Old Long Skiis – ‘He touched so many lives’

By Kathryn Reed

If life is about creating cherished memories, then **Bob Rockwell** had a full life – even though many would say 61 is way too young to die.

He was a character. His friends proved that on Saturday with their stories about this longtime South Lake Tahoe resident who died in November.

As a lover of history, the afternoon doubled as a fundraiser for the Osgood Toll House, which is believed to be the oldest building in the Tahoe basin. It was appropriate that the nearly 70 people in attendance faced that old building as others talked about the man they called friend.



Bob Rockwell

Rockwell in the last few years became involved with the Lake Tahoe Historical Society, even speaking at events. The nonprofit is trying to raise $30,000 to restore the toll house; which people were asked to donate to in Rockwell’s name.

For those who didn’t know Rockwell growing up or working with him at South Tahoe Refuse, they were introduced to him as Old Long Skiis (his spelling) as a regular commenter on *Lake Tahoe*

News.

“One thing that amazed me after he passed is how many people only knew him as Old Long Skiis. They had never met him,” Jeff Tillman said. “We’ll miss Old Long Skiis because he set us straight, told the truth and kept us in line.”

Tillman was not only Rockwell’s boss at the garbage company, but his friend. A token of honor was Tillman wearing a T-shirt from one of the many car races they went to.

Rockwell’s genuine good nature, storytelling and love of music were constant themes during his memorial June 11.

It was a different world when he grew up here. Mike Silvera recalled when they were 11 they wanted to ride around the lake with a couple other friends. Their parents said fine. They spent the night on the North Shore camping and then came home the next day.

John Allasia recalled the five-day canoe trip around the lake. No life jackets. The canoe was so loaded down that the water, especially as the waves got stronger, nearly came in.

The sentiment was Rockwell was always up for an adventure even it wasn’t well thought out.

“We went to the same church – the great outdoors,” Kevin Cruess said. He talked about how Rockwell liked to backcountry ski in an area just north of the Carson Pass. It had been years since either had been there. Cruess took his old skinny skis back there last December to scatter some of his buddy’s ashes.

Christy Prouty recalled being set up on a blind date. She was told this guy was cute and funny. She said that was true, and spent the next 25 years with Rockwell.

“He touched so many lives and always in a positive way,” she said.

Rockwell was also an avid gardener. It was appropriate that wildflower seeds were handed out Saturday – symbolizing the circle of life.

Nevada GOP confronted with taxing choice in primary

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY – Rarely have Nevada Republican voters had such clear choices about the future of their party as they do in Tuesday's primary election.

On one side is Gov. Brian Sandoval and the GOP state lawmakers who stood with him on the 2015 budget, which included $1.5 billion in new and continuing taxes aimed primarily at funding public education.

Their support in the Assembly and Senate was crucial to getting the two-thirds vote needed to pass the omnibus tax measure, which included a new commerce tax now being implemented on businesses that earn $4 million or more in revenue.

On the other side are anti-tax Republicans who are outraged that the party, which controlled the governor's office and both houses of the Legislature for the first time since 1929, failed to enact a stronger GOP agenda.

Read the whole story

Passenger-carrying drone company will test in Nev.

By Nicole Raz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

The nation’s first passenger-carrying drone manufacturing company is coming to test its system in Nevada.

EHang Inc., a company headquartered in Guangzhou, China, is developing a drone capable of carrying passengers. A passenger would enter a destination into the drone system’s accompanying smartphone app.

The Nevada Institute for Autonomous Systems, a state nonprofit group sponsored by the Governor’s Office of Economic Development, will work to help EHang test and develop its system, officials said this week.

Read the whole story

Unpopular Lake Valley fire chief leaving

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Valley Fire Protection District’s divisive fire chief is about to be without a job.

Gareth Harris has had a tempestuous tenure as chief. Twice he had unanimous votes of no confidence from firefighters. Key staff has been looking to leave because the morale is so lousy. Finally, the board had enough.



Gareth Harris

While the official letter sent by board Chairman Bob Bettencourt to staff said Harris is retiring, those close to the situation told *Lake Tahoe News* the chief was told to leave.

Harris' last day on the payroll is Aug. 1, however he will be gone at the end of the month. Bettencourt described it as being "on leave beginning July 1."

