Kirkwood ski resort still evolving at age 40

By Kathryn Reed

It was 40 years ago that a dream came true for Dick Reuter and Bud Klein. The ski pioneers created Kirkwood Mountain Resort.

Today, the ski resort celebrates its roots without its founders. Reuter and Klein both died in 2011 – both in their 80s. But what they have left is a legacy, a mountain that often gets the most snow in the greater Lake Tahoe area, a place that isn't for the meek, a place that embraces its ruggedness as well as its place along Highway 88 that isn't always easy to get to no matter the direction one approaches from.

The Reut chairlift is named after Reuter.

"From the beginning, Kirkwood was a special place and it still is. Our task is to maintain that," Blaise Carrig, president of Mountain Operations for Vail Resorts, told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Kirkwood Mountain Resort opened 40 years ago.

Kirkwood's Dec. 31 anniversary events

2pm

Torchlight parade tickets on sale at Guest Services

Photo/Kathryn Reed

(tbc)
2-6pm
DJ Village Plaza – DJ Berkmon
4pm
Lifts close
5:15pm and 5:45pm
Fire performances in Village Plaza
5:30–6pm
Torchlight parade skiers are loading chair
6–6:30pm
Torchlight parade
6:30–7pm
Fire performance – Village Plaza
7–7:30pm
Speeches – Kirkwood Past, Present & Future
7:30–7:45pm
Fireworks
7:45pm
Fire dancers lead guests to party at

Red Cliffs
8pm–1am
After Party at Red Cliffs – (full bar plus appetizers available)
8pm–1am
DJ – SMURKO
9pm–12:30am
Gogo dancers
10pm
Aerial performance at Party
Midnight
Countdown in Red Cliffs
12:05am
Aerial performance at Party
1am
Party ends

The Colorado-based company bought Kirkwood earlier this year for $18 million from Mountain Springs Kirkwood.

Carrig said the goal of the new owners is to retain the passion and spirit Reuter and Klein had for the area.

“Kirkwood is about great skiing and it’s about the special landscape,” Carrig said.

When Klein and Reuter developed the resort that is mostly in Amador and Alpine counties, but has a slice in El Dorado County, too, the land was undeveloped and cows were grazing in the meadow.

“I flew over it a couple times. I could taste it, smell it,” Klein told this reporter on the 35th anniversary of the resort of what Kirkwood would become.

Klein was at the resort for the groundbreaking of Expedition Lodge. He never got to see that come to fruition. The recession derailed the project.

Kirkwood Mountain Development retained most of the rights to the real estate assets, while Vail Resorts has the mountain to operate.

“Looking ahead, I am extremely excited to work with the very talented and committed staff of Kirkwood to kick-off the next 40 years. The mountain is incredible, the snow is unbelievable and the possibilities are many. My priority is to get behind the scenes to understand where the opportunities are to provide the best experiences for our guests,” Casey Blann, general manager of Kirkwood, told *Lake Tahoe News.* “While I won’t be around to see the entire next 40 years, I can at least get the ball rolling toward improvements which we hope will resonate with our both our guests, as well as staff.”

Vail Resorts is still in the process of assessing what improvements to make first.

Better lift service – Kirkwood has two high-speed quads, with one being on a beginner run – is a big goal. Carrig said looking at alleviating choke points would be on the priority list.

More food service on the mountain is also likely to be forthcoming.

Today, various events will take place to commemorate the resort turning 40, as noted above.

“We want to honor those individuals who had the vision and the passion to make Kirkwood a reality. Without their dedication

and rugged determination; Kirkwood would not have persevered and prospered for all these years," Blann said.

Frigid temps no deterrent to fun at SnowGlobe

By Kathryn Reed

With temperatures below freezing, musicians were blowing on their hands to get their fingers working and the main stage of SnowGlobe included two heaters.

But for those in the audience Dec. 29, dancing and disrobing seemed like a good idea. People were looking for the coat check and others were showing skin on a night when the low was slated to be 16 degrees.

The most warmth could be found in the Techibeats.com Tent because heaters were keeping the sound technicians cozy and the entrance was narrow.



The music fest SnowGlobe starts its three-day run Dec. 29 in South Lake Tahoe. Photos/Kathryn Reed

At the Sierra Tent one side was completely exposed to the elements.

And the main stage was wide-open on the ball field.

Most people moved as close as possible to all the stages and were moving to the music. Plus, there was the body contact of friends and strangers to keep them warm.

