

Heavenly cements Hollay's legacy at resort



Martin Hollay has been an icon at Heavenly for decades. Photo/Terra Breeden

By Terra Breeden

There are a lot of South Lake Tahoe residents who ski, ride or work at Heavenly Mountain Resort, but few have had an impact on the mountain like Martin Hollay. The 96-year-old skier embodies the spirit of Lake Tahoe.

On Sept. 25, Heavenly honored Hollay with a hiking trail named after him in his honor of his lifetime of dedicated work and joyous skiing at the resort.

“He’s a legend in everyone’s mind but his own,” Stan Moore, friend of Hollay and longtime Tahoe resident said.

Hollay is a Hungarian native who has lived in South Lake Tahoe for well more than six decades. His passion for skiing brought him to Tahoe in the late 1950s. He began working at Heavenly in the 1960s.

At Heavenly, Hollay was the head of ski patrol in the winter, and he planned and carved out runs in the summer, cutting trees and pruning branches to open up areas to tree skiing. Hollay also had a hand in building Heavenly's first snowmaking machine, and a dam and reservoir to conserve water runoff. Through his work, Hollay has helped transform Heavenly from a small-time ski resort to the sprawling world-class resort that people enjoy today.

"He created all of the runs on the Nevada side of Heavenly, laying them out and felling the trees," Tom McGowan said. "He's done so much for this mountain and today is all about him, as it should be."



Martin Hollay on Sept. 25 at Heavenly is honored with a trail and grove of trees named after him. Photo/Terra Breeden

Hollay not only cut down trees at Heavenly, he also planted them. The man has a soft spot for nature. He hated seeing the mountain barren of trees after clearing a run, so over the years, Hollay planted saplings around the resort. Today, if you ski down Maggie's run, many of the towering trees you'll

see on either side were planted by Hollay decades ago.

An avid skier, Hollay spent every day of the winter at Heavenly until he retired from ski patrol when he was 70. At 96 years old, Hollay still skis more than 100 days a year. It's a personal goal of his. Last winter, when Heavenly closed for the season, Hollay had only gotten 96 days of skiing under his belt, so he drove to Mammoth and skied four more days there, just to make sure he achieved his goal.

"I admire Martin Hollay because as long as he's doing it, I know we all can do it," South Lake Tahoe Mayor Austin Sass said.

A crowd of about 60 people gathered at the base of the Heavenly gondola on Monday morning. The day was crisp and clear and South Lake Tahoe residents were bundled in gloves and beanies as they exchanged greetings and hugs. When Hollay arrived, he was immediately surrounded by friends and together, the crowd took the gondola to the mid-station.

On the Observation Deck, Hollay was honored for a lifetime of achievement at Heavenly resort with a trail named in his honor: Martin's Trail. The quarter of a mile-long trail winds from the Observation Deck through the trees to Martin's Peak.

"His life is a life well-lived and that's an understatement," Mike Goar, Heavenly COO said. "We want to thank him for creating this place: a world-class ski resort."

During the event, the grove of trees planted by Hollay all those years ago was given the name "Martin's Trees" and a sign emblazoned with the story was unveiled to resounding applause from the crowd.

Hollay stood at the podium afterward with tears in his eyes.

"When the dam was finished, I looked around and saw that all the trees had been cut down," he said. "I had to get the trees

back on the mountain. So in 1973, I planted the trees at Maggie's Run."

At the end of the event, the crowd hiked Martin's Trail to Martin's Peak, an outcropping of rocks overlooking the Lake.

Holley led the way.

"Here we go," he said. "I hope I make it."

Everyone in the group laughed. It was clear that if anyone could make it to the top, it was Holley.

When all of the hikers reached Martin's Peak they noticed a scrappy bit of red fabric waving from the top. The tattered remains of a flag Holley hung there decades ago. On Monday, a new flag was hung there in Holley's name. A brand new, red, white and green Hungarian flag.