

# Highway 89 reopens amid caution

By Susan Wood

With Highway 89 reopening Monday evening at Emerald Bay near Eagle Falls after an avalanche buried a vehicle a few days before, at least one area resident would not be fooling when she says she won't be driving it.



An avalanche at Emerald Bay on Highway 89 buries Karrie Kunich's vehicle.

Karrie Kunich of Markleeville recounted with *Lake Tahoe News* the scare of her life on Friday afternoon – April Fool's Day, when the snow tumbled onto the major thoroughfare between the Vikingsholm turnout and Inspiration Point.

When all was done, a 60-foot wide, 10-foot high wall of snow buried her sedan, allowing a very small space for her to escape on the driver's side. She recalled traveling southbound on 89 at 1:18pm and becoming annoyed at a motorist in front of her driving about 20mph because she had an appointment.

"All of sudden he sped up," she said Monday.

He beat the slide, but it was a whiteout in front of her. She slammed on the brakes, and the sound that roared over her car became increasingly louder. Her windshield shattered, and the vehicle stopped. There was snow everywhere.

“I was terrified. I thought I was going to be crushed,” she said. “I literally said to myself when it stopped: ‘I didn’t die.’”

The rescue crew had to cut her out of her seatbelt. Emerald Bay Towing responded – a company her husband John Baker runs.

A devastating thought crossed her mind that her 4-year-old son usually sits where much of the snow landed.

“He wouldn’t have made it,” she said, her voice quivering.

A few bruises and scratches later, along with much soreness, she admitted to having a little stress related to driving – especially in winter. And, she has no intentions of driving on Highway 89.



The car has to be dug out on the passenger side by rescue crews.

“I’d like to see that road closed all winter. It’s dangerous. I may be the minority here, but (opening it) isn’t worth somebody’s life,” she said.

The winter storms have kept the avalanche danger reports

fluctuating between extreme to considerable, where it now sits. But more snow is expected in the forecast later this week.

“If we get a certain amount of snow then we’ll have to watch it,” Caltrans South Lake Tahoe Supervisor Bill Netto said Monday evening.

A Caltrans crew conducted a long assessment of the snowslide area on Monday afternoon to ensure no movement may occur.