‘Polar Express’ delights kids as it chugs through S. Shore

By Susan Wood and Kathryn Reed

Hear those bells? Then you are a believer.

Ty Loughlin not only believes in Santa Claus, he has lived the Polar Express story. A year ago he tied the silver bell to his backpack – but it disappeared. Because the 8-year-old boy’s family owns the book and movie he knew somehow it would turn up – with or without a hole in his pocket as the main character had in the story.

He found his bell in time for the second annual Polar Express on Dec. 5 as he got dressed in the afternoon in his snowboarder pajamas. And just in case he had not found his bell from 2009, Santa had plenty of shiny new ones to hand out.



Children surround Mrs. Claus as she reads "Polar Express." Photos/Kathryn Reed

Hundreds of South Shore children boarded the Polar Express on Sunday to be whisked to the North Pole for a dose of Christmas

magic. The signature event of the Festival of Trees and Lights wrapped up the three-day fund-raising event for the Barton Community Clinic.

Some kids admitted to having been in their PJs all day. It was the preferred outfit – even for many adults. One father of three in a purple robe getting refreshments said he wished he could dress this way for work every day.

Also aboard the Dancer train car (which closely resembled a big yellow school bus) was Ralston Johnson. The South Lake Tahoe lad, who was born weighing in at an equivalent weight (9.2 pounds) as the elevation (9,200 feet) of the significant peak on the South Shore that he is named after, knew who the star of the day would be. His eyes lit up when asked what he would ask Santa for – a Blackhawk 2 Nintendo game.

He stood up in his polar bear pajamas and said so at the urging of conductor John Marchini, who donned a train conductor uniform and gold pocket watch.

“Doesn’t he look like Tom Hanks?” Ralston’s grandmother Louise Mitchell whispered. The actor played the lead role in the 2004 movie. Marchini had the role down to a science as he kept the bus entertained.

Buses with famous names like Vixen, Dasher, Prancer and Dancer left the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Complex at 3pm and 6pm, with a stop at the Red Hut Café on Ski Run where elves brought hot cocoa on board for all to sip.

Jude Stackpole, 7, sat with 5-year-old brother Jake for the second year in a row. Jude’s favorite part is the hot cocoa. Last year the Stateline family (dad Patrick was sitting in front of them) boarded the buses in Nevada.

An only-in-ski-country line was overheard describing the Tumbleweed Gymnastics performance in the parking lot of the Red Hut – “the aerialists” is the phrase that was used – much

like what these girls see in terrain parks.

Continuing along Highway 50 the bus didn’t go the most direct route to the North Pole. It kept with the storyline by skirting the lake. (An exciting scene in the movie shows the train riding its tracks over a large body of water.)

Despite it being his first time, Ralston looked quite at home at the North Pole’s Festival of Trees at MontBleu in Stateline. His school, Sierra House Elementary, won first place for the best decorated tree with the Peace Tree, which included a peace sign at the tree topper.

Paul Kushner and his Tahoe Belles choir kept the holiday mood going with songs that young and old could sing along to.

As Mrs. Claus read the “Polar Express,” children clamored onto the stage to be close to her in an impromptu way only children can get away with.

Her “husband” was certainly the star of the event – especially because he ordered each child get a silver bell. The significance of which is revealed in the book.

Although the event was designed for the young, there were moments when it was hard to tell who was having more fun – the children or adults.

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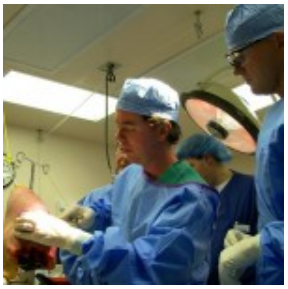
Tahoe docs teach intricate

orthopedic surgery techniques

By Jessie Marchesseau

ROUND HILL – Seven doctors, nurses and assistants, two monitors, multiple trays of surgical tools and two large adjustable spotlights fill the cadaver lab Dec. 3 at Tahoe Orthopedic & Sports Medicine in Round Hill.

The things that resemble raw turkeys on metal stands – those were the cadavers. They were not full bodies, just shoulders. There were two of them set up at separate surgical stations; one for each of the two doctors participating in the Lake Tahoe Sports Medicine Fellowship.



Dr. Brian Duggan, left, prepares to operate on a shoulder as Dr. Kyle Swanson observes. Photos/Jessie Marchesseau

The doctors, known as fellows, will take part in four of these cadaver surgeries during their year in the program. Sometimes they use knees, other times hips, this day it is shoulders.

“It’s a way to give the fellows the most realistic way to

practice a surgical technique and to learn new ones," said Dr. Keith Swanson, program director for the Lake Tahoe Sports Medicine Fellowship and one of its founders. "You can try things, new things that you wouldn't try on someone if you haven't done it before."

