Bond of friendship stronger with Lou Gehrig diagnosis

By Susan Wood

When John Winkelman wakes up Christmas morning, the 1977 South Tahoe High School graduate and his class buddies will have the comfort of knowing they share the greatest gift of all – an everlasting friendship that long sustains the presence of the person.

Two years into it, Winkelman is dying of Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) – better known as Lou Gehrig's disease. The debilitating illness that attacks the spinal cord and nerve cells of one out of every 100,000 people has taken away his ability to talk. But that setback has not deterred him from communicating with his friends who gather to share good times, laughs and understanding.

"It really is a celebration when we get together," STHS grad Lynn Corey of Sacramento said.



John Winkelman skied in the 1980 Winter Games. Photos/Provided

The friends are spread out with Winkelman living in Los Altos.

The Tahoe bond remains strong. The 51-year-old returns to the South Shore for the STHS homecoming every year.

This fall 65 people showed up to play bocce ball. The sport has turned into a mainstay of activity. And why wouldn't it? Winkelman was a first-class athlete in high school, playing football. He even placed 18th in downhill ski racing at the Lake Placid Winter Games in 1980.

"I remember thinking that this is a man who was always an athlete, skied in the Olympics, played hockey on three different teams. The idea this athletic person was going to be reduced to an amuscular person was devastating," said Corey, who drops what she's doing whenever the group calls.

People who know Winkelman may contribute to a website called the Caring Bridge to share thoughts on their friend

Corey stressed how when she and a handful of friends from STHS meet up, there's lots of laughing – sometimes over crazy antics when they were young. She shared classes with Winkleman.

She recalled how Winkelman was supportive, like a brother, when she took her military father's Jeep out for a joy ride with him.

After high school, time escaped until they reunited and ended up at Steamers Bar for a drink. She was troubled by watching him struggle with swallowing, a symptom of the disease. She learned about his prognosis about 10 months ago. From then on, the friends have met at an accelerated pace.

"I just didn't want the next time I see him to be at his funeral," she said.

Rob Miller, another friend and fellow grade, agrees. For Miller, the experience has hit close to home. His father died of ALS in 1981, so he witnessed firsthand the wrath of the

disease. Most patients die between three to five years after diagnosis, but one-fifth of them live beyond that mark.

“It’s hard because I know what lies ahead for him. As a group, we try to do all we can,” he said.

Since Winkelman wants his home remodeled and is unable to perform the work, Miller is bringing a contractor over to help.

“I knew John would be needing help,” he said.

The men played football together in high school, but Miller was adamant that they’re closer now.

“His attitude is strong, and he still has his wit,” Miller said.

It’s as though Winkelman is helping his friends discover what’s important in life. And along the way, Winkelman has had his own epiphanies about the true meaning of success and living a life as a good person. The husband and father of two admits to being “overwhelmed” by the show of support from friends.

“Having a good reliable friend is like oxygen to me. I have to have it. All fires start small in your fireplace. With some work, you get it to where you want it, then enjoy it. I am now enjoying the warmth of my good, reliable friends,” he said via email. “It feels great. May the STHS Viking spirit live on!”

He said he doesn’t want to be remembered as a good athlete, but much more.

“I was gifted to be good at whatever sport I played. How I want to be remembered is summed up in a poem by Ralph Waldo Emerson. It has nothing to do with trophies, medals or places. It measures success,” he said.

The poem called “Success” reads:

“To laugh often and love much; to win the respect of intelligent persons and the affection of children; to earn the approbation of honest critics and to endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to give of one’s self; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to have played and laughed with enthusiasm and sung with exultation; to know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived – this is to have succeeded.”

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New owners making changes to David Walley’s Resort

The historic David Walley’s Resort in Genoa is getting a much needed face lift, according to the new owners.

Summerwinds Resorts Services, based in Branson, Mo., has recently purchased the time share-hot springs and is renovating the resort.

The founders of Summerwinds Resorts, Joseph and Dawn Joyce are no strangers to the resort industry. Joined by partners Darren Abbott and Rich Dowdell, they collectively have more than 75 years of experience and success in the resort industry.