The three-day music festival started off much better than a year ago when area residents were caught off guard by the bass-driven sounds of the techno rich music. Not all of the performers are traditional bands. Most acts are disc jockeys bringing together sounds through their computers. Even many of the musicians are assisted by technology.

Early feedback based on comments posted on *Lake Tahoe News* is things are dramatically different from 2011.

City officials said after the concert came to an end at 10pm no one complained about anything the city had control over – including noise levels.

Turning the stage 180 degrees so the audience on the community ball fields is facing Lake Tahoe Community College was done as an attempt to have the sound be less of a factor to the

neighboring residents.

To make sure the decibel level doesn't exceed the limit, a guy wearing a backpack with a meter was measuring the output.

Those in attendance on the first night were clearly enjoying themselves – swaying and bouncing to the music, smiling and making snow angels.

Jared Clark brought his 15-year-old son Dylan up from Minden for the show. The elder Clark had seen Beats Antique before – and was excited when he found out they'd be the third act to take the main stage on Saturday. The younger Clark, a fan of Wiz Khalifa, was excited to hear his favorite next.

Sandy Meyer of Reno is also a Wiz Khalifa fan. That's why she bought a one-day ticket and made the drive to South Lake Tahoe.

Ryan Wingo and his buddies from Santa Cruz opted for the three-day pass. Wingo was at SnowGlobe a year ago and wanted back for more fun.

The Santa Cruz guys were excited to hear Minnesota – the last act in the Sierra Tent on Saturday – because they are from the same beach town.

"He has progressed so much this year," Wingo said of the disc jockey.

Wingo is glad there is snow this year – it meant being able to snowboard at Sierra-at-Tahoe the day before.

"It was beautiful, except there was no snow," Wingo said of 2011.

No worries about that this year. The snow was coming down good at 3pm when the gates opened. The skies parted a bit more than an hour later and patches of blue sky could be seen. With the moon full the night before, the globe in the sky and the early

snow made for a snow-globe of a different kind.

The combo of being able to ski and hear good music lured Brett Schwerin to Tahoe. The 30-year-old Maryland resident has an Epic pass, which allows him to ski at all Vail Resort properties – of which there are three in the Tahoe area. He's here for 12 days – not just for the three-day concert.

This is Schwerin's first time to Lake Tahoe. He said the combo of being able ski during the day, take a shuttle to the music venue and then be able to hang out with a California crowd that was putting out good vibes made for the perfect day.

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Personnel issues plague S. Tahoe's juvenile hall

By Kathryn Reed

The $6.3 million Juvenile Treatment Center in South Lake Tahoe has been rife with problems since it opened in 2004.

Since September girls aren't taken there. They must go to the facility in Placerville because there aren't enough female employees to care for them. This isn't the first time the girls have had to be transported to the West Slope.

And when they go, it means pulling a South Lake Tahoe police officer or El Dorado County sheriff's deputy off the streets in the basin. That in turn means fewer cops on the street, and more expenses in terms of mileage and potential overtime.



The Juvenile Treatment Center in South Lake Tahoe opened in 2004. Photo/LRS Architects

While the 26,500-square-foot facility has room to house 40 kids, it never has. Thirty-four is the most it has housed, according to Greg Sly, chief probation officer. (The El Dorado County Probation Department runs the JTC.)

According to Don Ashton, principal analyst with the Chief Administrative Office, this month the high mark was 17 juveniles, and 15 in both November and October.

Because the number of delinquents has never hit the maximum capacity, the probation department currently has a budget as though 30 would be the maximum number of kids housed at the center.

“A lot of times we’ve reduced the number to 20 beds and no one knows about it,” Sly said. “Occasionally it’s a problem for a parent of a minor if they’ve been moved to Placerville.”

The reduction in available beds has to do with staffing. With the 30-bed scenario, the Tahoe juvenile hall should have 20 line staff members, plus supervisors. Right now there are five vacancies at the line level – or 25 percent fewer workers than there should be.

Sly told *Lake Tahoe News* this is not a new problem, but one that has been going on since the center opened eight years ago. He attributes it to wages, people not wanting to live in the snow and/or not wanting to make the commute.

In a letter dated Sept. 27 Sly outlines his concerns to the Board of Supervisors in 36 pages. Much of what was included were historical issues with the facility, but he still presented a case for the need to hire more people to make the Tahoe JTC function at the level it was designed for.

That letter was part of the Oct. 16 Board of Supervisors packet. However, Sly was not able to present his findings and beliefs to the elected officials in person because one day after the letter was dated – Sept. 28 – he was placed on administrative leave.

