

Measles – resurgence of a preventable disease

By Jennifer Ehmann

Recently, measles made headlines after an outbreak linked to exposure at Disneyland in mid-December. Washoe County has reported two suspected cases and more than 100 cases, mostly in California, have been confirmed.

Measles is caused by a highly contagious virus and more cases are likely to emerge. Fourteen states have been affected and previous statistics from the California Alert Health Network showed 86 percent of past measles cases are patients who have not been vaccinated or the vaccination status is unknown.



Jennifer
Ehmann

In two years, cases of the measles in the United States have increased. Vaccination can help prevent the spread of the illness and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports a two-dose series has been found to be 97 percent effective.

Measles is not a new disease. A Persian doctor wrote the first description in the 9th century, but the disease may date back to Roman times. Before 1963, when a vaccine became available, most children had the disease by age 15. Prior to the use of the measles vaccine, the CDC estimates 500 deaths, 48,000

hospitalizations, and 4,000 cases of encephalitis (infection of the brain) occurred in the United States annually.

Without the vaccine, nearly 90 percent of people who come into contact with an infected person get the measles. Measles spreads through respiratory droplets in the air, such as coughing and sneezing, and touching contaminated surfaces. Some reports note the virus can survive for up to two hours on surfaces.

Symptoms include a fever (often quite high), runny nose, cough, red eyes, and a sore throat followed by a distinctive rash on the whole body. The flat and sometimes bumpy rash may appear three to five days after the other symptoms, starting on the head and spreading down the rest of the body. People are contagious up to four days before they show signs or symptoms and until four days after the rash appears.

The measles has no specific treatment. Complications include diarrhea, ear infections, and pneumonia. Encephalitis, an infection that causes a swelling of the brain, is a more serious problem that can leave the person with deafness, seizures, mental retardation, or death. Another complication is Subacute Sclerosing PanEncephalitis (SSPE), which is a progressive, fatal infection of the nervous system that occurs seven to ten years after having the illness. Pregnant women can have severe complications that can affect them and their unborn child.

In 2000, measles was considered eradicated from the United States largely through immunization efforts. Immunization is achieved with the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine or MMRV (measles, mumps, rubella, and varicella) vaccine. A young child usually gets the vaccine between the first 12 and 15 months and a second dose between 4 and 6 years old. Travel outside the country may prompt earlier vaccination between 6 to 11 months old for younger children at risk. The American Academy of Pediatrics reports that mild side effects may occur

from the vaccine, but a severe reaction is very rare.

If you are unsure of your or your child's vaccination status or have concerns regarding your child having the illness, contact your pediatrician. The Centers for Disease Control and American Academy of Pediatrics also have valuable, updated information.

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Calif. lawmakers aim to limit vaccine exemptions

By Fenit Nirappil, AP

SACRAMENTO — California lawmakers proposed legislation Wednesday that would require parents to vaccinate all schoolchildren unless a child's health is in danger, joining only two other states with such stringent restrictions.

Parents could no longer cite personal beliefs or religious reasons to send unvaccinated children to private and public schools under a proposal introduced after dozens of people have fallen ill from a measles outbreak that started at Disneyland. Mississippi and West Virginia are the only other states with such strict vaccine rules, though the California bill's chief author said he would consider including a religious exemption.

"People are starting to realize, 'I'm vulnerable, my children are vulnerable,'" said Sen. Richard Pan, a Democratic pediatrician from Sacramento. "We should not wait for more

children to sicken or die before we act.”

Childhood vaccine has become an emotionally charged topic amid a measles outbreak that has sickened more than 100 people across the U.S. and in Mexico. No deaths have been reported.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, California is among 20 states that allow for personal belief exemptions and 48 that allow for religious exemptions.

A Washington state lawmaker introduced a bill Wednesday that would remove the personal belief allowance for an exemption in that state.

Public health officials believe an immunization rate of at least 90 percent is critical to minimizing the potential for a disease outbreak. California’s kindergarteners met that threshold at the start of this school year, according to state statistics: 2 percent were exempted because of their parents’ personal beliefs and another half a percent were exempted because of their parent’s religion.