Pat Joyce, in a press release, said, “We made this purchase to restore a historic icon in the Carson Valley community, and bring back what David and Harriet Walley envisioned years ago.”

The purchase included the restaurant and spa, which are open while improvements are made. The 1862 David Walley's Restaurant and Saloon renovations include maple wood floors, leather seating, and equipment throughout the restaurant and bar.

Doc specializing in internal medicine hired by Barton

Allison Steinmetz joins Barton Internal Medicine after 10 years of medical practice in Santa Cruz with Dominican Hospital. Prior to practicing in Santa Cruz, Steinmetz spent three years as a physician in Houston.

She serves as a primary care physician for all ages with a specific talent for treating menopausal issues, teenagers and women's health.



Allison Steinmetz

Her excitement for the outdoors is what brought her here to Tahoe. She enjoys snow sports, hiking and surfing.

Steinmetz joins Internal Medicine physicians, Drs. Gary Cooper, Paula Crenshaw, and Jay Chung, as well as ear, nose

and throat specialist Dr. Ronald Roth at 2175 South Av. in South Lake Tahoe across the street from Barton Memorial Hospital.

She is accepting adolescent and adult new patients. For more information or to make an appointment, call (530) 543.5685.

LTCC schedules audition for ‘Almost, Maine’

Lake Tahoe Community College Theatre Arts Department will present the wildly successful off-Broadway hit “Almost, Maine” as the winter producation.

On a cold, clear, moonless night in the middle of winter, all is not quite what it seems in the remote, mythical town of Almost, Maine. As the northern lights hover in the star-filled sky above, Almost’s residents find themselves falling in and out of love in unexpected and often hilarious ways. Knees are bruised. Hearts are broken. But the bruises heal, and the hearts mend – almost – in this delightful midwinter night’s dream.

Auditions for the college’s winter production will be Jan. 4 at 7pm in the Duke Theatre.

Performances will be March 11, 12, 17, 18, 19 at 8pm and Sunday matinees March 13 and 20 at 2pm.

For more information, contact director Susan Boulanger at Boulanger@ltcc.edu.

Ways to be green with gift wrapping

By Sharon Harvey-Rosenberg, McClatchy Newspapers

Scissors and clear tape transformed a store bag into festive wrapping paper for a gift. That green use of an old bag solved an annual challenge of finding affordable wrapping paper. The sale of traditional gift paper is a profitable business, creating annual revenues of $2.6 billion dollars, according to Earth911, an environmental services company.

Alternative gift-wrapping ideas can save money and reduce landfill waste. If every American family replaced traditional gift wrapping paper with fabric or recycled paper for three gifts, the amount of paper saved would be enough to cover more than 45,000 football fields, according to the Sierra Club.

Read the whole story

Mark Lundahl 1953-2010

By Guy Clifton, Reno Gazette-Journal

Mark Lundahl, managing editor at the Reno Gazette-Journal and veteran newspaperman, died Tuesday after a brief illness.

He was 57.

Lundahl joined the Gazette-Journal as a news reporter in March

1987 and held numerous titles during his 23 years at the paper, including assistant city editor, city editor, assistant managing editor, senior editor for news and multimedia and managing editor.



Mark Lundahl

He was remembered Tuesday for his skills as an editor, his calm under deadline pressure and his unbridled passion for news, history, music and gardening.

“Mark was an historian, a wordsmith and a coach,” said RGJ President and Publisher Ted Power. “He was the conscience and spirit of the newsroom. But mostly he was a friend with a smile and laugh to make everyone feel at ease and at home.”

Former RGJ editor Ward Bushee, now editor of the San Francisco Chronicle, promoted Lundahl to city editor in 1994. He said Lundahl “was a gifted newspaper man who had extraordinary editing skills, news judgment and courage.”

Read the whole story

STPUD employees give back to

community

On Dec. 20, 40 local residents had their Christmas brightened as a vanload of presents was delivered by South Tahoe Public Utility District employees to the El Dorado County mental health program. Specifically to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of South Lake Tahoe, an alliance of individuals and families who have banded together to assist mental health patients in obtaining treatment, housing, support, and to fight the stigma associated with mental illness, coordinated the event.