This was exactly why Dr. Brian Duggan, one of the fellows, was so excited about Friday's cadaver lab. He was looking forward to performing suprascapular nerve decompression on a shoulder. It is a relatively rare surgery that he has only encountered once.

"This is something that most surgeons have never done," he said. "It's one of the most complicated surgeries."

Duggan, originally from Detroit, did his residency in Maryland before moving to Lake Tahoe in July for the fellowship program. He says his goal is to have a general orthopedic practice specializing in sports-related injuries.

The fellows are not medical students. They are fully trained orthopedic surgeons when they arrive. They choose to participate in the fellowship as a way to acquire more in-depth training specifically in the field of sports medicine.

Duggan applied for the fellowship because he says he knew it would give him the opportunity to see a variety of cases, get a wealth of hands-on experience and work with experts in the field of sports medicine. He has already seen an improvement in his surgical skills since starting the fellowship four months ago.

"Because of the complexity of orthopedics, the more training you can get in your specialty, the better," Swanson said.

When it comes to additional training in the field of sports medicine, doctors' options are relatively limited. The Lake Tahoe Sports Medicine Fellowship is one of 95 across the country and the only one in Nevada. What's even more unique

about the program is that it is not located in a big city or associated with a large metropolitan hospital or medical school.

“The only reason we can do a sports medicine fellowship in a small town like this is because of the high volume of sports injuries here,” Swanson said.

Swanson and six other local doctors make up the fellowship faculty. Drs. Steve Bannar, Jeffrey Cummings, Roger Rogalski, Kyle Swanson, Robert Rupp, and Daniel Robertson all donate time to the program. However, the fellowship benefits these doctors almost as much as it does the fellows, giving the seasoned surgeons an opportunity to work with doctors who have just finished training in the latest techniques and assist them with research projects.

“If you want to really get good at something, you need to become a teacher at it,” Swanson said. “I think they teach me almost as much as I teach them.”

Swanson credits the program with keeping the orthopedic care here on the South Shore some of the best available.

This was evident as Duggan and Kyle Swanson performed the rare decompression surgery. It is an arthroscopic procedure, meaning the doctors use a tiny camera to do the surgery rather than cutting the flesh open, and one that is currently a hot topic among the medical community.

Water dripped from the shoulder as Duggan maneuvered the long metal tool equipped with the camera through tissue to the suprascapular nerve. The doctors intently watched the monitor in front of them, pointing out the rotator cuff and different types of tissue they were passing through.

On the other side of the room, fellow Dr. Cecelia Pascual Garrida watched a different monitor as she performed an arthroscopic rotator cuff surgery on her shoulder with

Robertson assisting.

“I think the bottom line of all this for the public is because of this program, it keeps the orthopedic care very high in this community,” Keith Swanson said. “It’s the very highest care available.”

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‘Race To Nowhere’ coming to Truckee

Due to continued public demand, a third screening of the hard-hitting education documentary “Race To Nowhere” is scheduled for Dec. 15 at the Truckee High School theatre from 6:30-9pm.

Sponsored by Sierra Nevada College, Lake Tahoe in partnership with Parents for Public Schools of Truckee-North Tahoe and the Tahoe Truckee Unified School District, this film has already drawn local educators, administrators, parents, and college students from around the Lake Tahoe Basin together for important discussions about the current state of the American school system. Members of SNC’s Department of Teacher Education, Excellence in Education, and the Tahoe Truckee Education Association will facilitate a panel discussion immediately following the film.

“Race to Nowhere” focuses on the saturation point many students, teachers, and parents have reached in the high-stakes, high pressure culture of the current educational system. It highlights the mounting pressures and stresses children experience – from elementary school through high school – in an effort to gain admission to top colleges.

The film is rated PG-13 and runs 1 hour, 25 minutes.

For more information on the event, contact Katrina Midgley at (775) 831.1314, ext. 7517, kmidgley@sierranevada.edu, or Leisa Peterson at (530) 448.1558, ntt.parentadvocacy@yahoo.com.

Truckee artist opens show at Dragonfly

Truckee artist and designer Sara Zimmerman will be celebrating her newest artworks at the opening of her “Fall to Winter” exhibit on Dec. 16 from 4:30 to 6pm at Dragonfly Restaurant in downtown Truckee.



The public is welcome to join in the festivities, where appetizers will be served and a free drawing will take place for a Sara Zimmerman print.

These unique landscapes will be on display now through March 2011.

Zimmerman’s newest works in her “Fall to Winter” exhibit depict the late seasonal change in the Sierra from a unique perspective.

For more information, call (530) 587.7492 or email sara@sarazimmerman.net.