El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury signed an order putting Sly on indefinite leave. That order was rescinded Dec. 12.

He was paid while he was on leave, but how much has not been released to *Lake Tahoe News*.

And why he is back on the job or was ever forced out on leave has not been made public. Kingsbury oversees the probation department. However, it is not possible to leave a message at the courthouse until Jan. 7 when employees return to work.

In September, Kingsbury deferred comment to Chief Administrative Officer Terri Daly. She is the top person in El Dorado County. Daly has yet to return any call or email of *Lake Tahoe News'*.

But Sly got what he wanted. Supervisors agreed to hire more personnel. It's possible they could be hired by the end of January. Even so, they still must undergo several weeks of training.

Daly-Sly issues

Daly has been on the job since December 2010. She had worked as the county's assistant chief administrative officer for five months before the promotion. She was the CAO in Amador

County before working for El Dorado County.

Sly has been with the county since 1990, having been head of the department since July 2005. He was instrumental in getting the JTC funded and built.

Sly won't talk to *Lake Tahoe News* about why he was put on leave or why he was allowed back. Nor would he say anything about the investigation that is going on regarding whether Daly acted in retaliation against him. He did say he has retained an attorney.

Bobbi Bennett, the county's Human Resources manager, on Dec. 28 told *Lake Tahoe News* she would respond to a Public Records Request Act within the statutory 10 days.

Lake Tahoe News wants to know what the county paid Sly to not work for more 2½ months, why an outside law firm is handling the alleged retaliation investigation, and how much that firm has been paid. Answers to those questions are public information.

However, with the leave issue falling under "personnel", it may never be known why the CAO asked the judge to remove Sly from his job in the form of an administrative leave.

Karl Knobelauch, the acting Human Resources director, is supervising the retaliation investigation. He did not respond to emails about the subject.

Knobelauch and Daly are friends and know each other from when they worked for Amador County. Knobelauch was the undersheriff until retiring in 2006.

South Lake Tahoe City Council to appoint fifth member; Lovell-Sass-Grego want the seat

By Kathryn Reed

Three people familiar to South Lake Tahoe voters have told *Lake Tahoe News* they want to be appointed to the City Council – Kathay Lovell, Austin Sass and Bruce Grego.

With Claire Fortier abandoning her seat midterm, it means the four remaining members were left with the decision to either appointment a replacement or call for an election. On Dec. 27, they unanimously agreed to have people apply, then go through a public interview process before the council picks the fifth member.

Any registered voter living in the city limits has until Jan. 25 to apply. Applications should be available next week through the city clerk's office.

Interviews will be conducted Feb. 5 at the start of the regular council meeting. It's then likely that person will be sworn in that day and expected to have read the agenda in order to be able to vote on items.

The term expires in December 2014.

Lovell was on the council for two terms before deciding not to run again in 2010.

“I feel like there is more to do and I want to be part of it,” Lovell told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Lovell said when Fortier first indicated months ago that she would not fulfill her commitment she began thinking about getting back on the council.

Sass, who came in third in the November council race, and Grego, who was fourth, were at Tuesday’s meeting listening to the council weigh the pros and cons about how to fill the vacancy.

The council had the option to pick someone who was on the November ballot. While the electeds did not go that route, nothing is preventing the men from filling out the paperwork for consideration.

Sass and Grego said after the meeting they each intend to file an application.

At the meeting John Cefalu, Kenny Curtzwiler and Mike McKeen spoke in favor of Grego being appointed.

Grego has the distinction of being one of less than a handful of people to ever have been appointed to the council. This happened after then Mayor Terry Trupp was arrested in June 1989 on a slew of federal drug charges stemming from Operation Deep Snow. He was not elected after the appointment expired. Grego was elected four years ago before being voted off seven weeks ago.

Four letters were read into the record – all in support of Sass being on the council. Those were from Harold Anino, Pat Pohl, Josh Benin and Toogee Sielsch. Sass has twice unsuccessfully run for the council.

The cost of an election – which could have been as much as $15,000 – was the overriding reason the council chose the appointment route. Second, was the desire to have a full

council before the next possible election date. Had it been a mail-in election, May would have been the time frame; the soonest a traditional election could have been called was June.

Animal lovers ensure Tahoe pets are cared for

By Kathryn Reed

Pets are often a barometer for how the economy is doing. In good times people fill their homes with four-legged family members, while in bad times shelters are what get filled up.

From 2006 to 2011 all pet ownership decreased 2.4 percent, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association. Cat ownership decreased 6.2 percent and dog ownership declined 1.9 percent in that time span.



