Former Sierra Ski Ranch owner dies at age 92

Former Sierra Ski Ranch owner Vernon Dewayne Sprock has died. He was 92.

Mr. Sprock, who was living in Bozeman, Mont., died Feb. 10.

Mr. Sprock along with his wife, Bobbie, owned and operated Sierra Ski Ranch for 40 years. In 1953, the couple took over the financially troubled ski area that is now known as Sierra-at-Tahoe.



Vern Sprock

It was here that Mr. Sprock gained his reputation as a hard worker, dreamer and innovator. Sierra Ski Ranch was located one mile down Highway 50 from its current location. Sierra was relocated in 1968 due to a proposed highway alignment that never happened.

The first year in that location was one of many challenges due to a very heavy snowfall damaging the new lodge and lifts. However, perseverance and prayer prevailed, and the obstacles were overcome to lay the groundwork for many expansions at this new location. He was an instrumental member of the B77 Code of National Ski Safety Committee for aerial tramways. The couple shared a lifetime of pioneering hardship and hard work, always working together to solve each challenge. The resort was sold in 1993 to Fibreboard Corporation. Three years later

Booth Creek acquired it and changed the name to Sierra-at-Tahoe.

Mr. Sprock was born Sept. 3, 1921, in Elk Grove to Hiejo Henry and Bertha (Stubel) Sprock. Following his graduation from Elk Grove High School, he continued to work on the family farm. While doing this he furthered his education in the engineering and surveying field. Mr. Sprock was a World War II veteran, serving in the Army in the culinary department in Texas from 1942-46.

After the war Mr. Sprock spent time with his dog as his only companion near the Tioga Pass as a trapper of marten and bear. He sold the meat and furs from the trappings to make his living. He later relocated to Tamarack Pines on Highway 50.

For a couple of winters he worked for the California Division of Highways, now known as Caltrans. In the summer months he built log cabins, doing all the work from scratch by cutting the trees, skinning the logs, and cementing them together, along with all aspects needed for a completed cabin.

Mr. Sprock met the love of his life, Barbara “Bobbie” Sprock, at Strawberry Lodge on the dance floor in 1950. They were married Oct. 28 that same year in San Francisco. Together they built a log cabin for their first home and raised rabbits to supplement their income. They were married until Bobbie passed 56 years later.

After the ski area was sold, Mr. Sprock took an interest in an innovative and cutting edge pedestrian transport system called the Yantrac People Mover, where he spent much time using his background knowledge in engineering and survey.

Then the couple moved to Montana where they purchased and operated the V & B Ranch located near Wilsall. On their 5,500-acre cattle ranch there were several other businesses operated from this property, such as guided fishing on the property, horseshoeing, and more.

After the loss of Mr. Sprock's vision due to a stroke, they sold the ranch and moved to Bozeman, Mont. He then took great interest in the activities and accomplishments of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Mr. Sprock enjoyed skiing, fishing, hunting and family activities. He enjoyed and attended Kirkwood Baptist Church in Bozeman.

Survivors include children, Kathy (Robert) Pavich, and Peter (Juli) Sprock; grandchildren, Christopher Pavich, and Ty Sprock, all of Zephyr Cove, Richard Pettay and three great-grandchildren (Tyler, Jacob, Sara) of Carson City; sister Nadine Tomlinson of Sioux Falls, S.D.

Funeral Services will be at 11am Feb. 20 at Dahl Funeral Chapel, with interment to follow at Sunset Hills Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, the Vernon Sprock Athletic Scholarship Fund has been created for the benefit of alpine skiing athletes through Far West Ski Foundation, a 501(c) 3. Checks may be made payable to Far West Ski Foundation, P.O. Box 861, Fallbrook, CA 92088.

Opinion: Machines can't do everything

By David Brooks, New York Times

We're clearly heading into an age of brilliant technology. Computers are already impressively good at guiding driverless cars and beating humans at chess and Jeopardy. As Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology point out in their book "The Second Machine Age," computers are increasingly going to be able to perform

important parts of even mostly cognitive jobs, like picking stocks, diagnosing diseases and granting parole.



David Brooks

As this happens, certain mental skills will become less valuable because computers will take over. Having a great memory will probably be less valuable. Being able to be a straight-A student will be less valuable – gathering masses of information and regurgitating it back on tests. So will being able to do any mental activity that involves following a set of rules.

But what human skills will be more valuable?

In the news business, some of those skills are already evident. Technology has rewarded sprinters (people who can recognize and alertly post a message on Twitter about some interesting immediate event) and marathoners (people who can write large conceptual stories), but it has hurt middle-distance runners (people who write 800-word summaries of yesterday's news conference). Technology has rewarded graphic artists who can visualize data, but it has punished those who can't turn written reporting into video presentations.

Read the whole story

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2 medals for U.S. in men's super G

Travis Ganong of Squaw Valley, who is skiing in his first Olympics, finished the super G in 23rd place with a time of 1:20.02.

Four medals were handed out in Sunday's event.

Kjetil Jansrud of Norway took the gold with a 1:18.14.

Andrew Weibrecht of Lake Placid, N.Y., won bronze four years ago in Vancouver. In Sochi he came away with the silver with a time of 1:18.44

Tying for the bronze were Bode Miller of New Hampshire and Jan Hudec of Canada. They had a time of 1:18.67.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

El Dorado County wants help with mental health

The Mental Health Division of the El Dorado County Health and Human Services Agency wants input on the county's Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Programs Plan for fiscal year 2014-15.