When Harris was hired in 2005 from the Half Moon Bay Fire District as battalion chief and fire marshal for Lake Valley he was the first hire at that level outside of the department. But he came with baggage. According to news reports from Half Moon Bay, Harris was accused of harassment by a subordinate that ended in a settlement agreement.

The 54-year-old became chief in summer 2011. Harris replaced popular and well-respected **Fire Chief Jeff Michael**. Michael had been with the Lake Valley department for 32 years. He is being brought back in to be interim chief starting July 1.

Bettencourt in a letter to Lake Valley staff that was obtained by *LTN*, said, Michael's hire is "to assist the district with the issues we are facing at the current time."

Harris has been described as lazy as well as a bully.

Harris was the subject of 2014 El Dorado County **Grand Jury report** regarding selling radio equipment to the department he worked for. California Government Code prohibits employees from having any financial interest in any contract made by them or in their official capacity.

Harris did not return a phone call.

Squaw Valley to host women's World Cup events

By Lake Tahoe News

For the first time in 19 years, a World Cup event will be staged at a Lake Tahoe area ski resort.

The International Ski Federation (FIS) today awarded Squaw Valley a women's giant slalom race on March 10, 2017, and a women's slalom on March 11, 2017.

The athletes will compete on Red Dog, the same run women competed on in the slalom and giant slalom at the 1969 World Cup and 1960 Winter Olympics.

Julia Mancuso, whose home resort is Squaw, intends to compete. This, though, is assuming her hip that was surgically repaired this spring after a shortened race season allows her to return.

"Growing up at Squaw Valley, I have been hoping for the return of the World Cup for a long time, and now we have the chance to show the world that our Olympic legacy is very much alive,"

said Olympic champion Mancuso said in a statement. “The terrain at Squaw Valley is what raised me as a skier, and I know that when my peers stand on top of the course on Red Dog they will see what competitors saw in 1960 and 1969: one of the most challenging courses in the world. So many of today’s racers have trained and competed on Red Dog in the past, and now we can see this legendary venue re-emerge onto the world stage.”

The 2014 Nature Valley U.S. Alpine Championships were on Red Dog. Mikaela Shiffrin, the reigning Olympic slalom champion, took the giant slalom gold that year.

The terrain so impressed Shiffrin that she returned to the course last April to train with fellow athletes from the U.S. women’s team. She expects to compete in the World Cup at Squaw next year.

“Red Dog is an awesome slope. The hill itself is super challenging and fun to ski,” Shiffrin said in a statement. “The middle section has a lot of terrain variation: a break over, fall-aways, side hills, and bank turns. You have to be able to really attack the course. By the time you hit the pitch, which is one of the longest sustained pitches on the world cup besides Sölden (in Austria), you are already 45 seconds into the run and your legs are burning. Then you come over the break over and you can see the finish and your thinking ‘oh man, I’m not even close! OK here we go!’”

The Red Dog Giant slalom course begins at 7,520 feet at the top of Snow King Peak, descending 1,267 feet before the finish at 6,252 feet at the base area of Squaw Valley. The slalom course will be on the lower portion of the same course, dropping 656 vertical feet from its start on Lower Dog Leg.

The addition of Squaw in March and Killington, Vt., in November brings the number of World Cup events to 16 for the 2016-17 season, the second highest ever.

Brown, top Democrats strike deal on spending plan

By Jessica Calefati, San Jose Mercury News

SACRAMENTO – Gov. Jerry Brown and the Legislature's top Democrats have agreed on a framework for a state budget that makes a generous deposit into a rainy-day savings account and sets aside close to a half-billion dollars for affordable housing, administration sources said Thursday.

Despite a Wall Street slowdown that led Brown last month to release a revised $122.2 billion general fund budget that had shrunk slightly compared to January, legislative leaders convinced him to increase spending not just for housing, but also for child care and welfare programs.

But Senate President Pro Tem Kevin de León and Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon weren't the only ones who walked away from the negotiating table happy, the sources said. Brown convinced them to support a $2 billion rainy-day fund deposit he wanted instead of fighting to spend that money on new programs or services.

Read the whole story

Renowned Nev. epidemiologist talks diseases

By Susan Wood

RENO – And the doctor worked on.