Humane societies on both ends of Lake Tahoe are selling 2013 pet calendars as a fundraiser.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals says more than 2 million dogs enter U.S. shelters each year. While there are a variety of reasons why animals wind up in shelters, not being able to afford their care is on the list.

Sometimes there aren't even scraps for four legged family members.

As the economy sputters to regain stability, pet food can be the last item on the grocery list – assuming it even makes the list.

Humane societies on both ends of the lake would rather help people be able to keep their pets than have them wind up at a shelter. That is why there are food pantries for animals.

"The Lake Tahoe Humane Society has always maintained a community pet food bank for pet owners in financial difficulty (lost a job for example), seniors in financial difficulty and folks waiting for assistance, for clients of other agencies (such as Tahoe Youth & Family Services, Live Violence Free, mental health) who may be transient or in life change/crisis situations, etc.," Dawn Armstrong, executive director of the South Lake Tahoe humane society chapter told *Lake Tahoe News*.

“During and after the Angora Fire, we maintained a large cache of food and supplies available to all community members for almost a full year.”

Donations are accepted at the Emerald Bay Road office or at the shelter in Meyers, but it must be designated for the LTHS food bank if dropped off at the shelter.

The Humane Society of Truckee-Tahoe’s Pet Pantry’s slogan is “Give what you can, take what you need.” This program collects pet food and distributes it to needy families and their pets in the Truckee-Tahoe area.

Through the holidays the Safeway in Truckee and Kings Beach have collection barrels for pet food. Year-round there are barrels at the Pet Station and Scraps Dog Bakery in Truckee.

The shelter in Truckee keeps all those animals on the same food.

The El Dorado County shelter in Meyers accepts a variety of donations, with the following on its current wish list: peanut butter for kong toys, dog collars, cat and kitten food, cat beds, cat toys, dog toys, and scoopable cat litter.

Both humane societies are selling 2013 pet calendars as a way to raise money for their respective programs. Money helps pay for food when the pantry is bare. It also helps people during disasters, like the Angora Fire. The Truckee facility is also still raising money for the shelter that is under construction.

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Contact info:

- **South Lake Tahoe Humane Society**

Phone: (530) 542.2857

Address: 1221 Emerald Bay Road, South Lake Tahoe

Website

• **El Dorado County Animal Shelter, Meyers**

Phone: (530) 573.7925

Address: 1120 Shakori Drive, Meyers

Website

• **Humane Society of Truckee-Tahoe**

Phone: (530) 587.5948

Address: 10720 Riverview Drive, Truckee

Website

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Notes:

• Dogs With Issues will give one free dog training session for any puppy or dog rescued during this month or in January. Call (530) 577.0263 for an appointment.

• *Lake Tahoe News* is making its final holiday donation to the animal shelter in Meyers. New paid subscribers have helped *LTN* be able to give back to human food pantries, and now we are helping the animals of Tahoe. Here is a paid subscriber form if you would like to join the special NEWS team and be eligible for specials.

• Each Monday *Lake Tahoe News* publishes Tahoe Tails – an item provided by Karen Kuentz from the Meyers shelter about a dog or cat that needs adopting.

40,000 expected to attend 3-day SnowGlobe Music Festival in South Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

While SnowGlobe should still be a bass-driven event, the music lineup for the three-day South Lake Tahoe festival has been altered to help appease the neighbors who last year made as much of a ruckus as the musicians.

Plus, when the first act takes the stage at 3pm Dec. 29, the direction of the sound won't be the same as in 2011. The stage and speakers will be set up in such a way to lessen the reverberation into neighborhoods.



The Dec. 29-31 SnowGlobe Music Festival in South Lake Tahoe is expected to bring thousands of people to town. Photo/LTN 2011

Still, it's a lot of techno acts that fill the main stage and two tent performance areas.

Headliners include deadmau5, Wiz Khalifa, Chromeo Live, Beats Antique, Big Gigantic, Laidback Luke and MiMOSA.

But it's not just music and a smattering of vendors who will fill the community ball field adjacent to Lake Tahoe Community College.

"We've added so much, from décor to heating to action sports elements," Chad Donnelly, SnowGlobe creator and general manager, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "There are so many new touches the fans will get to experience firsthand."

The local non-food vendors include Tahoe Made Attire, Enlightened Jewelry, Luna Lobo Creations and UKY The Spot. Nonprofits that will be there are the Boys and Girls Club of Lake Tahoe and Sierra Avalanche Center.