Less than one-fifth of a percent of all students – about 1,000 – had a medical vaccine exemption that would be preserved under the bill.

Pan, who previously served in the Assembly, was the author of another vaccination bill that took effect last year. It requires parents who don’t have their children vaccinated for non-religious reasons to get a note from the doctor’s office before enrolling their children in school.

A spokesman for Gov. Jerry Brown, who signed that bill, did not say if the governor would oppose efforts to end exemptions.

“The governor believes that vaccinations are profoundly important and a major public health benefit and any bill that reaches his desk will be closely considered,” spokesman Evan

Westrup wrote in an email.

Parents cite a variety of reasons for not immunizing their children: religious values, concerns the shots could cause illness and a belief that allowing children to get sick helps them to build a stronger immune system.

The American Academy of Pediatrics says doctors should bring up the importance of vaccinations during visits but should respect a parent's wishes unless there's a significant risk to the child.

The California bill is also backed by Democratic Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez and Democratic Sen. Ben Allen, a former Santa Monica school board member.

Separately on Wednesday, Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein called on California's top health official to reconsider the state's policy on vaccine exemptions in light of the measles outbreak.

"We believe there should be no such thing as a philosophical or personal belief exemption, since everyone uses public spaces," the Democratic senators wrote in an open letter.

Hard Rock – branding Tahoe's music lifestyle

By Scott A. Lukas

STATELINE – As someone who studies themed and immersive spaces from around the world, I have always felt that Tahoe (and its many consumer spaces) needs a theme ... besides itself. In this case, music is the theme of choice.



Hard Rock Hotel & Casino is
redefining the South Shore.
Photos/Scott A. Lukas

In so many ways, the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino is an ideal addition to Stateline and Lake Tahoe. As a press release states, the \$60 million renovation “[of] the debilitated Horizon ... ushers in an improved property make-over and economic revitalization of Tahoe South and the Hwy 50 corridor.” The Hard Rock takes over for the Horizon, which had struggled with its identity late in its existence and which had itself been remade and rebranded from the iconic Del Webb’s Sahara Tahoe (and its Elvis glory) and the later Western-themed Del Webb’s High Sierra Hotel.

The lake, the mountains, and all of the natural beauty and activities that go along with the Tahoe lifestyle are wonderful and shouldn’t be downplayed, but relying solely on these themes can be limiting. Newer events like SnowGlobe Music Festival remind us all that a community’s identity is ever shifting and changes in line with what is happening within the community and outside of it. This, I think, is case and point for the excitement that we should have for the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino and its recent grand opening.

I would suggest that as a metaphor, the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino represents the beginnings of a revitalization of the Tahoe region. The community is changing economically, demographically, and in terms of its tourist patterns, and certainly the gaming industry has undergone major changes that

have been felt in Las Vegas, China, and right here in Lake Tahoe. The Hard Rock is a new direction and its major theme – music – could be seen (literally and metaphorically) as a source of great vitality for the region.



Elvis' connection to the area has not been forgotten.

It's with this theme of music that I began my experiential visit to the Hard Rock. In my research and consulting work on themed and immersive spaces, one of my first steps is to take an initial walk-through of a space in order to discover its key essences. Later, I often share these on my YouTube channel, which gives visitors the opportunity to join in the tour and to discover something exciting about the space.

I learned many years ago, while working as a trainer for Six Flags theme parks, that the first impressions a guest has of a space are the lasting ones, so I try to capture my own impressions as a visitor would when visiting a new space like the Hard Rock. I am also a cultural anthropologist, so my insights are not just based on first impressions, but on years of research and study in the analysis, design, and operation of themed and immersive spaces.

So, here is my hybrid ethnography-tour that I recorded on Feb. 2, 2015.

Before I entered the Hard Rock, I had decided that I needed to survey the massive guitar that adorns the Highway 50 entrance

of the hotel and casino. I had heard a great deal about the sculpture, which was created by Terrence Martin of Jagged Edge Metal Art of Sacramento. On first glance I think, “It’s a guitar and, yes, guitars are heavily symbolic of music,” but I begin to note some other features that are rather ingenious reflections of a number of metaphors. We have *music*, but it’s amplified through the metaphors of the lake (with glass boulders backlit to appear like the water at night), the *remade* and *revitalized* (with its patina that looks like old lumber and a crazy quilt of hinges and other parts), and *change* and *vitality* (with the movement of the guitar around its space – which wasn’t actually spinning during my visit).

