

# Tahoe slow to memorialize Olympic history

By Sam McManis, Sacramento Bee

TAHOE CITY – Flames lick the crisp morning sky, as they've done for decades from two cauldrons along Highway 89, midway between Truckee and Tahoe City. They don't quite reach the Olympic rings looming from the twin-towered entrance to Squaw Valley USA, but their symbolism burns strongly. Once, these flames announce, something extraordinary happened here.

But that's it, ladies and gentlemen. There is your Squaw Valley 1960 Winter Olympic Games history, in toto.

Move along, now. Go hit the slopes.

Nothing else to see here.



The Olympic flame at the entrance to Squaw Valley.

Photo/LTN file

Actually, there is plenty of history to be cataloged and relished about Squaw Valley's brief and unlikely period on the world stage. But you'd almost have to embark on an archaeological dig to unearth it.

There is no permanent museum documenting Northern California's

lone flickering fortnight of Olympic glory. No repository for keepsakes and mementos. No place to educate youngsters who consider the X Games the pinnacle of snow-sports achievement.

It's not for a lack of trying. For five years, a group of avid skiers and history buffs has been trying to rectify this gross slight, in a curvy giant slalom of an effort.

The Squaw Valley Ski Museum Foundation has doggedly drawn up plans, redrawn them a few times, chatted up Placer County politicians, elicited public donations of funds and memorabilia, yet it still has not yet reached the finishing chute to actually break ground on a facility.

So, until a permanent museum can be erected – Lake Placid, N.Y., by the way, boasts an Olympic museum that draws 35,000 tourists annually – what we'll have to settle for is a four-panel display hanging in the Boatworks Mall in Tahoe City.

Yet even on such a small scale, the array of artifacts from the 1960 Games is impressive.

Programs, pins and pennants. Photos from official Olympic photographer Bill Briner. Promotional material, such as an "Olympic Survival Kit" from Harrah's Club, and a jaunty felt Nordic hat with an "Olympic VIII Winter Games" logo ironed on. Magazine covers, from Time, Newsweek, Sports Illustrated. A red bib number worn by a downhill competitor.

Best of all is a sign posted in the window of a nearby boarded-up bookstore, reading: "Future Site of the North Tahoe 1960 Winter Olympics Museum, coming April 2, 2013."

So, history will finally get its due?

Sort of.

Consider the future Boatworks Mall site a temporary home, said David Antonucci, the force behind the mall effort. An author and Squaw Valley Olympics historian, Antonucci has teamed with

the Baptiste family of Granite Bay, which has an extensive collection of Squaw Valley Games memorabilia, to give the public a taste of what a larger, permanent facility might offer.

“The history is totally underappreciated,” Antonucci says. “In the aftermath of the Olympics, it was like people walked away from their heritage. Now, 50 years later, people are saying, ‘Gee, we should be preserving and honoring our Olympic and skiing heritages.’”

For the past six months, Antonucci has cataloged Stan and Maryann Baptiste’s more than 200 artifacts and sent out the word that they are looking for other items residents may have kept from the Games.

He said he sees the Boatworks site as an acceptable temporary home until the “world-class museum” the Squaw Valley Ski Museum Foundation plans can be approved. Antonucci said he and the Baptistes had no plans beyond the four-panel display, but added that the mall’s owners offered the empty space rent-free after “they saw what kind of artifacts we had.”

Ideally, Antonucci says, the Baptiste artifacts will be combined with a big collection of non-Olympic but historical ski memorabilia held by the Auburn Ski Club, and housed at the foundation’s proposed permanent site at the entrance to Squaw Valley USA.

What’s the holdup with the “real” museum?

Bill Clark, head of the foundation’s board of directors, said museum consultants they hired in 2009 to do a site selection determined that the best spot for the museum was at the county-owned park at the base of Squaw Valley USA – near those dueling Olympic flames.

“It makes so much sense to put it there it’s mind-boggling,” Clark says. “(But) there were some folks who didn’t think that

was the greatest idea, mostly because our consulting architects threw out conceptual plans that showed this enormous building. It originally looked like it was going to overwhelm the park.

“But if it’s properly sized and sited within that park, and if we can work with (Placer County) with the operation, we think it’s a win-win. We’ve done a revised concept and been sharing it with different supervisors in the county. But we have not gotten to the point where we’ve had any formal sort of evaluation.”

In other words, don’t expect a swift, luge-run type of approval any time soon.

But Clark is optimistic. He thinks it’s important to preserve Squaw Valley’s history, and he’s excited about some of the items his group has stumbled upon.

“Every day, we hear of things hiding in people’s closets,” Clark says. “We know where the scoreboard from the Olympic ice arena is hiding. I just got an email from a guy the other day who (said) his brother had purchased the downhill skis from the giant slalom winner. He walked up to (the winner, Roger Staub of Switzerland) in the finish corral and said, ‘I’ll give you \$20 for the skis.’ He’s going to donate them. We have the winning hockey puck from when the USA beat the Russians. A guy from Rocklin ran out on the ice and grabbed it.

“There’s some great stuff.”

Until then, if you want history, nod to the flames but head to the mall.