LTCC involvement

Lake Tahoe Community College will have two booths on the field to be able reach out to music fans about what the institution is all about. LTCC is hoping this won't be the only time some of the concertgoers are on campus.

"We are partnering with SnowGlobe this year to gain benefit from their marketing campaign worldwide. Basically, instead of renting the facilities we get marketing, booths, and some other perks for the use of our facilities," LTCC President Kindred Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We are very optimistic that this will be a benefit for our community by having a structured event for young people on New Year's, and by the marketing to the SnowGlobe target audience 18-34 age group, which is where we want to reach out in developing our destination market."

Organizers have to pay for snow removal costs, which with the forecast could be an issue this year. But snow on the ground could be a good thing because it will help absorb the sound. Plus, it means the field should not be trashed as much as it

was a year ago.

City’s concerns

South Lake Tahoe makes money off the event primarily through more people being in town – as in hotel and sales taxes.

Will SnowGlobe return in 2013? That remains to be seen. City officials say they won’t start talking about that until they see how this year’s event goes. Promoters have said they would like a multiyear contract and would entertain the possibility of moving the date. But dates would have to be coordinated with the college to ensure school is not in session.

“The police plan is essentially unchanged from last year as it went very well,” Police Chief Brian Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We will have amnesty bins and we will have undercover presence.”

Both of those were in place in 2011, too. The amnesty bins are where people can deposit (no refund) any drugs without question. The theory is officers would rather dispose of unused drugs than have people using during the concert.

In addition to local law enforcement, event organizers also provide security staff.

They have also increased the list of items not allowed at the festival; specifically glass containers. A complete list of items is online.

“SnowGlobe event promoters have been very supportive of community concerns from last year’s event and are taking extensive measures regarding a sound management plan, increase in the number of shuttle stops, waste management, and local business integration,” Tracy Franklin, spokeswoman for the city, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Bus service

At the Dec. 14 Tahoe Transportation District meeting, the board agreed to enter an agreement with SnowGlobe organizers to increase bus service.

The music festival will pay for more buses to be on Route 53 Dec. 29-31.

TTD staff anticipates between 60 and 80 hours of additional service will be required to accommodate the festival demand.

Like last year, the festival will also provide chartered bus service for people to get to the Lake Tahoe Community College campus.

According to TTD, the plan is to add one to three Route 53 buses before and during the festival times, with an additional seven buses operating for 90 minutes when the festival ends each night.

Donnelly expects more people to attend this year – with about 40,000 people throughout the three-day festival. This compares to the approximately 10,000 who attended each day in 2011.

He expects to sell out on Friday or Saturday.

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Things to know:

• Dec. 29-30 3-10pm

• Dec. 31 3pm to Jan. 1 12:30am

• Fireworks will be shot off New Year's Eve

• Jan. 3 field will be cleared

• South Lake Tahoe has a webpage dedicated to SnowGlobe

• Dedicated SnowGlobe phone line – (530) 542.7429.

Here is a video from 2011:

Trek through Tahoe history on cross country skis

By Kathryn Reed

CAMP RICHARDSON – Apparently for rich San Franciscans, Lake Tahoe's winters were too harsh. Instead of embracing the elements and the beauty, they boarded up their homes, packed their belongings and went to the flat land for most of the year.

Of course, those who summered on the shores of Lake Tahoe in the first half of the 20th century didn't have all the modern conveniences we have today.

And had those with last names like Pope, Baldwin and Heller decided to reside year-round at what is now known as the Tallac Historic Site, it's possible the winter experience would be much different in the 21st century. Maybe it would still be privately owned.

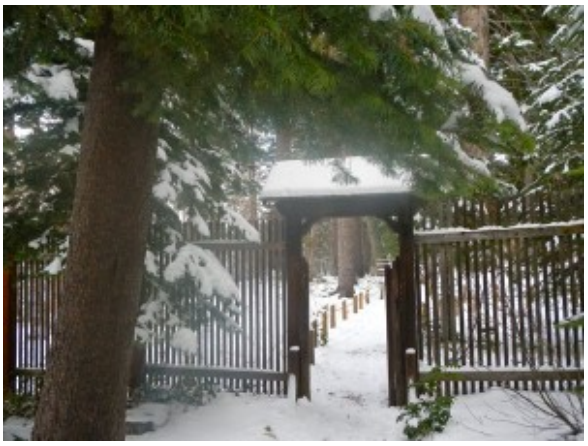


Sue and AJ at Kiva Beach.

Today, it is so incredibly tranquil. Few people seem to venture to this part of the South Shore in winter. It's almost like a ghost town.

