

# Olympic torch runner gearing up for historic honor

By Susan Wood

Few people would admit to improving their skiing ability without the use of their legs.

But Bill Bowness isn't just anybody. The 51-year-old disabled skier from Truckee turned a tragic car accident in 1977 that rendered him a paraplegic into an opportunity â€” a journey of sorts in the building of personal character and a rewarding career.

â€œIâ€™m a much better skier than I ever was standing up,â€ he said of his accomplishment. â€œItâ€™s hard to know what my life would have been like (if not for the accident).â€



Bill Bowness

He runs the adaptive skiing program at Alpine Meadows, where he started as a student, later a volunteer and now serves as an instructor. His latest venture involves being asked to run the commemorative torch from his home ski resort to the base of Squaw Valley, which is marking its 50th anniversary of hosting the Winter Games with a slew of activities for Olympic Heritage Week.

The torch relay slated for Jan. 8 starts at Sugar Pine Point State Park and is scheduled to arrive at Alpine about 1:15pm.

It ends at the Olympic Village at the base of Squaw Valley at about 3:30pm, when an Opening Ceremony is set to commence.

Bowness told *Lake Tahoe News* he plans to cherish the 1.5-mile run. He figures it will last 10 minutes.

“This is another huge milestone in my life. As it gets closer, I expect to get very excited,” he said.

This isn’t the first time the Winter Olympics have placed Bowness in the spotlight. The paralympian represented the United States in Lillehammer, Norway, during the 1994 Games. He took home three medals in the four events he competed in: downhill, giant slalom, slalom, and super-G.

“That was an awesome experience,” he said.

Bowness insists he’s never missed the Winter Olympics “even though he enjoys summer sports, too. He and his wife split their time between Truckee and a small town near Jackson, Miss., where he teaches at a water ski school. Unlike many snowbirds, the couple leaves the Lake Tahoe region in the summer because they prefer it here in the winter.

“It’s white gold around here,” he said.

Although Bowness knows his work involves play, he’s not afraid to get down to business when he needs to. He lives up to his commitments with zeal and looks forward to the latest “honor” that is in some respects quite nostalgic.

“I’m looking forward to giving back to a sport that has taken care of me,” he said, adding even more affection for his Truckee community.

Bowness and all the spectators aren’t the only ones enthusiastic about the upcoming festivities.

Linda Williams, project manager for the Squaw Valley Ski Museum Foundation and Olympic Heritage week executive

producer, sounded giddy when she pointed out how the commemorative torch participants “will each be carrying a replica of the 1960 Olympic torch.”

More details on the activities will be featured in an upcoming article focusing on the Olympic Heritage Week organized by Squaw Valley and affiliates.

**Publisher’s note:** *Read about Olympic hopeful Andy Finch on Jan. 3.*