

# Chris Nelson – 1935-2012

Chris Nelson died June 29, 2012, at his home in Tahoe Donner. He was 76.

Well known for his efforts on behalf of the Tahoe Donner area, the founding director of the Truckee Tahoe Community Chorus and the OK Chorale, Chris and his family have been residents of the area for more than 16 years.

On Nov. 8, 1935, Chris was born on a farm in Richfield, Utah, where his parents Neil and Reva raised him and his brothers, Ted and Dan.

Though he began his musical career as a trombonist playing principal chairs in the University Orchestra, the Utah Symphony Orchestra under Maurice Abravanel and in back up orchestras for major stars such as Johnny Mathis. Chris also had a superb vocal talent that allowed him to have a major influence in both instrumental and vocal genres.

As a student, he worked as the assistant director of bands and studied conducting under Forrest Stoll. Later, his studies included conducting under Dennis DeCoteau of the San Francisco Ballet. He earned his bachelor and master's of music degrees from the University of Utah. It was at the university where he met his wife, Sharilyn. They married Dec. 17, 1962, and have one son and two daughters.

Upon college graduation, Chris taught elementary and junior high music. In 1964, the couple moved to Las Vegas where he built a 100-voice chorus at the junior high level. Though he had little training in vocal-choral music, he was extremely successful and his choirs won many awards. The real reason the Nelsons moved to Las Vegas was for Chris to play in professional "relief" bands, a band that fills in when a performer's main band takes a night off. Always the principal trombone, he played professionally behind some of the greatest

jazz and pop singers in the world with gigs in Salt Lake City, Reno, Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

In the late-1960s, Chris took a high school position in Belmont, Calif., where he began one of the state's first high school jazz bands. In 1971, Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill recruited Chris to start the community college's jazz band and build the music program. He was chair of the music department for 15 of the 28 years he taught there.

Once the Nelsons moved to California, skiing became a big part of their lives. While Sharilyn learned to ski at age 6, Chris, despite his growing up in Utah, didn't ski until graduate school. Even this past winter Chris was gliding effortlessly through the powder at Sugar Bowl (frequently with his grandchildren). He spent 10 years as a ski patroller at Sugar Bowl and taught skiing at Squaw Valley for nine years. He also started the Tahoe Donner Ski Club, which now has a membership of more than 250.

Extremely athletic, Chris began playing golf after moving to Truckee, frequently playing several times a week. When Chris wasn't singing or playing outdoors, he could be found in the kitchen of the home he designed and helped build in Tahoe Donner. He was an accomplished cook who trained at the Hotel Utah in Salt Lake City and worked summers while in college at the Grand Canyon Hotel on the North Rim.

Retirement allowed him to expand his musical accomplishments. Eleven years ago he launched the community chorus, which has more than 60 singers from the Truckee, Tahoe, and Reno area. It has become Truckee's major classical performing arts organization. The biannual concerts present styles ranging from jazz to classical, spiritual to standards, frequently with orchestra.

He also developed a highly lauded barbershop ensemble, the OK Chorale, that has performed programs of his own writing and

composing.

For the past two years, Chris worked on the Performing Arts Commission (reporting to the Truckee Donner Recreation & Park Department) and been instrumental in the planning and design of a performing arts center for Truckee. There will be on a bond issue on November's ballot for the center.

Music was the center of Chris' life. The silence of his voice and his trombone will leave a tremendous void, save for the numerous students he inspired to become professional musicians and dedicated audiences for fine music. Through them, his voice and musical gift will continue to resonate.

Survivors include his wife of almost 50 years, Sharilyn Nelson of Truckee; son Matt Nelson of Phoenix; daughters Courtney Murrell of Truckee (husband Mark Murrell, children Megan and Gavin), and Kimberly Eilian of New York City (husband Kevin Eilian, son Jerome); brothers Ted Nelson of Florida and Dan Nelson of Utah; and several nieces and nephews.

A celebration of life will be in this fall when the Truckee Tahoe Community Chorus assembles for its concert season.

Donations may be made to the Truckee Tahoe Community Chorus, P.O. Box 10756, Truckee, CA 96162.