Sure, the buildings are closed up – just like when it was privately owned. But there is still plenty to see. The U.S. Forest Service has done a great job in putting up signs telling about the history of this site.

(Most of the buildings are open in the summer.)



A gateway to history.

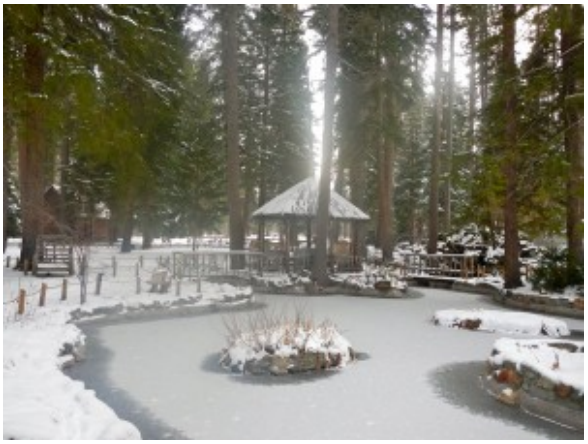
Nineteen buildings are dispersed on what were three estates. The 74 acres are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Restoration work continues on the buildings and grounds.

Imagine what it would have been like a century ago to live here. Imagine the summers back then compared to today. Same lake, same trees, same beach – but a different time makes for a different world.

One of our favorite cross country ski outings is to park at the Beacon restaurant, then glide along the snow-covered beach toward Taylor Creek.

On a blustery December Saturday we hit the point that would take us to Baldwin Beach and decided we didn’t need to go farther. Instead, we headed back along the beach a bit until we could get onto the trail that would lead us through the Tallac Site.



Tallac Historic Site is rich in history and beauty. Photos/LTN

That’s the fun thing about this trek – which is good on skis, snowshoes or boots – it can be a loop. It’s a bit present day, a bit yesteryear.

And with the Beacon the start and end point it makes for a good spot to get something to drink and/or eat.

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Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, go north on Highway 89 toward Emerald Bay. At Camp Richardson, turn right at the lodge. Drive down to the Beacon parking lot.

Santa Claus – it’s not just a

seasonal nickname

By Linda Conaboy

Maybe you're among the millions who no longer believe in Santa Claus. But think about those vivid memories of all those years your parents persuaded you to be nice instead of naughty, ensuring a visit from the man in red at Christmastime – and you, being good little girls and boys, did your very best to comply.

When did you finally lose faith in Santa Claus, officially becoming one of the knowing, big kids?

Well, listen up non-believers. There is a Santa Claus. Really. He's the real deal. He's alive and well and he lives at the North Shore of Lake Tahoe. His hair is genuine and so is his ample girth, although he says he's been trying to lose a few pounds to show kids that obesity isn't such a good lifestyle.



Santa gets an earful from all ages at Heavenly Village in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Nina Miller–focusphotoTahoe

Who is this person who calls himself Santa? He's the very Irish Mr. Thomas Patrick O'Connor, now 65, who became Santa Claus on the eve of St. Patrick's Day in 2005 when he legally

changed his name to Mr. Claus. Why? Because he decided he could do the greatest good for the greatest number of children with an official name change.

Santa said he rarely entertains children at Christmastime anymore, but ideally spends most of the year advocating for millions of kids.

“Often, I try to convince legislators to support legislation that will benefit children,’’ he said.

In real life, Santa is a Christian monk who believes that the greatest gift one can give is love.

“I aim to help restore America’s heart and soul, primarily by reminding legislators, parents, caregivers and educators that a country’s morality can be measured by how it treats its most vulnerable, especially children,” Santa said.

With this in mind, he no longer spends much time dressed in his red suit. However, he says, when he began his Santa role, he served more than 30 nonprofits in that capacity; however, as time went on, he said his philosophy altered.

“I’d like to change children’s perception of Santa Claus,” he said. “For example, I believe that Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Christ, not the crass, commercial, secular spectacle it has become in many places. I believe that the greatest gift one can give is love, not presents.”

Santa said he rarely gets paid for his now rare Santa gigs, but when he does occasionally receive remuneration, the funds support his child advocacy and ministry work.

“I don’t think children or anyone else should have to pay to see or spend time with Santa – any Santa,” he told *Lake Tahoe News*. “When I appear, I never charge children or parents; however, they are welcome to pay a photographer to take their photo or use their own camera or cell phone for free.”

For his appearance at Heavenly Village in the giant snowglobe through Dec. 31, he will be paid by the village as will the photographer.

His beard, he said, is authentic, growing at least an inch each month.