Many of these clients have serious mental illness challenges that make even day-to-day existence a struggle. Each District employee and their families “adopted” a client and filled their personalized Christmas wish lists.

Due to medical confidentiality requirements, District employees are not able to meet face to face with the recipients. Instead, a counselor delivers the gifts to each person, either during a counseling session or by making individual trips to their homes.

According to one program counselor, the home deliveries are the most heartwarming as they are able to see firsthand how these brightly wrapped gifts brought such happiness to an otherwise uneventful Christmas season.

This is the 12th year district employees have participated in the “Adopt and Angel” program and each year the program is more successful than the last. Everything from microwave ovens to slippers was delivered. In addition to NAMI, District employees have been strong supporters of Christmas Cheer for many years.

Weather historian to delve into Sierra's winter wonders

By Susan Wood

Think globally, act locally.

Weather historian Mark McLaughlin is expected to bring this mantra to life when he addresses an extremely topical topic on Thursday at the Explore Tahoe in South Lake Tahoe.

McLaughlin has the spotlight for the center's second annual winter speaker series with his talk called "Reign of the Sierra Storm King," an overview of how the last 150 years of winter weather in the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range tells about life at Lake Tahoe and the evolving climate.



Mark McLaughlin

Topics that evening will include the Donner Party, the storm of the century in the winter of 1951-52, along with the tropical weather conditions associated with El Nino and La Nina, the latter of which Tahoe is experiencing. The lake is located on the north-to-south cusp of seeing unusually wet or dry, cold or warm conditions associated with the equatorial weather phenomena. This year's La Nina is expected to bring

more extremes across the United States like El Nino did the previous year. The Pacific Northwest has already experienced wetter than average systems this winter as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration predicted.

If there's one thing weather as a science can prove over time, long-term theories are "not all things to all people" or even places, McLaughlin explains.

The author and commentator who's made appearances on CNN, the Weather Channel and History Channel said he tries to take recent information released from the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center and be a bridge in deciphering these theories for the average weather watcher.

For example, he's noticed that since 1962 the lake level snowpack at Tahoe has diminished more than two weeks earlier each year. However, in the higher elevations such as Donner Pass, this is not the case. The legendary mountain region remains a place to be reckoned with in the winter, he said.

The winter of 1951-52 brought record snowfall with such magnitude, traffic in and out of the South Shore was cut off, a drop shipment of supplies was made from the outside world and residents dug out of their second story windows to get out of their homes. Some attend a reunion each summer to mark the occasion. The adults have looked back at that time as hard labor. The children at the time have rejoiced over sledding down the roofs of their houses.

Explore Tahoe Recreation Coordinator Lauren Thomaselli insisted the winter speaker series and specifically McLaughlin's talk that kicks it off fits well into the center's format and mission of blending environmental education with recreation.

"It's really to provide ways to get (people) connected with our area," she said.

The Dec. 23 talks starts at 6pm. A $5 donation is requested. Refreshments will be served.

Free family science event in Incline

UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center is hosting a family science day on Dec. 29 from 2-5pm.

Families are invited to explore the mysteries of snow and ice. Conduct scientific experiments, discover what snowflakes look like under microscopes. Learn about wind chill and why some animals hibernate, among many other activities.

It will be in rooms 139 and 141 Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences, 291 Country Club Drive, Incline Village.

For details, call (775) 881.7560, ext. 7483.

The is for ages 8 and older.

It is free.

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe

Hilda is a spectacular gray Himalayan cat with beautiful blue eyes. She is an older girl who is declawed on all four paws. She is sweet and loves attention. She was found as a stray and

nobody claimed her, but she must have been well loved by someone as she is groomed nicely and well-socialized.



Hilda is spayed, microchipped, and vaccinated. She is at the El Dorado County Animal Services shelter in Meyers, along with many other dogs, cats, and kittens who are waiting for their new homes.

Call (530) 573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information on adopting a pet. The shelter will be closed on Dec 24-25, Dec. 31 and Jan 1.

For spay-neuter assistance for South Tahoe residents, go online.

– Karen Kuentz