

# Tahoe ski resort heavyweights to advance Olympic chances

By Susan Wood

Experience counts. The Reno-based coalition tasked with bringing Olympic gold to the California-Nevada region in winter 2022 threw some big guns behind the effort Wednesday by appointing to the board Lake Tahoe ski giants Blaise Carrig of Vail and Andy Wirth of Squaw Valley.

The two men have shared the Olympic experience when they worked in Utah. They would like to share it again in 10 years.



If organizers get their way, the Olympics will return to Lake Tahoe 62 years after they were in Squaw.

Photo/LTN file

Carrig, co-president of Vail's mountain division, brings to the Tahoe table his experience at The Canyons resort in Park City during the 2002 Winter Games at Salt Lake City and a steadfast investment as the head of Heavenly Mountain Resort before moving up Vail's corporate ladder.

Wirth would like to see the Games return to Tahoe and pledged to work closely with his old pal and resort competitor Carrig to accomplish that goal.

The board may even enlist some high-level help from the East Coast – as in presidential candidate Mitt Romney, who salvaged the Winter Games to Utah a decade ago and turned it into a profitable endeavor. Romney visited the coalition in 2008.

It could also be a boon that Nevada Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki is co-chair of Romney's presidential campaign in Nevada.

“(Romney) did a phenomenal and remarkable job. He took a group from utter disaster to an extreme success,” Wirth said.

The Squaw chief noted that even if the Reno-Tahoe group loses to a city like Denver, it would be a lesson learned.

“It's difficult to handicap (one city versus another). I'm just encouraged by the initiative of the resorts,” he said.

Reno and Denver want to be the U.S. city chosen for 2022. Reno has Tahoe, with resorts from Squaw Valley to Heavenly providing world-class views from one side of the lake to another. Denver has Vail, with seven back bowls stretching seven miles across at its namesake and a not-for-the-faint-of-heart World Cup downhill run (Birds of Prey) at the customer-oriented Beaver Creek resort that would make Tahoe's Olympic downhill legend Daron Rahlves look twice.

On the North Shore, Squaw has a reputation. Let's face it. If one doesn't get enough of a poignant chill seeing that Olympic flame burning on Highway 89, then maneuvering with the elite down runs off KT-22 may provide bone-chilling humility.

On the south side, Heavenly has the entertainment to support the bed base and snow caches some don't want to share. The bi-state resort even brings its own entertainment to the slopes, with Gunbarrel 25 each spring. Just once, one may want to

imagine skiing wild man Glen Plake and freestyle Olympian Jonny Moseley bumping knees side-by-side.

Both resorts have a history with the Winter Games.

The guts and vision of Alex Cushing brought the games to Tahoe in a surprise move away from Innsbruck, Austria, 42 years ago. A decade ago this month, the Olympic torch graced Lake Tahoe on its way to Utah with one of the torchbearers, Martin Hollay, skiing it down Heavenly's Olympic run. (This reporter ran a leg of it down Sierra Boulevard.) The South Shore community showed up in great numbers for both.

In an area divisive on many fronts, the North and South shores were unified in being a part of something big.

Organizers hope for this dream again.

But either way, the revenue-sharing agreement between the U.S. Olympic Committee and International Olympic Committee will need to be worked out before any U.S. city is considered. The two entities are in meetings this week to hash out their differences.

Carrig insists the Olympic-seeking group remains in the early phases of planning – with no cost analysis or set venues in mind.

The Denver committee recently released a cost estimate to host the Games – \$1.5 billion. They used the 2010 Games at Vancouver as a benchmark, the *Denver Post* reported.

Everything remains on the table as a possibility in Tahoe. Carrig did mention Heavenly could see a new run – perhaps one carved on the front ridge of South Lake Tahoe leading to the Olympic run. It's all just a possibility. It all could be for the men's downhill.

"We're going to evaluate it. A new venue could start over that way," Carrig told *Lake Tahoe News*, while peering out his

Colorado window at snow falling last weekend.

“A larger issue is all the beds being filled by the spectators, media and athletes,” he said.

Carrig admits Tahoe and Colorado are attractive for the Winter Games, with their history, ski terrain, scenery and environmental cultures.

He believes the stigma has disappeared regarding Denver turning down the Games in 1976 after winning the bid. Nonetheless, Carrig said his loyalty lies with working with Reno-Tahoe Winter Games Coalition Chairman Krolicki.

Squaw Valley CEO Wirth has a massive background at Vancouver with Intrawest. His home resort's host-city status in 1960 and his company's purchase of neighboring Alpine Meadows bring elements of nostalgia and terrain to the Olympic bidding table.

The goal is for Tahoe-Reno to edge out Chile and China on the international front after bumping Denver out of the picture.

What Denver's coalition of public officials and business leaders doesn't have is a representative from Vail Resorts, the largest U.S. ski company.

“I'm not sure how (our efforts) all stack against others, but their not having something has no bearing on what we do. The truth is, we have the properties in both regions. We did look at who they have on their committee and noted what representation they did have but didn't focus on what they didn't have,” Reno-Tahoe coalition CEO Jon Killoran told *Lake Tahoe News* on Jan. 11. Instead, Killoran focused on the board's level of depth. The efforts began in 2001 with Reno sports commissioner Jim Vanden Heuvel, who died three years ago.

Since then, California Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom – the former San

Francisco mayor – threw his support behind the venture, along with a Bay Area sporting event group which tried to bring the 2012 Summer Games to the area. State Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Roseville, is one of the California Winter Games Committee members. Gaines started skiing at a young age at Tahoe resorts and has a second home on the North Shore. And Newsom has business interests at Squaw.

To Killoran, a vision like forming an Olympic bid requires cooperation from a collective group of people.

“You don’t always do that every day,” Killoran emphasized.

Wirth seconded the sentiment.

**Other members of the Reno Tahoe Winter Games Coalition board include:**

- Dan Allen – ITS Logistics
- Krys Bart – Reno Tahoe International Airport
- Larry Bernard – attorney
- Bruce Breslow – Nevada Department of Motor Vehicles
- Nicholas Butler – Umpqua Bank
- Brad Chamberlain – attorney
- Nancy Cushing – Squaw Valley
- Carolyn Wallace Dee – Squaw Valley
- Susan Fisher – Fisher Consulting
- Jeff Hamilton – Olympian
- Toni Harsh – Valley Building Company
- Glenn Hibl – CFO Group

- Chris Kassity – Kassity Management Group
- John Krmpotic – KLS Design
- Limin Liu – Olympian
- Tamara McKinney – Olympian
- Gregory Peek – ERGS Inc.
- Michael Pennington – Community Services Agency & Development Corp.
- Daron Rahlves – Truckee Olympian
- Rossi Ralenkotter – Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority
- Tony Sanchez – NV Energy
- Jim Simon – Porter-Simon Attorneys at Law
- Steve Trounday – Navegante Group
- Steve Woodbury – Nevada Commission on Tourism
- Larry Young – Ward Young Architects
- David Youngberg – Youngberg Group.