage director, Debbie Brown. The restaurateur calls him her mentor, friend, partner and father figure – as a five-star leader. She attributes her success to Rice's gentle guidance. It helped her in advancing from running food and beverage at Stateline Brewery to opening her own place Cold Water Brewery where the Swiss Chalet sat for more than a half century.

"He encouraged me to get out of my comfort zone," said Brown, who was responsible for getting the West Bowl concession area off the ground.

Tracy Owen Chapman, who served as his marketing manager, asks herself "in difficult situations, 'what would John do?'," she said. "I am a better person because I have worked with John."

Molding souls and taking part in an industry about fun and frolic – it's all in a day's work for the 59-year-old Rice. It's probably because it really isn't work to him. It's a way of life.

When the going gets tough

Case in point, despite brown spots on the slopes and a long wait for the snow gods to come through, the general manager rallies his troops regularly to keep their spirit and psyche up. He asks his groomers among other workers: "Did they put their best out there?"

He even got excited and pulled out a purple cow pin that workers get when they do something that distinguishes the Sierra-at-Tahoe brand. Employees wear it with pride.

Rice recalled how at a local eatery he ran into a former employee who was depressed and drank heavily before working for him at Sierra-at-Tahoe. She poured out her soul to him.

“She told me: ‘Sierra-at-Tahoe saved my life.’ So if I’m guilty of something in life, it’s that I cared too much,” he said.

Rice keeps inspirational authors like Betsy Sanders who wrote “Fabled Service” and Laura Moriarty of the human resources world as well as famed basketball coach John Wooden close to his vest. Rice pointed to a plaque on his wall detailing Wooden’s pyramid of success.

Sierra-at-Tahoe has operated with a focus of constantly seeking talent, then growing that talent from within. It’s something Rice learned early on from other movers and shakers.

“I’ve used the principles: Hire for attitude, train for skill. I’ve worked for some pretty amazing people,” Rice said, listing the late Alex Cushing of Squaw Valley as one such person. “I learned from him how to treat people and establish relationships, and that you never burn bridges because that person may be your boss tomorrow.”



John Rice put on a tie
for the 2014 Olympic
celebration.

Photo/Brooke Laine

Coach to be flexible

“Adaptability is the key to survival,” Rice said.

At no other time is that mantra more necessary than now, as drought conditions and dry weather patterns have forced some ski resorts to close and others to cut back this winter.

Instead, on a bone dry Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, Sierra-at-Tahoe put on a giant Jenga game, disc jockey and football punting contest on its massive year-old plaza. The resort even staged a pony race with inflatable balls and play unicorns.

Yes, there’s something magical about Sierra-at-Tahoe. And much of that scene is due to the leadership of John Rice.

He’s come a long way from age 5 in Southern California learning to play guitar, listening to John Denver, working at Disneyland then playing baseball at Cal State Fullerton.

“Mountain life was calling,” he said, adding that a tour of Chico State brought him to Tahoe in 1975.

"I saw a picture of that depth of blue and thought: 'This can't be real'," he said.

Rice remembered pulling over on Highway 50 at the Echo Pass lookout and thinking: "Oh my God." He rented a moped and stayed in an old wedding chapel one summer before going to work at Squaw over the winter.

And although he said he's had "amazing job offers" over the years, Rice enjoys working for Booth Creek partners because the company nurtures that freedom to do what's right. He would also miss Tahoe and its complementary lifestyle too much if he moved.

"I love being a part of the community. You know, I'm close enough to the ocean. And you know, when you go down to the lake and hear that clanking of the lines (on the boats) in the elements, the lake can look like the ocean," he said like a poet.

Is there retirement in the future?

"When it stops being fun, I'm done," he said. "As long as people think we're adding value to the community and they trust my leadership, I'm here."

Then, that could be a long time.



John Rice is responsible for all aspects of Sierra-at-Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Beyond the resort

Just ask California Ski Industry Association spokesman Bob Roberts, who has known Rice for more than 30 years.

“John Rice is one of the most resourceful and creative operators in the industry. We have our share of corporate ownerships in this industry, and John stands out as an independent free spirit. In my book, literally and figuratively, he stands taller than anyone in the industry,” Roberts told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The state industry representative has been impressed over and over by Rice’s abilities, charm and for having the “personal gravitas” to overcome challenges and turn them into ways to excel. He insists Rice’s positive nature has “almost painted rocks” in difficult times of scarce snow conditions.

But how many ski resorts can boast of spawning three Olympic gold medalists? They are Maddie Bowman, Jamie Anderson and Hannah Teter. The resort threw a huge event last year to honor the three women. And this isn’t the first time Sierra has spawned Olympic athletes. Travis Cabral and Travis Ramos paved the way for the three young women.