Questioning whether Mary Guinan has fulfilled a storied career in medicine is like asking Nevadans if they want clean air and Americans if they want to be disease free.

A notable epidemiologist, the 76-year-old distinguished physician not only served as the Silver State's chief health officer from 1998 to 2002 and 2005-06, she was on the front lines of the first AIDS cases while working for the Centers for Disease Control for 20 years.

And now, an East Shore resident, she has written a book – "Adventures of a Female Medical Detective."

She read excerpts and signed copies this week at Sundance Books in Reno.



Mary Guinan, left, talks with people after the June 7 reading at Sundance Books in Reno. Photos/Susan Wood

Much of the book chronicles those critical, painful years of treating the AIDS epidemic, with all its stigmas and challenges. It was a shameful, fear-based era in American health. AIDS represented a death sentence to mostly gay men, who were disowned and disenfranchised from society.

The disease, which burst on the scene in mainly metropolitan areas in the early 1980s, has claimed 36 million. Still today 50,000 cases are reported each year. In the early years, the team with Guinan at the CDC launched an undaunted fight to understand AIDS, which has no cure or vaccine – just treatment for the HIV immune system deficiency symptoms. These medical soldiers' work was documented in Randy Shilts' book "And the Band Played On." There's a scene in the story in which Guinan and her colleague realize they both connected with Patient 0, the first to be chronicled. Their "aha" looks told the story of the monumental task ahead of them as they tried feverishly to understand and isolate the disease.

But it was the reaction of society to those infected that left

Guinan with the sinking feeling that discrimination was alive and well in the United States.

“The fear was overwhelming. People were thrown out of their apartments, lost their jobs,” she told the group. She told *Lake Tahoe News* earlier that some mothers approach her after her talks declaring they disowned their gay sons with AIDS, “a decision they’ve regretted the rest of their lives.”

Any regrets from the front line of the AIDS fight?

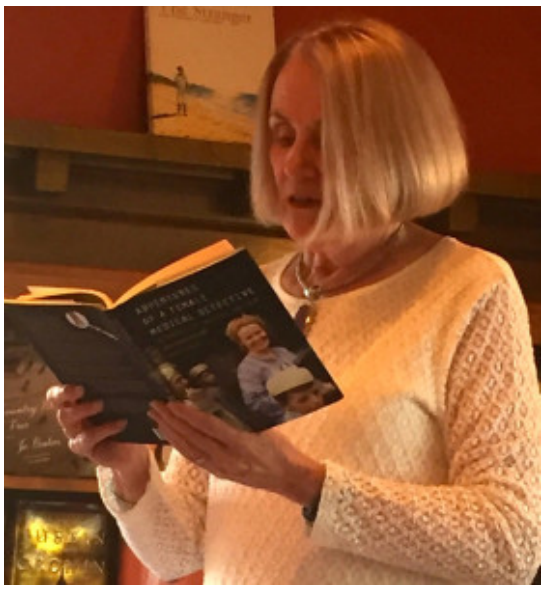
“I wished we could have eliminated the hatred,” Guinan said in the *LTN* interview, while adding: “My son (at 30) didn’t know much about the time. He read the book and couldn’t believe what life was like. People of his generation couldn’t care less who’s gay.”

She even conducted a talk in Ireland and thanked the citizens for passing an initiative to legalize same-sex marriage.

“I told them they shamed New York City,” Guinan said.

The chapter of her book dictating how homophobia gripped the nation in the 1980s and’ 90s was difficult to write, she told the group.

“It took me a long time to write it because it was so sad,” she said, while a hush came over the room. “Still people don’t want to be tested because they don’t want to be identified.”



Mary Guinan

She read a passage about the story of a woman shamed by her husband, a preacher, who gave her AIDS.

Guinan also talked about working as the top medical officer for Nevada at a time when Fallon harbored the largest cluster of leukemia ever recorded. Normal for the health department is one case every five years.

“We had 15 cases in a 2½-year period there,” she said. The audience gasped.

She had indicated to *LTN* one of her most crowning achievements for Nevada centered on the Clean Indoor Air Act of 2005. The tobacco and casino industries fought hard against it, spending millions of dollars on a campaign against it.

