

Olympic-size party for Sierra's 3 super stars

By Susan Wood

TWIN BRIDGES – It truly takes a village.

The Olympic dream continued into March at Sierra-at-Tahoe on Saturday when thousands of family, friends and dignitaries hit the street and the ski resort to celebrate the roots and return home from Sochi of three local Olympic gold medalists.

Jamie Anderson, Maddie Bowman and Hannah Teter, who all hail from Meyers, started their day at South Tahoe High School and made their way in a grand-scale procession through the South Shore on a 1947 fire truck. Anderson's brother, Luke, from Lake Valley Fire was at the helm.

Ribbons, flags and signs were spotted along Highway 50 – with a huge crowd awaiting the parade at the entrance of Sierra-at-Tahoe. The fire truck cranked its horn, people screamed and the three women on top glowed as bright as a blaze. Even a small rock slide that delayed the procession couldn't curb the enthusiasm or the drive to celebrate the special occasion.

"The guys in the front moved the rocks," Teter told *Lake Tahoe News* when asked about the little challenge – proof again of the community support. She proceeded to scamper down the stairs to the newly created plaza where hundreds of cheering fans awaited the athletes.

"This is the most amazing moment of my life," Anderson told the attentive crowd. "This was the day care I had growing up," she said fondly of Sierra. "I grew up outside appreciating nature and the beautiful place we live in."

She thanked Sierra and her family for the opportunities she's

had over the years.

Anderson won gold last month in slopestyle with her board on a massive course with one jump named after Russia's highest mountain, Mount Elbrus. Bowman did the same on skis in the halfpipe. Teter placed fourth this time in snowboard halfpipe, but she took home silver in 2010 at Vancouver and gold at the 2006 Games in Turin, Italy.

Anderson and Bowman carry the distinction of being the first gold medalist in the slopestyle snowboard and freestyle halfpipe ski events, respectively. Bowman turned her first-place run into an emotionally-charged glaring tribute to Canadian skier and friend Sarah Burke, who tragically died in a fall on a training run a few years ago.

Sierra-at-Tahoe General Manager John Rice got some giggles when he mentioned the joy of watching the guys at Sierra try to keep up with Bowman.

Rice winced a little when he considered how high Anderson could fly and "land like a butterfly" on her snowboard. He also mentioned being proud of Teter's year-after-year accomplishments, including the World Vision charity she uses to help a Kenyan village through proceeds of her line of maple syrup from Vermont, where she grew up.

"The best moment of my life was moving to South Lake Tahoe and riding Sierra," Teter said of her big move from the East nine years ago. The crowd, which more than adopted her, was hushed by the sentiment.

"I want to live here forever," she said.

All three women came across humble and grateful, and the fans held on to each word and each moment.

Through heartfelt speeches, high-fives and hugs all around, much of this day was about the power of place. And proven once

again was that the people make the place. South Lake Tahoe and beyond showered them with gifts from the business community, resolutions and special passes from the state of California, city acknowledgements and proclamations from El Dorado County.

“Is this on top of the *cha cha* scale or what?” El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago asked the screaming crowd gathered around the stage. “Sierra-at-Tahoe – it’s unbelievable. There’s got to be something in the water.”

Santiago pointed out how fitting that El Dorado translates to “the golden one” and called the county “the most gold-winning community per capita in the world.” The crowd roared.

South Lake Tahoe Mayor Hal Cole joined the sentiment with admitting he felt he was “watching family members on television” when the women performed their medal-deserving runs.



Jamie Anderson, Maddie Bowman and Hannah Teter celebrate their achievements March 15 with the South Shore. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“I swelled up with pride,” Cole said, choking back tears.

Also on hand with state resolutions, state Sen. Ted Gaines saying he was “so impressed with what the athletes had done and what John (Rice) had done.”

Lake Tahoe Unified School District board member Sue Novasel attributes part of the Sierra athletes' success to Rice's "straight A season pass program" in which 300 students have benefited. Bowman, in particular, held a grade point average of 4.3 when she graduated. Anderson has returned the philanthropy by sponsoring economically-challenged students in full gear and time on the slopes.

Bob Roberts, California Ski Industry Association executive director, told the attentive audience he was blown away by the support in Tahoe and compared it to the time he attended Squaw Valley's 1960 Olympics.

"It had nowhere near the ability to turn out the community love like this one. This is truly amazing," Roberts said before passing out California gold passes with no black-out dates and transferable rights. Bowman's buddies standing feet away yelled for Bowman to pass it to them.

Also reflecting on the past, Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce Executive Director B Gorman noted the last time she was on stage with an Olympian was in 1968 with skier Nancy Greene and felt nostalgic about how the experience inspired her.

"Keep it up kids. It's a great way to spend your life," she said, delivering a special message to the many children in the audience who may be the next set of budding Tahoe Olympians.

Former Sierra-at-Tahoe staffer Megan Waskiewicz felt nostalgic too. She left the ski resort in 2001, but made sure she brought her three children with husband Christian to witness the spectacle.

"It's really making Sierra-at-Tahoe stand up and stand out," she said, adding the importance of Anderson's profile that aired on NBC around the globe during the Olympics. The television clip showed the beauty of the lake and Anderson on a rail with the Sierra logo prominent.

Chloe Waskiewicz made it clear she would like to be an Olympian, too.

The same goes for 11-year-old Annie McCully. Her brother, Levi, 5, welcomed the Olympians with a sign of support almost larger than he is tall.

With its longtime reputation of community activism and cultivating spirit, Sierra-at-Tahoe showed how it successfully nurtured these athletes who at a young age identified it as their home resort.

"I think I teared up when I saw her first (Olympic) run," Anderson's longtime coach Brady Gunsch said after the ceremony. He coached her for 12 years from age 5 and witnessed her work ethic.

"She's worked for everything she's got," he said.

Longtime Sierra ski instructor Donna Vano teared up as well when she thought about the years she taught Teter and drove Anderson to her events.

Rice, who received numerous accolades, admitted to having goose bumps, chills and tears watching the athletes he's known over the years take to the world stage last month. When he went out to dinner the other night, many locals shared how they either changed diapers, taught or helped the girls stay out of trouble.

That must have been good news to Anderson's dad, Joe.

"I pretty much knew all along," he said of his daughter's spiritual grounding and fighting spirit.

It takes a lot of focus and maturity to work hard and win in that one moment of time, Rice pointed out.

"A true champion has to be the best when the best is called for," Rice quoted his mentor. "This was not an accident. These

women have the secret sauce.”

He shared specific messages to all three as Olympians, philanthropists, friends and people.

What comes around, goes around.

Rice brought the first celebrated Sierra Olympian Travis Cabral to the stage early on. Cabral proceeded to mention how proud he is of the three women, who exude modesty and love of community. The hometown boy is now a city police officer serving the community. The cycle of goodness continues.

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