“You know, he cultivated these kids,” Roberts said, remembering they were children when they started skiing and boarding at Sierra-at-Tahoe.

Rice put on a tie for the event and kept on the ball cap.

Roberts has seen one of those rare occasions from Rice with a tie in critical circumstances when an industry representative must stand in a courtroom to testify as an expert witness about snow safety.

“What people don’t know is he is an extremely articulate policy wonk,” he said.

The two have traveled together to the nation’s capital.

“John is an impressive guy – whether he’s in front of dignitaries in Washington or his employees. To his employees, he walks on water. I haven’t seen him do it yet, but he probably can,” Roberts said.

Maybe when the snow melts.

Anderson providing opportunity for kids to ride

Sierra-at-Tahoe professional snowboarder and Olympic gold medalist Jamie Anderson is sponsoring three South Lake Tahoe students for her annual Give Back With Love sponsorship.

This year’s recipients are Justice Ensign, 11, Jeremy Kornbeck, 14, and Jade Smith, 16. Through this event students have the opportunity to experience what it is like to be a sponsored athlete for a season. As part of the sponsorship, each student receives a Sierra-at-Tahoe unlimited season pass, new Oakley outerwear, a GNU snowboard, Oakley goggles, boots and bindings, and a camera from GoPro.

Because of Anderson’s competition schedule and involvement with “Celebrity Apprentice” she won’t be able to be at the this Feb. 3 event. She will join them on the slopes another day.

The 24-year-old created the Jamie Anderson Give Back With Love sponsorship to give back to the community and provide less fortunate kids with the opportunity to snowboard.

AAUW hosting nutrition talk

June Denney, a registered dietitian as well a fitness instructor at Lake Tahoe Community College, will give a talk Feb. 7 from 10am-noon in the board room of the college.

She will discuss the three things people can all do to achieve ideal body weight, reduce risk factors for disease and increase longevity.

The talk is put on by the American Association of University Women.

The talk is free, but brunch is \$3. RSVP to Christy at 530.542.8748.

Sandoval working on national stage

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review-Journal

If Gov. Brian Sandoval was not already busy enough with a state budget and myriad other duties, he will be now with his latest assignment.

Sandoval and New York state Sen. Carl Marcellino have been named to lead the Council of State Governments in 2015 as the national president and chairman.

They will be joined in the leadership team by Nebraska state

Sen. Beau McCoy as chairman-elect and Nevada state Sen. Kelvin Atkinson, D-North Las Vegas, as vice chairman.

Sandoval, who was re-elected to a second four-year term as governor in November, also was named in June last year as chairman of the Western Governors Association.

Read the whole story

Public college isn't as affordable as it used to be

By Danielle Douglas-Gabriel, Washington Post

Michael Bayne has done everything you're supposed to do to avoid taking on too much debt for college. He lives off-campus to save money on housing. He's always working at least one job – sometimes two. And he enrolled at an in-state public school, Arizona State University.

But it's not nearly enough. The \$2,500 in grants Bayne received this semester covered less than half of his tuition at ASU. A decade ago, the same amount of aid would have been enough to pay his entire bill.

"My parents don't have money to help me, so to help pay for tuition, pay for books, pay for everything, I work a full-time job," he said. "And I still have \$17,000 in student loans."

It used to be that students such as Bayne could attend a public university and graduate with little to no debt. Then came the recession, when state governments slashed funding of higher education and families began paying higher tuition bills.

Now, even as the economy recovers and taxpayer revenue is pouring back in, states have not restored their funding, and tuition keeps rising, leaving parents and students scrambling to cover costs.

Total student debt now surpasses \$1 trillion and is growing by the day. For the first time ever, according to a recent study, families are shouldering more of the cost of public university tuition than state governments.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



- Here is the El Dorado-Tahoe roadwork schedule for this week.

- Nic Abelow of South Lake Tahoe has been named partner at Abelow, Pratt & Associates financial investment firm.
 - Tahoe Truckee Unified School District is seeking members for the Citizens' Oversight Committees that are being formed for Measures E and U. Applications are online and are due Feb. 6.
 - Maddie Bowman – Meyers resident, Sierra-at-Tahoe rider – check her out in this video:
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Craft beer hurting wine industry

By Mark Anderson, Sacramento Business Journal

Wine-industry experts gathering in Sacramento on Wednesday said wine sales have been hurt by the growing popularity of craft beer, ciders and even mixed drinks.

A panel of industry leaders at the Unified Wine & Grape Symposium said the vintners face a number of challenges. One is that the casual drinker's choice for an everyday beverage is increasingly beer.

Sales of inexpensive table wine – bottles under \$7 – fell in 2014. Sales of premium wine grew – but the everyday wines are the foundation of the wine market, and those are the wines people start with before they eventually buy premium wines.

Read the whole story