

Weather historian to delve into Sierra's winter wonders

By Susan Wood

Think globally, act locally.

Weather historian Mark McLaughlin is expected to bring this mantra to life when he addresses an extremely topical topic on Thursday at the Explore Tahoe in South Lake Tahoe.

McLaughlin has the spotlight for the center's second annual winter speaker series with his talk called "Reign of the Sierra Storm King," an overview of how the last 150 years of winter weather in the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range tells about life at Lake Tahoe and the evolving climate.



Mark
McLaughlin

Topics that evening will include the Donner Party, the storm of the century in the winter of 1951-52, along with the tropical weather conditions associated with El Nino and La Nina, the latter of which Tahoe is experiencing. The lake is located on the north-to-south cusp of seeing unusually wet or dry, cold or warm conditions associated with the equatorial weather phenomena. This year's La Nina is expected to bring more extremes across the United States like El Nino did the previous year. The Pacific Northwest has already experienced wetter than average systems this winter as the National

Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration predicted.

If there's one thing weather as a science can prove over time, long-term theories are "not all things to all people" or even places, McLaughlin explains.

The author and commentator who's made appearances on CNN, the Weather Channel and History Channel said he tries to take recent information released from the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center and be a bridge in deciphering these theories for the average weather watcher.

For example, he's noticed that since 1962 the lake level snowpack at Tahoe has diminished more than two weeks earlier each year. However, in the higher elevations such as Donner Pass, this is not the case. The legendary mountain region remains a place to be reckoned with in the winter, he said.

The winter of 1951-52 brought record snowfall with such magnitude, traffic in and out of the South Shore was cut off, a drop shipment of supplies was made from the outside world and residents dug out of their second story windows to get out of their homes. Some attend a reunion each summer to mark the occasion. The adults have looked back at that time as hard labor. The children at the time have rejoiced over sledding down the roofs of their houses.

Explore Tahoe Recreation Coordinator Lauren Thomaselli insisted the winter speaker series and specifically McLaughlin's talk that kicks it off fits well into the center's format and mission of blending environmental education with recreation.

"It's really to provide ways to get (people) connected with our area," she said.

The Dec. 23 talks starts at 6pm. A \$5 donation is requested. Refreshments will be served.