“I trim it about every three months. If I had let it grow, without cutting it, since 2005, it would be longer than I am tall,” Santa, who stands 5-feet-10, said.

Because he serves as a child and peace activist most of the year, he said his apparel of choice now is blue jeans and a red shirt along with his snowy white beard. Red, white and blue, he said – very American.

In keeping with his activism, this year he ran for president of the United States. His platform was to restore American’s heart and soul.

“My candidacy was recognized by the Federal Election Commission and 15 states,” Santa said.

In addition, he writes eBooks, his latest being “The Santa Diet”, a complete regimen for physical, emotional and spiritual health.

Surprisingly, before he became Santa Claus, when he was still just plain Tom O’Connor, Santa served as a law enforcement and public safety administer in New York City. Specifically, he was the special assistant to the deputy police commissioner in New York City as well as the chief of safety and security for the U.S. Virgin Islands Port Authority.

His best Santa story, he said, is that of a young girl who visited him with her mother in a church setting, about Christmastime.

“When she wondered why I hadn’t asked her what she wanted for Christmas, I told her I was more interested in what she

planned to give someone else. She replied that she didn't have any money to buy anything," Santa said. "So, I assured her that the greatest gift she could give was love. She thought about that for a moment and asked me if I could help her mother stop smoking so they could enjoy a long life together. I smiled and called her mother over and related her daughter's wish, asking the mother if she would at least try.

"She nodded, and they left. The following year, they both visited again and were pleased to let me know that the mother had stopped smoking altogether. She loved her mother enough that she didn't want to lose her; and her mother loved her enough to overcome a destructive habit and create a better environment for both of them. So, there was an example of the gift of love they shared with each other. Simple, but profound."

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Note: Santa will be in the Heavenly Village every day through Dec. 31 from 2-7pm.

Northstar celebrates 40 years, looks forward

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – "Everything in the middle of nowhere." That was Northstar's motto in 1972 when the first lift started turning.

A lot has changed since Dec. 22, 1972 – owners, lifts, amenities, and definitely the fact that the Truckee resort can no longer be considered being in the middle of nowhere.

Its evolution into being a fixture in the greater Lake Tahoe area and a destination resort for those beyond the drive up market of the Bay Area and Central Valley was heralded on its 40th anniversary.

In blizzard conditions year 41 started with snowboard legend Shaun White joining a group of riders for first tracks. While he is normally in the resort's halfpipe (when it's built), on this Saturday he was letting loose in the fresh powder – and not always on the trails.

The day before, White, who is now sporting a much shorter haircut after last week cutting off his locks for charity, did another charitable act. He made a Make a Wish come true by giving a young boy a snowboarding lesson.



Northstar's Zephyr Lodge is one indication of Vail's commitment to upgrade the resort. Photos/Kathryn Reed

On Dec. 22, White dropped in on the kids at the Burton Snowboard Academy to offer some advice.

Still under snowy skies, at 4pm it was time for White and Northstar COO Bill Rock to offer a toast.

Earlier in the day Rock had been at a celebration that was part reminiscing about the past and part looking forward to the next 40 years.

A bit of history

In 1949 a tree farm was started where Northstar is located. The land when Georgia Pacific owned it was called the Timber Farm.

It was the Fibreboard Corporation that opened Northstar-at-Tahoe in 1972.

The first snowboarders were allowed in the 1988-89 season. In the video that was shown at the celebration on Saturday the binding settings on the boards were much different than they are today.

Trimont took over operations of the resort in summer 1994. Two years later, Booth Creek Ski Holdings acquired Trimont/Northstar.

In 1999, Booth Creek and East West Partners agreed to a real estate agreement that led to the development of the village and various lodging properties. The first phase of the village opened in 2005-06. The village kept expanding, culminating with a third phase.

The Ritz-Carton, Lake Tahoe opened three years ago at mid-mountain – though it has separate owners.

(The Highlands Gondola that goes from the Village at Northstar to the Ritz-Carlton was in jeopardy of not operating this season. The funding partners for the eight-passenger gondola that opened in 2009 were having trouble finding resolution. A deal was reached Dec. 21. However, that same day a tree fell on the cable. It should be fixed by the end of the year.)

In 2010, Colorado-based Vail Resorts bought Northstar. In its first year more than $30 million in on-mountain improvements were made.

The past and future

Hank Schwarz, Zeke Straw and Paul Daily were highlighted in the video shown to a select group at Schaffer's Camp on Saturday. The trio talked about the early days, the dozens of romances developed in ski school and the fun that was had on the slopes.

