

Sam Borges 1924-2010

By Kathryn Reed

Sam Borges, the man who built Borges Sleigh Rides, died Jan. 11, 2010. He was 85.

Mr. Borges died peacefully with his family beside him.

Born in Albany, N.Y., on Jan. 21, 1924, Mr. Borges was industrious from an early age. He moved with his mother and younger sister to California when he was 5. As a teenager he bought some cows in the San Joaquin Valley and started an early career as a dairyman and farmer.



Sam Borges

In 1955, Mr. Borges moved to San Jose, when it was still an agriculture community, and sold tractors.

It was in 1958 that he and his young family started to make annual pilgrimages to camp at Camp Richardson. He moved his family to South Lake Tahoe in 1965.

Mr. Borges got a job working for Dillingham Corporation helping to build what is now the Tahoe Keys. He was a backhoe operator and was responsible for putting many of the sewage lines in.

Something he remembered from a conversation he had with a casino executive before moving to Tahoe full time was that the South Shore needed a winter business for non-athletes.

It was 1967 that the sleigh business started. He worked at it part time for several years until it became his full-time job. From a postcard of a sleigh he was able to weld together his first sleigh.

“He found out horses eat all year-round so he decided let’s get the carriage rides going,” his son, David Borges, said.

A handful of years ago, another son, Dwight, took over the sleigh business.

Mr. Borges had a way with animals; he could practically talk to them and understand what was going on with them.

He was a wonderful storyteller. Anyone on a sleigh ride would be riveted by one of his stories.

He was even known to entertain the entertainers who were in town at one of the showrooms. Bob Hope joked that he wanted a private ride, but with it being Christmas Day, Mr. Borges did not oblige the comedian.

Ray Charles has a Christmas album with him holding the reins of the sleigh.

Several times the Borges horses were featured in the Rose Parade.

Last year his daughter-in-law, Dianna Maria de Borges, published a book titled “Sleigh Rides in Lake Tahoe: Memoirs of Sam Borges.”

Mr. Borges and his wife, Rosie, were both national water ski champions. He was on skis last summer gliding across Lake Tahoe. The two traveled much of the world together.

“He was fun to be around, he loved people,” David Borges said. “He could converse with anyone, at anytime.”

In 2002, Mr. Borges was chosen by the community to run the Olympic torch en route to the Salt Lake City Games.

Mr. Borges is survived by his wife of 60 years, Rosie, of South Lake Tahoe; sons Don, David and Dwight, all of South Lake Tahoe, and Dean of Carson City; seven grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

Services are pending.