

Mayo Clinic doctor to lead sports medicine on South Shore

By Kathryn Reed

Understanding your patients' lifestyle can be critical to getting them to being in top shape after an injury.

As someone who has competed in cross country skiing and mountain biking, Jon Finnoff knows what an active lifestyle is about. It's one of the reasons he moved to South Lake Tahoe.

Even though he does not start at Tahoe Orthopedics and Sports Medicine until next week, he has been on his bike, closed on a house and has his 2011-12 pass for Heavenly Mountain Resort.



Jon Finnoff

Now it's a matter of him, his wife and their 4-year-old daughter getting settled and learning where to play outdoors.

His position is new for Barton Health. Finnoff will be medical director of sports medicine, working with the physician team of Keith Swanson, Terry Orr, Steve Bannar, Robert Rupp, Dan Robertson, Kyle Swanson and William Cottrell.

Like Orr, Bannar and Kyle Swanson, Finnoff is also a doctor with the U.S. Ski Team.

“Sports medicine is not just orthopedics. I’d like to create a multi-disciplinary team for sports medicine,” Finnoff told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I want to find out what we have, what we have that needs to be improved and what we don’t have.”

While he comes from the esteemed Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, it’s growing up in Boulder and living in Bend, Ore., that fueled him with the desire to return to the mountains.

Finnoff met Orr at a conference a few years ago, which led to building a relationship and his eventual move to head the center.

He has been an associate professor at the Mayo Clinic, is still on the faculty at the University of Utah, and often gives lectures internationally. He has also contributed to more than 60 publications.

This month he will be traveling to Chile and China to give presentations.

Finnoff is aware of the missed opportunity by Barton to have Richard Steadman pursue his dream of an orthopedic clinic. He eventually did so in Vail, leaving South Lake Tahoe decades behind the curve. Finnoff shrugs that off.

On the South Shore he intends to create a sports concussion program like he did at the Mayo Clinic. He will create a multi-disciplinary team that incorporate the schools and ski resorts.

“For the concussion program, the baseline tests people who are at risk. If you don’t know how the person functions prior to injury, you don’t know how they are functioning after the injury,” Finnoff said.

In other words, cognitive skills differ in everyone. If they weren’t a rocket scientist to begin with, then there should not be the expectation that recovery will make them one.

“If you are participating in a sport at high risk for concussion, that includes snowboarding and skiing, you should get a baseline (concussion test),” Finnoff said.

He says concussions are “somewhat of a hidden injury” because blood and broken bones are not usually part of the trauma. Finnoff is well aware of second-impact syndrome and the need for better education about it.

Finnoff wants to turn this area into a hub for sports medicine – not just in terms of treating patients.

Education, research, and tracking clinical outcomes are key goals of his.

He also said, “It’s important to create a strategic alliance with other medical centers to create a high level of care here.”

Finnoff is also tasked with continuing Barton’s goal of becoming a destination health care facility. This is also part of the basin’s prosperity plan.

After he gets acquainted with the community and facilities in the area and region, Finnoff intends to create a one-, five- and 10-year action plan.

And when Finnoff isn’t in scrubs or a lab coat, expect to see him dressed to hike, bike, climb or ski.