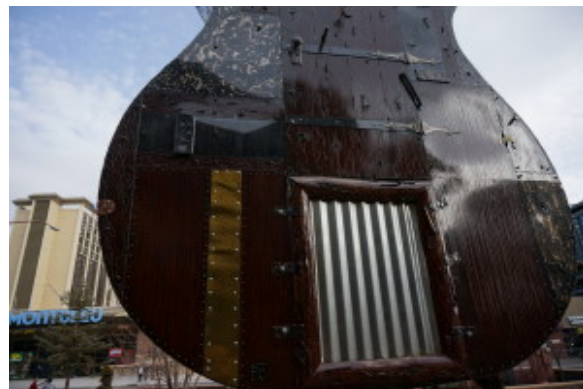
What’s key in my observation of these metaphors is how complementary they are. Most important is the fact that the guitar (and its representation as the Hard Rock brand) dialogues with the lake as it evokes its presence – which is just down the road – through the backlighting and a base made to look like a tree. As I walked past the guitar, it also occurred to me that having an iconic symbol like this one at the entrance is very important. So many cultures rely on such symbols and their related threshold spaces in order to create transformative experiences for those who enter those spaces.



The base conjures images of Lake Tahoe.



The guitar is multifaceted.



The guitar has elements from the Park family ranch in the Carson Valley.

Just entering the casino, I found a first dose of music memorabilia – a rather large case that features many items from the career of Kurt Cobain and Nirvana. One of the things that has always struck me about the Hard Rock brand is how it uses music memorabilia to create atmosphere—an ambiance of the lifestyle brand that is music. This is certainly the case here in terms of how this aspect of the design is used to connote music as lifestyle.

Just to the left, I notice the first of a number of restaurants – the Fire Break Kitchen & Bar. The Fire Break, in

a bit of local homage, takes its name from a run at Heavenly Mountain Resort. Not unlike some of the indoor-outdoor concept restaurants and clubs on the Las Vegas Strip, Fire Break features interior and exterior dining areas and, appropriately enough, outdoor fire pits just beyond the iconic guitar. I was impressed to see the reference to the local and to snowsports, as I noted a number of snowboards on the walls and other depictions of the significance of snow sports in Tahoe.

As a metaphor, fire has multiple useful connotations that help establish links between Tahoe and the music lifestyle brand of Hard Rock. Fire is warmth, the cooking of comfort food, the playing of a guitarist who is shredding through a solo, and many other things.

Like other casino spaces, the perimeter of the Hard Rock includes the many restaurants and thematic content, while the interior features table games and slots. Wandering around this space, I just slightly thought of the casino space of the New York-New York in Las Vegas, only because I felt somewhat claustrophobic and missed some of the theming that makes the perimeter spaces shine. This is certainly not a fault of the Hard Rock as they were working with the space that remained of the Horizon.

Getting back to the perimeter area, I couldn't help but notice the many subtle nods to music theming. Guests may sign up for a Backstage Pass, which was emphasized on signage that was made to resemble roadie crates and in many other spaces, such as the valet area, we see lamps that are also kick drums.



Memorabilia is everywhere.



Is it a drum or a lamp?

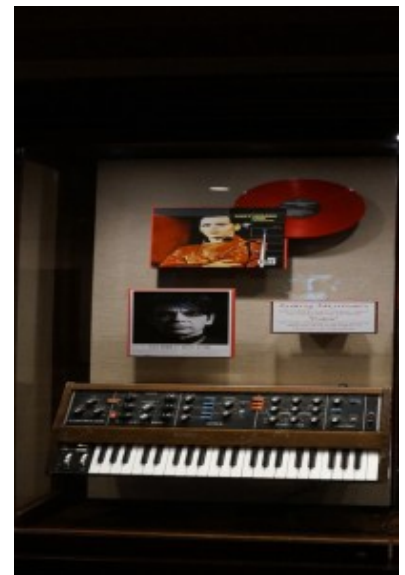
As we might expect, the music theming is carried beyond the physical spaces and into the website of the hotel and casino. The text “Start Me Up,” by the Rolling Stones, is a link on the hotel and casino’s website. “The Only Way to Rock Tahoe,” a similar link, is connected to a Heavenly-Hard Rock package deal on the same site.