Community members may provide input via email or at one of the community meetings this month or in March.

MHSA's primary focus is on the unserved and underserved. MHSA looks at the needs of all ages.

Copies of previous MHSA Plans, as well as upcoming community meeting dates and times, can be found online.

For more information about MHSA or the plan, call (530) 621.6340.

USFS to pile burn throughout Tahoe basin

U.S. Forest Service fuels management crews may resume prescribed fire operations in several locations around the Lake Tahoe Basin beginning Feb. 18.

Operations may take place in the Luther Pass Campground off of Highway 89 near South Lake Tahoe, on the west side of Highway 89 near Tahoma, and in Slaughterhouse Canyon on Lake Tahoe's East Shore.

Prescribed fire crews may continue operations through the weekend, weather, staffing, and conditions permitting. Locations may vary due to changing conditions.

All prescribed fire projects are conducted in accordance with an approved prescribed fire burn plan. Burn plans describe specific conditions under which operations are conducted including the weather, number of personnel, opportunities to minimize smoke impacts, and available burn days. This information is used to decide when and where to burn.

Smoke from prescribed fire may continue for several days after the initial ignition. Smoke that settles in low lying areas in the morning usually lifts out of the area during normal daytime heating.

Last summer’s wildfires serve as

Forest Service staff will post road signs around the areas affected by the prescribed fire, send email notifications, and update the local fire information line at (530) 543.2600, No. 6. To receive prescribed fire notifications, send an email to pa_ltbmu@fs.fed.us.

Fish stocking to start earlier than normal in Nev.

It’s been 10 years since Nevada Department of Wildlife officials needed to stock rivers so early with fish.

It’s all because of the drought that stocking will start this month instead of the end of March.

“Mother Nature is not being very good to us this winter so we’re trying to look ahead,” Kim Tisdale, supervising fisheries biologist for the Nevada Department of Wildlife, told the *Reno Gazette-Journal*. “If we don’t, we’ll end up with a hatchery full of fish and no place to put them.”

The department will start with the Truckee River next week. Then it will stock Topaz, Spooner and Marlette lakes, as well as other smaller water bodies.

Tisdale told the *RGJ* that Lake Tahoe will likely receive more stocked trout than normal.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Obama pledges millions to help drought-stricken Calif.

By Norimitsu Onishi and Coral Davenport, New York Times

FRESNO — President Obama arrived in the heart of California's parched farmland on Friday afternoon to offer tens of millions of dollars in federal assistance to the state, where the lack of rain and snow this winter has led to the severest drought in its modern history.

Meeting with farmers and ranchers around Fresno — where electronic signs along highways flash entreatingly to drivers, "Serious drought. Help save water" — Obama pledged $183 million from existing federal funds for drought relief programs in California. Though the announcement won cautious support in this region, Obama also pressed ahead with the more difficult task of enlisting rural America in his campaign on climate change by linking it to the drought.

Obama also spoke of climate change, drawing links to the drought as well as hurricanes in the Atlantic Ocean. Mr. Obama announced that he would ask Congress for $1 billion in new funding for a "climate resiliency" program to help communities invest in research, development and new infrastructure to prepare for climate disasters.

Read the whole story

Judge dismisses Nevada patient dumping civil lawsuit

By Phillip Reese and Cynthia Hubert, Sacramento Bee

A federal judge on Thursday dismissed a civil lawsuit brought on behalf of a patient who was bused to Sacramento from a Nevada state psychiatric hospital in Las Vegas.

Rawson-Neal Psychiatric Hospital discharged James Flavy Coy Brown via Greyhound bus last February to Sacramento, where he had no connections and no arrangements for treatment or housing waiting for him. Brown's story was the impetus for a series of investigative reports in the *Sacramento Bee* that found the hospital had shipped about 1,500 psychiatric patients to states across the nation in a five-year period.

In the wake of the *Bee's* reports, Rawson-Neal lost its accreditation and its treatment protocols have been the focus of ongoing reviews by state and federal agencies. The hospital, Nevada's primary facility for mentally ill people, remains in danger of losing its federal Medicare funding, pending demands for improvements.

Read the whole story

Night of improv coming to LTCC

Random Acts of Improv is the resident improvisation company of the Theater Arts Department at Lake Tahoe Community College.

They will be performing Feb. 21 at 7:30pm in the Duke Theatre. Tickets are $5 at the door.

This family-friendly show will feature seasoned improvisation performers, as well as a few fresh faces. For more information, call (530) 541.4660, ext. 240 or email Boulanger@ltcc.edu.

Calif. court overturns restrictions on concealed guns

By Maura Dolan and Tony Perry, Los Angeles Times

SAN FRANCISCO – In a significant victory for gun owners, a divided federal appeals court Thursday struck down California rules that permit counties to restrict as they see fit the right to carry a concealed weapon in public.

The 2-1 ruling by a U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals panel would overturn restrictions on carrying concealed handguns, primarily affecting California's most populated regions, including Los Angeles, Orange County, San Diego and San Francisco.

The majority said the restrictions violate the 2nd Amendment's guarantee of the right to bear arms because they deny law-abiding citizens the ability to carry weapons in public unless they show they need the protection for specific reasons.

Read the whole story