

# Locals talk of struggles, joys of living at Tahoe



Jerry Johnson, from left, Jack Martin, Carolyn Meiers, Bob Rockwell and moderator Dave Borges. Photo/LTN

**By Kathryn Reed**

CAMP RICHARDSON – Tahoe has never been an easy place to make it. But something about the mountains, the lake – it keeps people here.

Four people with deep roots on the South Shore shared their stories Tuesday night with nearly 100 people who gathered at Camp Richardson Lodge. This is one of a series of programs Lake Tahoe Historical Society is putting on.

Jack Martin moved to the area in 1937 and is now in Gardnerville, Jerry Johnson arrived in 1946, Carolyn Meiers in 1953 and Bob Rockwell in 1962.

Martin's parents owned Martin's Lodge where the Raley's center at the Y is. Fishing was always Martin's love. He remembers when the road to Placerville would be closed and they'd go fishing on the lake because the warden wouldn't be coming to town.

Meat came from Barkley Meats. There wasn't always the money to pay for it, so when someone would come calling for cash the Martin boys were told by their mom to be quiet so the person would go away.

Martin said how Harvey Gross asked his dad, Bode Martin, to go in on the land that is now Harveys casino, but his dad said no because he wasn't into gambling.

Jerry Johnson also had a story about Gross. It was about 1946 and Gross could not make his car payment so the vehicle was repossessed.

"Everyone at Tahoe struggled financially," Johnson said. "There were no secure jobs here."

His father-in-law ran Nel's Tahoe Supply. He'd leave a note on the counter saying if you need anything, just add it to your account. And people did.

Electricity often was going out and sometimes for days at a time. During those times Meiers remembers filling the bathtub with water just in case it would be needed.

It wasn't until Rockwell was an adult that he found out why he and his family were regulars at the South Shore Room at Harrah's Lake Tahoe. He knew this wasn't normal because he never saw any of the other "motel kids" there. (His family used to own various motels in town.)

His dad told him it all had to do with a deal he made with a man, who still lives in town. The man worked at the showroom, but had a way with women he wasn't married to. A hotel room

was always available for him in exchange for the unlimited comps.

Meiers remembers being a guest at the South Shore Room too, seeing people like Red Skeleton. Her dad had done all the wiring there.

One of the houses they lived in was behind the old Barton Ranch. Bill Barton, better known as Papa Barton, would come over for fried brains that Meiers said her mom would make. All the while he would be smoking his pipe.

“He was a delightful man, very quiet and very unassuming; unlike Alva, who was a real chatterbox,” Meiers said.

Johnson’s memories date back to when Cave Rock had only one bore, and Kingsbury Grade and Pioneer Trail were gravel roads.

Skiing was a part their lives at one time. It’s just what you did if you lived here. Johnson was the only one at South Tahoe High to letter in basketball and skiing at the same time.

There was Nebelhorn Ski Resort at the top of Echo Summit and White Hill near Spooner Summit. By 1962, Heavenly had three chairlifts and two rope tows. Rockwell remembers lift tickets being \$4 for adults and \$2 for kids.

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### **Notes:**

- DVDs of the November history talk are available at Lake Tahoe Museum.
- There will be another history talk in the fall.