

Nevada tourism guru turning in work passport

By Susan Wood

There's no fencin' in Larry Friedman, who's retiring today from TravelNevada.

The preeminent deputy director of the Silver State agency once known as the Nevada Commission on Tourism has traveled the world to promote the state.

Now the 62-year-old Douglas County resident plans to travel for himself with family and friends. A death in the family and his own major illness in the last year spurred him to call it quits.

But to those who know and love Friedman – nothing can keep this iconoclast down. He'll continue to travel, this time for pure leisure.

"To be a father, grandfather and have my friends – I just thought I'd go out on a high note," he told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I thought about it for a long time, and my friends encouraged me to do it."

Friedman admitted the decision to leave was a dilemma for him because he loves his job.



Larry Friedman has been the backbone of TravelNevada for more than two decades. Photo/Provided

He got choked up talking about it – especially when mentioning Rural Roundup, a program he started that involves connecting the small rural communities of Nevada to the state agency’s tourism efforts around the world. The agency has spearheaded trips and promotions connecting Nevada to China, India, South Korea, France, Australia, Mexico and Brazil.

Friedman refers to these events as economically and culturally rewarding, and he has felt a total welcoming from those in the far stretches of Nevada that are often conservative pockets of the state.

“My work with rural Nevada was exceptional and so rewarding. I never felt anything but love, a partnership and warmth from these people,” he said, while holding back tears. “Being gay or straight never made a difference. I can’t speak highly enough of these people. I wasn’t judged on my sexual orientation. I was judged on purpose.”

He'll miss the people the most when he leaves his job.



Larry Friedman was a master in the travel-tourism industry.
Photo/Provided

“I made some great friendships throughout the world,” he said.

Friedman also formed lifelong partnerships with agencies and companies connected to Nevada and Lake Tahoe, where he spent much of his career.

Upon leaving his childhood home in Marin County to be a foreign exchange student in Greece at age 17, he formed a close relationship with a family in Greece and has since returned for various weddings.

“The first person to repost my (TravelNevada) award is the son of my Greek brother,” he said of a man who’s like a brother to him.

The tourism agency just announced establishing the Larry J. Friedman Industry Partner of the Year Award to celebrate the tourism guru’s lifelong commitment to these special professional and personal partnerships in the name of the

Nevada's interests.

His career certainly left a mark on Lake Tahoe and its people. Friedman came to the South Shore to work as the director of sales for Lakeland Village for a short stint in the early years.

From there, he worked for three years on the Tahoe Queen paddle-wheeler boat as the marketing director. He also worked as an overnight disc jockey and program director for five years with KTHO. He recalled how longtime radio executive Ollie Hayden gave him his first job. Hayden died a few weeks ago, marking another poignant time for Friedman.

Friedman has been with TravelNevada (or NCOT) for 26 years.

What would he tell his replacement?

"I would tell them they're very lucky – that the keys to success is to respect all of Nevada," he said.

Carson Valley Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Bill Chernock agreed with a caveat.

"Oh, they'll find someone for the job, but he will not be replaced," Chernock told *Lake Tahoe News*. "There's only one Larry Friedman. The state was lucky to have him."



Brian Krolicki, Sue Barton and Larry Friedman

Chernock recalled a special Rural Roundup, which was always celebrated near Friedman's birthday in April. For his 40th, a sheriff's deputy rounded him up to claim someone might have broken into his hotel room. When Friedman was gone, other tourism officials putting on Rural Roundup snuck in friends and Friedman's parents to stage a surprise birthday party for him.

Chernock pointed to Friedman's infectious laugh as making him so lovable.

"When Larry laughs in Carson City, dogs in Fallon say: 'Did you hear that?'" Chernock joked.

The longtime tourism official who traveled in similar circles with Friedman cited how Friedman got him his first job on the radio.

"That crummy 20-hour-a-week job at KTHO – literally everything

(related) that's happened to me in the last 32 years I attribute to that. For that, I thank him, and other days, I curse him," Chernock added.

All was in good fun for the people in Friedman's life.

Former Nevada Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki also had memorable moments to share about Friedman.

Krolicki noted how Friedman "invented" Rural Roundup, and it grew into a major success.

"Lots of people looked forward to that," he said. This was unless one wore a tie to the event.

"If a tie was on, it was cut off. I lost more than one tie," Krolicki told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Rural Roundup is one of Larry Friedman's legacies.
Photo/Provided

When asked why he wore one knowing that standard, Krolicki responded with a chuckle: "I didn't think he'd cut off the tie of the lieutenant governor. He proved me wrong."

Krolicki further commended Friedman's dedication and passion about Nevada tourism.

"He broke barriers between professional relationships and personal friendships. His roots go very deep. He opened markets in India, Korea and China. He handled an amazing network of collaborations," said Krolicki, who served for many years on the Nevada Commission on Tourism board. "You knew Larry was in the room. He brought people together."

That's the precise impression Friedman painted for Chris Chrystal, who's retired from the NCOT.

"You always knew when Larry was in the building," said Chrystal, who worked with Friedman for 13 years. "Larry has been a great salesman for Nevada. He's a vivacious person who knows how to communicate a product – in this case, Nevada. He's got the expertise in talking to crowds. He's at ease behind the mic or in a booth at a trade show. He excelled in bringing people to Nevada."

For that, his contributions won't go unnoticed to those who work closely with Friedman.

"From his time on the radio and with the Tahoe Queen to TravelNevada, he's been so passionate about his work and travel, and it's been so advantageous to us," said Carol Chaplin, Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority executive director.

"Larry is part of a big hospitality family here. He's fun to be around. We all love him. We're going to miss him – but on to another venture," she said.

Not only did Chaplin hang in the same tourism agency circles, the two of them also worked on board the Queen.

That's where LTVA's Senior Vice President of Administration and Operations Sue Barton got to know Friedman, a year after watching him carry the Olympic torch at Lake Tahoe on its way to the 1984 Summer Games in Los Angeles.

The friendship and collaboration came full circle when the torch returned to Tahoe in 2002 while on its way to Salt Lake City. Barton helped spearhead an evening event at the then Caesars Tahoe parking lot in which Friedman was the emcee.

"He brought the 1984 torch. That was a fun, full-circle experience there," she said.

Barton has traveled extensively to promote Nevada with Friedman.

"His passion about Nevada and tourism is unmatched. It's made him an incredible ambassador," she said.

Friedman will be honored on his "industry partner" award at the Rural Roundup slated for April 26-28 in Elko.