

Embracing Squaw Valley's Olympic heritage

By Susan Wood



When enthusiasts of the Winter Games mark a half-century milestone during Squaw's Olympic Heritage Week at Lake Tahoe next month, few will boast a national and regional pride like Martin Hollay.

The 89-year-old native of Hungary escaped his war-torn country in 1956. He has lived in South Lake Tahoe for more years than Squaw's milestone – 52. He has made the most of his time by advancing his passion for skiing.

Among other volunteer duties, he helped build the 20-kilometer 1960 Olympic Nordic Trail system



Martin Hollay

near Sugar Pine Point State Park, a course designed by former U.S. Olympian Wendall "Chummy" Broomhall and Dartmouth University ski team coach Allison Merrill. The trails are considered part of the first cross country ski area in the United States and run between the park, Quail Creek Meadow and

McKinney Rubicon Road. They've been resurrected in time for the historic Olympic ceremony slated for Jan. 8-17.

During that time, the Nordic ski trails' home base – Granlibakken Resort near Tahoe City will host a special dinner featuring a multi-media presentation with rare footage of the winter that shaped Tahoe in honor of the cross country ski and biathlon participants, coaches, groomers and supporters.

“Our Olympic roots run deep, tracing back to the 1932 Olympic ski trials held here at Granlibakken,” resort manager Kay Williams said of the Jan. 15 event.

Hollay plans to take part in the Heritage Week festivities at Squaw Valley and the North Shore, which also include a commemorative torch relay from Sugar Pine Point to Squaw and an “Opening” ceremony of sorts complete with fireworks and live music on Jan. 8. The next day features a re-enactment of the sport of biathlon, and with good timing. It has just received its due recognition at Northstar-at-Tahoe. The Truckee ski resort installed the West Coast's one official course this year.

In addition, a cross country ski expo is set for Jan. 10 at Granlibakken. There, the first-sanctioned Scholastic Nordic Race held since the Winter Olympics and other events at Squaw will round out the week of activities.

Parties, events and venues aside, Hollay has another motive for taking part in the historic ceremony that for him is a bit more nostalgic.

“I'm wondering who's still going to be alive,” he said one recent afternoon, while glancing around his home located a few steps from Heavenly Mountain Resort.

Outside his humble abode, Hollay mounted cross country skis to the cabin. Inside, a large, framed photograph hangs high on the wall to showcase him skiing the official Olympic torch at

Heavenly when it made its way through South Lake Tahoe in 2002 on its way to the Salt Lake City Games. A book – “Snowball’s Chance” by Tahoe resident David Antonucci on Squaw’s long shot to host the 1960 Winter Games sits on his end table.

Holley reflects fondly on his 35 years of skiing at Heavenly, where he worked a dozen years as a ski patroller. In the early days, he recalled being impressed when he met the little-known ski school director – Stein Eriksen, now a legend in long-time skier circles.

Holley still skis the slopes about every day with his signature knickers and wool sweater.

Upon asking to be his native homeland’s guest, Holley dreams of making it to the Opening Ceremonies in Vancouver, British Columbia, for the Winter Games’ return to the West Coast in February.

“I’m very excited about that,” he said.

“Fifty (plus) years ago I came to Tahoe. Squaw had one lift. I carried a telephone box around to the aid station,” he said of his volunteer work leading up to and during the Games. The technology was lacking – but not the piercing drive of the athletes and community pride of their supporters. A humbled Holley gingerly pulled out a medal for volunteers like he won gold.



Reno Tahoe
International
Airport

Olympic
exhibit.
Photo/Squaw
Valley

Hollay hasn't given up skiing or a zest for life, but he has surrendered his skis and boots from the era of the eighth Olympic Games for an upcoming Squaw Valley Ski Museum. For now, Squaw foundation organizers have erected a temporary version at the Reno Tahoe International Airport until the permanent facility goes up near the Ehrman Mansion in May. The 500-square-foot display at the airport is adorned with international flags and other memorabilia including a uniform from U.S. Ski Team member Bev Anderson.

"It's received amazing attendance," said Carolyn Wallace Dee, the Squaw Valley manager of business administration and mayor of Truckee.

Catch the spirit

Those wanting to get up close and personal with the Olympic Heritage commemorative torch relay



Re-creating
the Olympic
torch run will
be Jan. 8.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

may view the spectacle during the lighting at and departure

from Sugar Pine Point State Park at 9am Jan. 8, at Homewood Mountain Resort at 10:45am or Sunnyside Resort at 11:40am.

From there, it will continue to Granlibakken at noon, Heritage Plaza at Tahoe City at 12:35pm, Alpine Meadows Ski Resort at 1:15pm, Resort at Squaw Creek at 2:25pm. The torch will be skied down Squaw's Red Dog run at 3:05pm. One may also get a glimpse of it at the Village at Squaw at 3:30pm, where the ceremonies will kick off. All times are approximate.

During the 10-day celebration, ski enthusiasts may simulate the challenge of negotiating the original 1960 Olympic men's and women's downhill courses on Squaw's slopes. The festivities culminate with a 1960 Olympic Legends Ball at the Resort at Squaw Creek.

[Click here for more information.](#)

Publisher's note: *On Jan. 1 read about adaptive skier Bill Bowness' story as it relates to Olympic Heritage Week.*