

Reveling in the cosmos on a dark winter night



Tony Berendsen, center, leads a star tour at Northstar on Dec. 21. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – Traipsing through the snow was otherworldly in a way that wasn't expected.

It became a star tour that required a bit of an imagination. Such are the hazards when Mother Nature decides to mar the night sky with clouds.

But along the way the clouds parted just long enough for Tony Berendsen to point out the star Capella, which was 42 light years from where we were standing. It is actually four stars within the constellation Auriga.

“Constellations are beautiful. They are humanity in space,” Berendsen said.

His passion shines through as he imparts nuggets of knowledge about the universe. Each stop was punctuated by the recital of one of his poems that was inspired by the cosmos. Berendsen was definitely able to stir the imagination enough to get people to start thinking about looking up more when it is dark and to wonder about what else is out there and what it will be like one day on Earth when our sun (which is a star) burns out

Berendsen is an award-winning amateur astronomer residing in Reno who writes the Star Guide astronomy articles for *Lake Tahoe News*. He is president of the Northern Nevada Science Coalition and a past president of the Astronomical Society of Nevada.



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Snowshoeing through the dark woods of Northstar to learn about the stars. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

On the winter solstice on Wednesday he led a group of novice star gazers into the woods from the Nordic center at Northstar and finished at the Ritz-Carlton Lake Tahoe. Normally the night wraps up with guests being able to view the myriad stars and planets through high-powered telescopes lined up at the Ritz. The clouds were not cooperating.

Instead of being able to be led by Sirius, which is the brightest star this time of year, headlamps were our beacon.

This is the eighth year Berendsen has put on guided the tours at the Truckee resorts, though he has been doing star tours for 15 years. He also guides summer programs.

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Notes:

- Future stargazing snowshoe tours will be on Dec. 28, Jan. 14 and Feb.11.
- Tours are approximately 2-2½ hours.
- Cost is \$63 for ages 13 and older, and \$45 for ages 10-12. Snowshoe rentals are available for \$21 per person.
- Make reservations **online**.
- For information, go **online**.