“Nevada has the highest rate of childhood asthma,” she said.

After the reading on June 7, those who came out assessed the event as a success. It hit more close to home for some than others.

“She’s a fascinating woman with a fascinating life. What she said about how no one knows public health is so true,” Pam Young said after the talk. Young, who retired from the Washoe County Public Health Department, came out in support of

Guinan’s work with colleague Ellen Marston.

“Her career is amazing,” one woman whispered after Guinan wrapped up her talk at Sundance books.

Glass ceiling?

Guinan’s journey to public health was varied and unscripted. She shared with the audience stories of how she tried to break down gender barriers by opting for professions not commonly held by women.

First, it was President John F. Kennedy’s insistence on reaching the moon that made her dream of being an astronaut some day.

She graduated from college a chemistry major, but few jobs were open to women. “Help wanted” ads back then were divided by men and women. For her college background, she landed in Queens in a gum factory. She was asked to develop a “kissing gum,” so her bright idea was to dye the surface sugar pink. The creation turned into a debacle as an explosion of pink sprayed so hard, it turned one of her male colleague’s underwear pink.

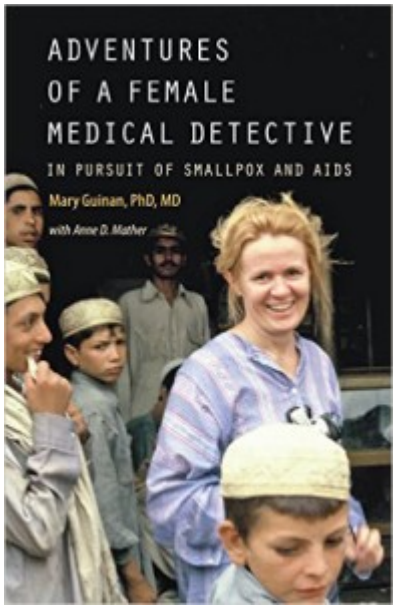
When JFK was killed, she pondered his famous speech: “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what can I do for my country.” With that, she got a job in the medical branch of the University of Texas in Galveston, where astronauts gathered often and talked about their exotic experiences in space. The fire was lit. She took an aviation course, but ultimately the quest didn’t work out. She instead enrolled in a post-doctoral fellowship, consequently attended medical school, and the rest is history.

Of Irish descent, she always remembers her parents dictating that “you could do whatever you want to do” in America.

Still marveling this day at 165 countries in the world

fighting to eliminate small pox, the ambitious New Yorker looked broader than the U.S. for her next quest.

So when the World Health Organization's infectious disease division provided an assignment to eradicate the dreaded disease, she jumped all over the job and onto a plane to India. The assignment that called for quarantining the infected while getting supplies over swollen rivers turned out to be challenging until one day, a man in a big black car said he wanted to help by giving her an elephant to ride over the rivers.



"I wasn't sure what to say," Guinan told the bookstore attendees, who were snickering at the notion.

It worked out, and she kept the elephant for three weeks. Needless to say, her expense reports got a second look when she claimed an elephant driver.

She left India in 1975, and within a year, small pox was no longer a threat.

"It was intoxicating for me to be a part of such as program," she said.

From that point forward, she was hooked on fighting infectious diseases.

She even became known as "Dr. Herpes" when the syndrome was

hitting all the news cycles. She served on a panel discussion in Utah on cold sores, and Dan Rather came on the *CBS News* and gave her the label.

The transition to AIDS was almost seamless. Her detective work was put to the test.

Three years before she left the CDC in 1998, a cocktail of drugs was developed to treat the symptoms.

“It was like a miracle happened,” Guinan told the group.

But the fight over diseases never ends.

The founding dean of UNLV’s school of Community Health Sciences, her most recent concerns go far beyond small towns and the state – and even her country.

“People need to be reminded of how bad it was during the AIDS epidemic and make that association with the Zika virus,” she told *Lake Tahoe News.*

And at her book reading, a few people asked her about the latest disease caused by mosquito bites. Her main concern lies with it being transmitted sexually. Therein lies a perfect storm of events – the virus is rampaging in countries with mass populations and few options of birth control.

The Summer Olympic Games’ host city Rio de Janiero is in one of the countries.