Blaise Carrig, president of mountain operations for Vail Resorts, recalled how his first experience at Northstar was in 1982. He was impressed with the ambiance, sense of feeling from the people, but completely understood why it had the moniker "flat star".

In 2002, after Vail Resorts bought Heavenly Mountain Resort on the South Shore, Carrig made it a point to return to Northstar. The transformation was remarkable. More of the mountain was open – which included steeper terrain.

As the top executive at Heavenly, he would bring his management team to Northstar each year to see what the resort was doing.

"We saw Northstar as an able competitor," Carrig said.

But he also knew about the 40-minute lines on busy weekends and people having to eat on the floor of the mid-mountain lodge.

In 2010, Vail Resorts bought Northstar.

"We wanted to come in and capitalize on their success," Carrig said. That meant an infusion of cash to disperse people around the mountain via a lift that opened last December, new runs, and a lodge at the top of Zephyr chairlift to provide more dining choices – and chairs.

And Vail is not done. The master plan is in the works.

As Carrig said, Beaver Creek is the template for what Northstar will become.

Beyond the infrastructure improvements, Carrig said it's the people who come to the mountain that matter most.

"It's not about customers, it's about maintaining relationships," Carrig said.

Taking on a trait from its Colorado properties, guests at Zephyr Lodge are now offered a tissue when they walk in – and more than one when dripping wet coming in from a blizzard.

In the end, it's all about the experience people talk about long after they've left the mountain.

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Cowboy Rock – small in size, big in views

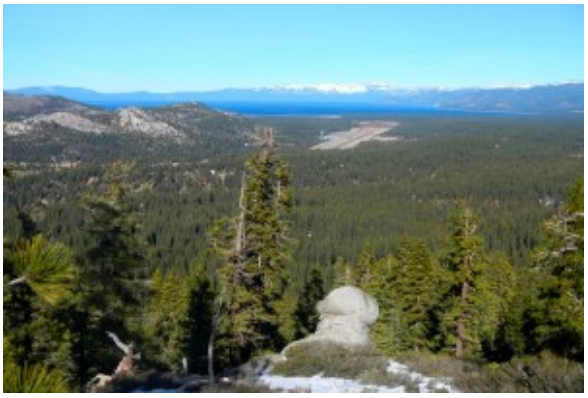
By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – While it probably would have been hard to get lost, it was nice to have a guide get us beyond the various off-shoot trails and direct us how best to make a loop through the woods so we'd find our vehicle before dark.

That's the thing about locals – they know where unmarked trails go.

Entering the forest off Pinewood Drive we pass a gate and walk

up a short ways on asphalt. A South Tahoe Public Utility District water tank is on the right. From there, the trail is all dirt – well, except for the pockets of snow.



Lake Tahoe's signature blue shines from a hilltop in Meyers. Photos/Kathryn Reed

We make this excursion on the second Sunday of December when there is more dirt than snow on the trail. The same conditions would not exist today. If someone else had been out there first I might go on snowshoes, but there were no blue markers on trees to help guide the way in snow.

Kim leaves work for a spell to show us one of her favorite places to take her dogs out for a romp. For her, it's a short walk from her house in Meyers. We had to drive *all the way* from South Lake Tahoe. It was well worth it.

It's one of those treks that isn't super long, but has incredible views.

Cowboy Rock is the end point – but we stop just shy of there. My stamina was lacking after coming off a nasty cold and the air temperature was less than pleasant when our bodies stopped moving.

While Mount Tallac is stunning from any angle, seeing the Angora burn area below it is still heart wrenching 5½ years later. This spot is where some in the neighborhood watched the

fire rage that June day in 2007. Today, the scar on the land is a reminder of what happens when campfires – illegal or not – are not fully extinguished.

Despite this reminder of one of Tahoe's tragic events, beauty is everywhere. Sugar pines are interspersed with other conifers.

No longer is the forest as dense as it was earlier in the summer. U.S. Forest Service crews have been out thinning this area. Future burn piles dot the landscape at the start of the trail.

Various routes abound. It's easy to hook up with Mr. Toad's or go over to Oneidas from here.

We turn around after a quick break on top of some granite boulders. There we have views of Lake Tahoe Airport with Lake Tahoe in the background.

Sue and I count this as a teaser excursion, as we look forward to discovering more about this network of trails after the snow melts.

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Getting there:



To the left is a map of where Pinewood Drive is in Meyers. For the most part, just go straight up, veering a bit to the right to get to where the excellent views are and then to the top of Cowboy Rock.

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