

# Carson City man hospitalized after being buried in avalanche

By Kathryn Reed

A Carson City man who grew up in South Lake Tahoe is being treated for severe head injuries he sustained in an avalanche near the Carson Pass.

Darren Johnson, 47, was backcountry skiing with his friend Matthew Beler of South Lake Tahoe on Sunday when he triggered an avalanche as he going from the saddle of Red Peak to Crater Lake.

Beler was able see Johnson's poles sticking out and dug him out in about seven minutes. He was conscious, but responsive at that time. Renown Medical Center in Reno where Johnson was taken is not releasing his status. Alpine County sheriff's officials knew he was alive and still at the hospital early Wednesday afternoon.

"With as much snow that had fallen, the chance of an avalanche was extreme," said Lt. Ron Michitarian of the Alpine County Sheriff's Department.

Even though the two skiers were considered experienced and carried beacons, it is still necessary to understand how that much snow would be unstable.

It took Beler about two hours to ski out to Highway 88 where he was able to flag down a deputy. The deputy in turn called out all the search and rescue crews. A CalStar flight crew located the avalanche field about 12:20pm.

A California Highway Patrol chopper lowered a paramedic to Johnson who packaged him in a rig to airlift him to Blue

Lakes. From there CalStar flew him to Reno.

Because Johnson was on a cliff the search and rescue crews on snowmobile were not able to reach him.

Also assisting in the rescue were Woodfords volunteer firefighters, South Tahoe fire and Lake Valley fire.