As a press release states, the theming at the Hard Rock is consistent with the idea of the “omnipresent soul of music,” and I believe that this is a great way of describing how the design and memorabilia elements of the space are used to connect the guest to the ambiance of the lifestyle brand. A number of critics of the general Hard Rock brand have missed this point in their claims that just staring at music memorabilia, artwork, and instruments will not make one a musician. The point of the Hard Rock, at least as I understand it, is to use the thematic elements that connote music and its

lifestyle associations to immerse the guest within the space. Whether she or he is a musician is irrelevant as the spaces are all about the enjoyment of the brand and the lifestyle that is music. There certainly is a lot of memorabilia to appreciate at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino.



Chris Squire belongs.



Memorabilia is varied.

Being a prog rock and analog synth fan, I was taken with the Chris Squire (of Yes) and Gary Numan displays. Certainly, one could spend the better part of a half-day going through the many examples of classic music represented in the cases at the Hard Rock. On so many occasions, while in a Hard Rock venue I am reminded of the space of a museum; of course, there are

limitations in terms of the volume of information that is presented about any given artist or band in the hotel and casino's displays.

It's just past the Chris Squire display where I believe the Hard Rock truly shines. This is the space that includes the Oyster Bar, the chic-minimalist Center Bar, Fuel café, Vinyl (the entertainment space), the Hard Rock Store, and the hotel check-in area. There's a remarkable sense of consistency in the design elements that run throughout this area. We note some of the colors common to the Hard Rock brand (the purples and earth tones) and we also note additional design elements in chandeliers and carpet insets that reminded me of some of the upscale chic of the Cosmopolitan in Las Vegas. This area also includes the important Elvis homage cases, which include everything from concert posters from the Del Webb's Sahara Tahoe days of Elvis, video of Elvis' family life, and information on Elvis' costumes. Again, we might see that the inclusion of these Elvis elements allows the Hard Rock to highlight both the rock theme and its connection to Lake Tahoe.

In addition to Elvis, we find iconic band and artist items ranging from Gwar, the Sex Pistols, Ramones, Foo Fighters, and many others. I cannot help but think that the selection of this diverse range of artists connects to the overall lifestyle philosophy of the Hard Rock brand. Many of us recall the popular Hard Rock "You Know Who You Are" advertising campaign that featured everyday people in business attire who, while hanging out with their families and doing domestic sorts of things, are shown to have an edgy tattoo peeking out from under the conservative business attire – the true rocker inner soul of the guest.

I was reminded of both this campaign and the Hard Rock's "come as you are" and "be yourself" hiring and training philosophies as I noted the artists (perhaps) chosen for their attitude, hard edge, and non-conformist tendencies. A hidden metaphoric

potential of these artists is this sense of the avant-garde and all its non-conformist possibilities – an irony, no doubt, as we are speaking of a highly popular corporate brand in the Hard Rock.



The lobby is full of mementos.



GWAR items at the Hard Rock.

Speaking of this last point, it would be very easy for us to scoff at a brand like the Hard Rock because of it merely being a brand, and a very recognizable one. Again, I would say that the Hard Rock has been misunderstood and what is offered to the guest at Tahoe's version of the Hard Rock has been highly localized with the many forms of homage to the lake, the mountains, snowsports, and Elvis. As well, the metaphors that are present through the design and music lifestyle elements at the hotel and casino are very appropriate for both connecting us with the music brand and its relationships to Lake Tahoe.

For so many reasons, I believe that music and its lifestyle associations are especially apt forms of theming for this latest hotel and casino in Tahoe. Lake Tahoe has a strong arts and music community which, I believe, could be even stronger with some of the potentials that we see in the Hard Rock's emphasis on music and lifestyle. And, there is something awkwardly cool about the fact that we can now all wear a "Hard Rock Hotel, Est. 2015 Lake Tahoe" T-shirt. But, beyond the gift shop, let me end on one final metaphor that I noted near the end of my visit.