Tree lighting makes it official – holiday season has arrived

By Kathryn Reed

It's definitely the holiday season in South Lake Tahoe now that Santa has turned on the lights on the community tree and the menorah has been lighted.

With nearly 200 people gathered in the center of town by the Lake Tahoe Visitors Center satellite office, student choir groups sang carols. Paul Kushner led the ensemble, with some participation from the crowd gathered in the chilly night air Dec. 3.



Dillon Breckenridge, 5, of South Lake Tahoe tells Santa his Christmas wish. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Breaking with tradition just a bit, Dwight Borges led his two Belgian draft horses to the front of the building to drop off Santa. This led the younger ones in the crowd to cheer and ask for hugs from the man in red and white. He obliged a bit before being escorted to his duties to light the tree.

Sydney Morris was standing out back waiting for Santa's arrival. The sixth-grader has been coming out for the festivities since she was in third grade. Her favorite part of the night is the tree lighting.

New LED lights eliminated the threat of a strand not lighting – like last year. Oversized wreaths, candy canes and balls adorn the large pine.

Santa made his way inside the center where Ethan Niven was his helper – handing out little items to all those who spoke to Santa.

One of the first to sit on the big guy's lap was Dillon Breckenridge. The 5-year-old is hoping his stocking is filled with a Woody doll from "Toy Story."

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Winter arts workshops at Sierra Nevada College

Sierra Nevada College is expanding its renowned summer art workshops – now in their 26th year – to include winter workshop sessions.

For a second year in a row, Fine Arts Department Chair Sheri Leigh O'Connor has organized an opportunity for individuals to

gather in Tahoe alongside nationally-known artists to focus on their creativity. Workshops begin the week of Jan. 3 and feature Josh DeWeese's "Pots as Expression" and Emily Silver's "Paper for Light: Focus on the Whites in Watercolor."

Each year, SNC at Incline Village offers a variety of summer workshops given by nationally known ceramists, glass artists, painters, sculptors, printmakers, digital artists, musicians, photographers, papermakers, jewelers, and more.

For more information or bios about the individual artists go here, or contact Sheri Leigh O'Connor at (775) 881.7588 or sleigh@sierranevada.edu.

'Wonder Woman' leaping snowbanks in South Tahoe

Publisher's note: ***This article first appeared in the November 2010 issue of ABHOW Words.***

Carol Crosby-Ferges Christensen fearlessly lay her body across the windshield of a moving car. She jumped through a ceiling and in and out of trees. She even leaped between tall buildings in a single bound.

No surprise. She was Wonder Woman, after all, or rather a stunt double for actress Lynda Carter, who starred in the late-1970s TV series.

Now 64, Christensen has lived at Kelly Ridge in South Lake Tahoe since it opened in 2009.



Carol Crosby-Ferges Christensen

How did she come to stand in for a superhero strong enough to lasso a plane, hurl a spaceship or single-handedly snatch someone away from an oncoming tsunami? It seems she was born for the part.

Christensen grew up in a family of acrobats and gymnasts and recalls they “had a trampoline in the backyard since before I could walk.”

When she was 6 or 7, she started performing with her parents and siblings as a family act in Muscle Beach near her hometown of Playa del Rey in Southern California. They did gymnastics and tumbling, and their signature act was a human pyramid.

“Dad would be standing and his feet would be the only two on the ground,” she says. “My twin brother and my older sister would be on their knees on his two legs, my mom would be sitting on his shoulders, I’d be sitting on her shoulders, and my little brother would be in front.”

All except her dad joined her in spending several summers touring the West Coast with a one-ring tent show called The DeWayne Circus.

“That’s a kid’s dream,” Christensen says. “We did not only the trapeze and the trampoline and the gymnastic, acrobatic things we were used to doing already, but we also did acts with ponies and an elephant.”



Memorabilia of Carol Crosby-Ferges Christensen's days as Wonder Woman. Photos/Provided

By the time she was 20, she had gotten to know a number of celebrities – Liza Minnelli was her best friend when she was a child – and through these connections, she started doing stunt work for TV shows, movies and commercials.

“I never had to go on one interview or scratch my way in to get a job,” Christensen says. “They always called and said, ‘Here’s something we need somebody for.’”

Her first movie gig was as Sharon Tate’s double in a film that also starred Tony Curtis. She later performed on the TV show “The Mod Squad,” in the movie “Brewster’s Millions,” and in other movies with such stars as Julie Andrews, Gene Wilder and Dom DeLuise.

When Lynda Carter’s original stunt double, Kathy Lee, was injured, Christensen stepped in. She was one of five called on to do stunts for Carter, and she says modestly that whenever she thought somebody could do a stunt better than she could herself, she would let them.

“I was never frightened, I never have been,” she says. Still, recalling her most challenging stunt does give her pause these

days.