“It’s a big problem,” Guinan answered one inquiry from the book reading. “(Olympic officials are) telling people to wear long sleeves and wear bug repellent. How effective that’s going to be remains to be seen.

“We have to do our jobs to try to find out people who have visited (these countries) and so they can be tested,” she said. The Zika virus, which is especially potent at causing birth defects, can be harbored for a decade in a carrier.

“It reminds of the AIDS virus,” Guinan said of that parallel.

The epidemiologist also fielded a question about the highly controversial issue of some parents refusing to vaccinate their children. Her response to the article in a medical science journal supporting that stance: “The damage is done.”

Calif. leaders working on affordable housing

By Jim Miller, Sacramento Bee

Affordable housing, a back-burner issue at the state Capitol for a decade, has emerged as a central part of talks on a new California budget, with Gov. Jerry Brown, lawmakers and others pressing proposals they want to be part of a final deal.

Brown’s revised spending plan, released May 13, includes a Senate proposal to borrow $2 billion against revenue from the state’s mental health services tax on millionaires to subsidize affordable housing projects for people with mental illness.

The Democratic governor also wants to speed up the local land-use approval process for housing projects that include affordable units.

Lawmakers, meanwhile, have introduced measures that would go much further, committing significant general fund money to the problem. The Assembly budget includes $650 million for various affordable housing programs, and a $3 billion affordable housing bond for the November ballot passed the Senate with bipartisan support last week.

Read the whole story

Lost hiker’s experience offers lessons for others

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

If Rocklin mom Dana Michael has it her way, her son Cody would give up this whole hiking thing.

Cody Michael, 23, was rescued last month by a Blackhawk helicopter after spending three days lost along a high Sierra trail with his dog Bauer.

In her words: “I hope he bags the whole backpacking thing after his experience.”

It’s unclear whether Cody Michael will oblige.

Read the whole story

Rough start to summer at SLT’s Beach Retreat

By Kathryn Reed

Call it what you want – Connolly Beach, Timber Cove Beach, Beach Retreat – just don’t call it Party Beach.

The latter is essentially what owners of Tahoe Beach Retreat and Lodge would have preferred based on the slew of events they had planned for this summer.

The problem, though, is no permits were ever obtained for the activities. And on top of that the private beach has a public easement on it. This means anyone can use the sand – to walk, sunbathe, picnic or swim – from June 1-Sept. 30, dawn to dusk.

The public component came about from a court case that started in the 1970s. It says access will not be thwarted.

Putting up temporary structures whether it's for a wedding, a volleyball tournament or outdoor bar are considered impediments.

In the three years that Urbana has owned the South Lake Tahoe hotel there has been an ongoing battle with city officials as well as residents.

At Tuesday's City Council meeting the electeds on a 4-1 vote decided to mostly enforce its rules. Councilman Tom Davis was the dissenter, saying he wanted to cut them "slack". The others didn't support favoritism.

City code says certain temporary activities require a permit and that there can only be four a year. The city wants to ensure fire safety, parking, amplified music and temporary structures are regulated.

A wedding would be considered one event. The Beach Retreat, which is getting out of the business of weddings on the beach, has three planned for this summer. They will be allowed to go on and not count toward the four activities.

City and hotel staff will work together to figure out which activities require a permit and which don't. A hula-hoop contest might be fine, while a luau would likely need a permit.

Until it is resolved the Beach Retreat is not allowed to have events. If they do, citations start at $250 and go up to $1,000.

The city has already had to go after property owners for putting up art at the beach without a permit.

The hotel has applied for a license with ABC to serve liquor on the beach. The city has filed a protest letter.

Police Chief Brian Uhler said without a controlled area for where adult beverages can be consumed, it would create an enforcement nightmare for officers.

While Brandon Reed, who manages the property, started his testimony with a bitter tone, and essentially said how the owners $24 million investment in the property should be worth some favors, ended his speech in a more conciliatory manner. Still, he never apologized for his actions.

He and others said the public is welcome to most of the events, and that without them the property would not remain viable.

Councilman Austin Sass said, “Putting art up without a permit – you should have known that would piss people off. You can’t keep doing the stuff you are doing and expect people to discuss (issues).”