Plenty of clothing to buy in the store.

Just across from the hotel's front desk area is a very iconic piece of music memorabilia – a glove once worn by the King of Pop, Michael Jackson. I couldn't help but marvel at this remarkable piece of music history which is made even more so in these years following Jackson's untimely death. I found myself, as I typically do in themed spaces, snapping many, many photos and I even found it necessary to capture a video of the glove – which moves in a circular motion inside a case – doing a complete rotation. Then, it struck me. In this one piece – this iconic glove of Jackson's – we have the most powerful and relevant metaphor of them all. This is *mana*. Mana is a spiritual concept from Polynesian culture that, though hard to translate, roughly suggests a power, prestige, or special presence that may be held by an object, artifact, place, even a person. For many people, Jackson represented

such mana and the general inexplicable sense of awe that they encounter when listening to their favorite artist. With Jackson now gone, his glove is a remainder and reminder of a vitality that is still present with us today through this mana. For me, it is this object and its specific placement in the space that makes it the centerpiece of the Hard Rock. Its power and its specific ability to connect us with the likes of Michael Jackson, not unlike the other objects and displays within the hotel and casino, allow us to feel and experience something quite magical and transformative. This, the power of music and everything that it entails.



Michael Jackson's glove is prominently displayed.

Scott A. Lukas teaches anthropology and sociology at Lake Tahoe Community College and taught American Studies at the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz. He was recognized at the top undergraduate professor of anthropology in the United States by the American Anthropological Association in 2005, was also awarded the California Community Colleges' statewide Hayward Award for Excellence in Education in 2003, and was honored as Lake Tahoe Community College's Distinguished Faculty Member in 2013.

Incline Village couple suing Bear League

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

A Lake Tahoe couple who claims they were harassed and subjected to death threats after reporting a problem-causing bear that was later killed by authorities have sued a nonprofit bear advocacy group they contend was responsible for the harassment.

Richard and Adrienne Evans of Incline Village sued the Bear League and the organization's founder, Ann Bryant, seeking unspecified damages in connection with the December 2013 incident at the upscale north Tahoe community.

Through the suit, filed Dec. 8 in the Washoe District Court, the Evans hope to alter a pattern of behavior that has people properly reporting black bear problems to Nevada wildlife officials subject to harmful harassment by critics, said the couple's Reno attorney, Sean Rose.

An attorney representing Bryant and the Bear League did not return repeated phone calls by the *Reno Gazette-Journal*. In an answer to the complaint filed in District Court Dec. 30, central allegations made in the Evans' complaint were denied, including that the Bear League urged and encouraged the alleged harassment.

Read the whole story

Atmospheric river en route to Sierra

By Darrell Smith, Sacramento Bee

Water vapor – Mississippi River-size amounts of it flowing at hurricane speeds miles above the Earth – is hurtling across the Pacific, an atmospheric river poised to drench a parched Northern California and the Sacramento region as early as Thursday night.

A crack team of science experts is going along for the ride, part of an experiment known as CalWater 2015, many of whom gathered at McClellan Park near Sacramento on Tuesday in preparation for the major weather event and the vital information they hope to pull from the phenomenon.

“It’s a real milestone for us. Nothing of this scope has happened,” said Marty Ralph, director of the Center for Western Weather and Water Extremes at Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego, of the project he’s helping to lead. “One of the drivers of CalWater was the uncertainty of climate projections. We haven’t had the data to measure the strength and structure of ARs. ... There’s so much potential for the monitoring of atmospheric rivers.”

Read the whole story

Ambulance subsidy rankles SLT

officials

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe is tired of subsidizing ambulance service on the South Shore and is about to demand El Dorado County pay what it actually costs to run the program.

The bulk of the Feb. 3 City Council meeting centered on the 14-year-old Cal-Tahoe JPA which oversees the ambulance service that is provided by South Lake Tahoe and Lake Valley fire departments.

