

# Sierra's rental boss more than one of the guys



Mark Reeves, front, likes working along side his staff in the ski rental shop at Sierra-at-Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn Reed

**By Kathryn Reed**

TWIN BRIDGES – Controlled chaos. That's what the rental shop at Sierra-at-Tahoe looks like on a busy Saturday.

Workers stand out because of their royal blue shirt or jacket. They are surrounded by a sea of people trying on boots, having bindings worked on and getting sized for skis and poles. And while they are all eager to hit the slopes, there is a sense of calmness – no yelling, no whiny kids, no sense of distress.

It's hard to know Mark Reeves is the boss. He looks like one

of the guys, maybe a tad older than the average worker. He's sliding skis across the waxer, then snagging poles for people. Later he has a screwdriver in his hand as he adjusts bindings and then makes sure they release properly.

"My favorite part is still adjusting ski bindings because you get to talk to them. You are helping them to have fun," Reeves told *Lake Tahoe News* as he took a quick break from the floor.

He has been working for Sierra since 1989 – always in the rental shop. Only now the 52-year-old is the boss. He oversees about 50 employees between the ski, snowboard and repair shops.

"It's really important to the employees that you are working next to them and not just sitting in your office all day doing paperwork. That's the last place I want to be," Reeves said.

What has kept Reeves at the job all these years is that it isn't a desk job, it's physical. Much of the day is spent on his feet – sometimes 12 hours a day, six days a week. The interaction with customers is what is most fun, and meeting people from all over the world.

While some businesses in the basin say it's hard to retain good employees, Reeves said that isn't a problem at Sierra.

"It's up to you to train and teach employees. If they don't understand guest services, you have to train them," Reeves said. "It's more the culture of the company, than the pool of people."

He also only had good things to say about his bosses.

Reeves' only complaint is that he knows plenty of people who don't work at a ski resort who get in more days on the mountain than he does.

Looking at the number of people lined up, this is going to be another non-ski day for Reeves.

And while it appears to be a jumbled mess, there is sense of organization to the process. It's all about the flow, Reeves said. It's also about keeping it cool in the rental shop because people are dressed for the outdoors. This little trick helps calm any potentially frayed nerves. The idea is to get people in and out as fast as possible, but the reality is that it takes time to rent boots, skis and poles, and then pay for them.



Mark Reeves is all about being a hand's on boss at Sierra-at-Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn Reed

It's not just first-timers or newbies to the sport who are in the shop. Sierra has a program where skiers and snowboarders (snowboard rentals are in a different location) may rent basic, performance or demo gear for the season. It means not having to schlep equipment from home to the resort every day, and it allows people to try different skis.

This is one of the biggest changes Reeves has seen during his tenure. "Fewer people have their own equipment these days than in the past."

There are all mountain skis, ones for carving and those designed for powder. Snowboards also have become specialized.

Demo and high performance skis turn over every year. The basic skis are replaced about every three years; it all depends on their use.

“They got destroyed last year. There were rocks everywhere,” Reeves said. The 2014-15 season was sketchy at best at most Tahoe area resorts, with Sierra having its earliest closing date on record.

“A lot of stuff ends up in the repair shop. We are constantly tuning and filling,” Reeves said.

It’s already time to figure out what the inventory will be for next ski season. Two weeks ago Reeves was at a trade show in Mammoth riding equipment. On March 3 he will be at a Reno trade show making the final decision about what gets purchased for the 2015-16 season. During the summer the manufacturers create the product.

Before the resort opens in late fall Reeves is getting the equipment ready.

“Every binding has to be tested. It takes up to two months to do that,” Reeves said of the 1,500 pairs of skis. The heel and toe are checked multiple times. (They are routinely tested during the season, too.)

While it’s all about having fun for the customers, for those working in the rental and repair shops at Sierra, safety comes first.