“There were 18-story buildings on the studio lot, fairly high, and I had to jump from one building to the other with no net, nothing down below. I used a mini-trampoline. I had to run and jump off that to the other building with no safety belt. I don’t even know why I did that one.”

Truckee Tahoe Community Foundation hands out $43,500

Truckee Tahoe Community Foundation’s board of directors announced grants totaling $43,500 to nine organizations through the fall 2010 granting cycle. Other TTCF grants programs include one specific to basic safety net services, one dedicated to environmental projects, and a spring general granting program.

Arts, Culture, and Civic Life

Three grants were awarded in this focus area. Within this area, the foundation looks for specific outcomes. These include ensuring growing participation in arts and cultural experiences, imparting the unique history of our region to residents and visitors, and building a strong community through enhancing regional cultural institutions. Grants were awarded to:

Boys and Girls Club of North Lake Tahoe to support a fine arts program that culminates in an art show in a local gallery ($3,000).

Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival to offer mainstage and

educational outreach programs ($5,000).

Truckee Downtown Merchants Association for funding toward self sufficiency for Truckee Thursdays, a strong community-building activity for full time residents, part time residents, and visitors ($5,000).

Education and Youth Development

TTCF awarded three grants for education and youth development. Outcomes for grants in this focus area include encouraging student success at home, school, and in the community through youth development programming; supporting early literacy skills, school readiness, and school success; and providing parents with information, training, and support. Grants were awarded to:

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Nevada County North Lake Tahoe to provide professionally supported mentoring for children ages 6-18 ($5,000).

Get in the Action! Arts in Action to underwrite a Science Fusion Theater at Kings Beach elementary. This program combines theater, inquiry, and participation to inspire and engage students in science learning ($5,000).

Plaza Comunitaria Truckee Tahoe to allow public use of the Plaza’s computer lab and homework center to provide internet access to local residents for academic and personal pursuits ($5,000).

Environment, Recreation, and Animal Welfare

One grant was awarded in this funding cycle in this focus area. Priority outcomes for grants in this area include educating local youth on the ecosystem of our region and increase their awareness of environmental issues; protecting and restoring the local environment; protecting native wildlife and improving the lives of domestic pets; and

increasing access to recreational activities while safeguarding against negative impacts on the environment.

Wylie Animal Rescue Foundation received a $5,000 grant to continue its spay/neuter program to pets of low-income residents.

Health and Human Services

Truckee Tahoe Community Foundation awarded two grants to organizations providing health and human services. The two outcomes identified for this focus area are maintaining the safety net in order to meet the basic needs of food, shelter, clothing etc. for all local residents; and increasing access to preventative care, intervention and case management to keep people out of crisis and help those who are in crisis. Grants were awarded to:

CoRR (Community Recovery Resources) for a student intervention program to reduce the recurrence of youth substance abuse and increase student school attendance ($5,500).

SPIRIT Peers for Independence and Recovery for core operating support to bring an Empowerment/Welcome Center to the community ($5,000).

Truckee Tahoe Community Foundation is building a strong community driven by philanthropy. For more information, visit our website at www.ttcf.net or call (530) 587.1776.

‘Sounds of the Season’

concert at Squaw

The Truckee Tahoe Community Chorus concert “Sounds of the Season” is Dec. 11 at 7pm and Dec. 12 at 2pm at the Resort at Squaw Creek.

The program has something for everybody, from light Christmas pops, Hanukkah selections, contemporary religious musical settings, to arias and choruses from Handel’s Messiah.

All children will be admitted free of charge and are invited to join the chorus on stage for our traditional sing along at the conclusion of the concert. For tickets or more information, go to www.singttcc.org. General admission is $12 and preferred seating is $20.

Heavenly Ski Foundation, Warren Miller team up

The Heavenly Ski and Snowboard Foundation is selling Warren Miller “Wintervention” tickets, as well as raffle tickets for the movie on Dec. 3 and 4 at the MontBleu showroom in Stateline.

Raffle proceeds will benefit the foundation, a nonprofit organization that provides skiing and snowboarding programs for regional youth, local middle school students, and the S.O.S. program.

Doors open both nights at 6, the movie shows at 7pm. Advance tickets are available through the Heavenly Ski and Snowboard Foundation for $13. Movie tickets with five raffle tickets are

$20. Raffle tickets only are available at the foundation or at both shows for $2 each or 10 for $10. You don’t have to be present to win. Limited reserved V.I.P. table seating and preferred entry is available for $40 and includes 20 raffle tickets.

Movie and raffle tickets are available at the Heavenly Foundation building, located in the California Lodge parking lot across from the Heavenly Tram at the base of World Cup chair, Monday through Thursday from noon to 5pm, with a last-chance sale Friday from 8-10am.