While the local agencies, with oversight by a board of directors, run the day-to-day operations, it is the responsibility of the county to provide residents with ambulance service. If the JPA were to disband, ambulance service would be solely the county's responsibility.

When the county went out for a bid in 2011 only the JPA made an offer. That contract expires in 2016, though the county has granted the JPA board's request to open the contract.



Ambulance service per law must be provided by El Dorado County. Photo/LTN

The fire departments operate three full-time and two reserve ambulances. But the county is only paying for two vehicles.

The county has also drained the coffers by reimbursing the JPA for trips to other hospitals at a flat fee. Inter-facility transfers used to garner 93 percent of the cost for the JPA, plus mileage. At that time it was a big revenue stream.

Another financial obstacle is that when the benefit assessment district was formed the engineer's report left out condos and timeshares from having to pay the fee. Wording in the assessment says, "Each property shall be assessed in relation to the entire cost of the provided service." That isn't happening and the JPA board wants all parcels to pay their share.

The county also is not reimbursing the city for what it actually costs to run the dispatch center.

Fire Chief Jeff Meston told the council the JPA has been subsidizing the ambulance service for 13 years for a total of \$13 million. Of that amount, \$8.58 million came from the city's pocketbook and nearly \$4.5 million from Lake Valley.

The council agreed to meet with Supervisor Sue Novasel, who represents Tahoe on the Board of Supervisors, to request an item be put on the supervisors' agenda regarding equitable compensation for the ambulance JPA. The vote was 4-0, with Councilwoman JoAnn Conner abstaining. She is on the JPA board and believes the council is usurping her authority.

Her council colleagues said as group they are a stronger voice than the JPA board, but are not trying to step on the JPA board's toes.

The JPA board is made up of two council members and two Lake Valley Fire board members.

Part of the problem in getting the county be fair is that the JPA board for years was totally dysfunctional. Ever since North Tahoe Fire Protection District left the JPA in 2006, many votes have been 2-2, so progress was stalled. Slowly they

have begun to play nice.

But still, South Tahoe wants a fifth board member, but Lake Valley says no. There has been talk of officials from Barton Health or CalStar being a fifth member or even increasing the board to seven to possibly function better.

It wasn't until Meston came on board that the true operating costs and subsidizes made by the city and Lake Valley have come to light.

Lake Valley Fire Chief Gareth Harris was in the room for the entire discussion, but never left his seat in the front row.

Obama's budget good for Calif. parks, wildlife areas

By Michael Doyle, McClatchy Washington Bureau

California would get its share, and then some, from the Obama administration's \$4 trillion budget proposal delivered Monday to a skeptical, Republican-controlled Congress.

There's money for restoring the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, which is likely to survive congressional winnowing. Proposed upgrades at places including Yosemite National Park probably will find Capitol Hill favor, as well, along with funding for Central Valley flood control and dam improvements.

The budget, for instance, would offer \$3.5 million to complete the Army Corps of Engineers' design and engineering studies for protecting the Sacramento area's Natomas Basin. It would provide tens of millions of dollars to upgrade Folsom Dam northeast of Sacramento and improve the safety of the earthen

Isabella Dam in eastern Kern County. These projects enjoy bipartisan support.

But the president's budget includes more fanciful proposals, including some familiar spending cuts and fee increases that invariably fail. A renewed proposal to eliminate the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program, for instance, would cut federal reimbursements for prisons and jails that incarcerate undocumented immigrants.

Read the whole story

Late interception deflates sportsbooks' profits

By David Purdum, ESPN

Nevada sportsbooks won \$3.2 million off \$115.9 million wagered on the Super Bowl, according to numbers released by Nevada Gaming Control on Monday. But it could have been so much more.

The New England Patriots winning in a higher-scoring game than expected was the worst-case scenario for the majority of sportsbooks, and they still posted a profit for the 24th time in the last 26 Super Bowls. The point spread closed at pick 'em at most books with the over/under total 47.5.

The Patriots defeated the Seattle Seahawks 28-24 Sunday, with Malcolm Butler's last-minute interception on the goal line sealing New England's victory and taking a giant chunk out of the books' profits.

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.

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