

Opinion: SLT taxpayers fund sexist sculpture



South Lake Tahoe's champions statue treats women as inferior to men. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Champions Plaza in South Lake Tahoe was developed to recognize athletes in the area who have reached statewide, national or international recognition in their sport. It was never intended to be just about Olympians or three in particular.

Nonetheless, the idea was born out of the trio who became known as the Golden Girls – Jamie Anderson, Maddie Bowman and Hannah Teter. All have won gold medals in their disciplines at a Winter Olympics, all live in Meyers, and all ride for Sierra-at-Tahoe.

Next year the inaugural inductees will have their names engraved into the Walk of Champions. They include: Anderson, Bowman, Teter, Elena Hight, Glen Plake, Jonna Mendes, Kyle Smaine, Shaun Palmer, Travis Cabral and Travis Ramos. Perhaps not surprisingly they are all either a skier or a snowboarder.

Let's hope other sports are soon brought into the fold.

I know who I'd nominate: the 2010 3.5 senior women's tennis team from Zephyr Cove. They won the national championship that year.

The Zephyr Cove team included Becky LeBuhn, Yrma Haro, Diane Baker Roberts, Patty Yamano, Charna Knerr, Becky Darrow, Susan Glasson, Linda Vollenhals, Karen Neri, Carel James, Carla Paterson, JoJo Conroy, Eddi Quiggle, Julie Zeid, Carol Faccinetti, Mary Rey, and Sandy Paul.

It was up to Neri, captain of the team, to choose who went to nationals in Indian Wells. She picked herself along with Roberts, Vollenhals, Haro, Zeid, Kerr and Rey.

But it takes an entire team to qualify for playoffs, then districts, then sectionals and ultimately nationals. That's why all of the women (and one would be posthumously) deserve to be inducted into the Champions Plaza.

In 2015 the City Council approved the criteria and nomination process for future Champions Plaza inductees.

The city is to be commended for carving out a part of Lakeview Commons to honor athletes. We are an athletic bunch, competing in an array of sports.

A sculpture was commissioned and last month the Spirit of Competition was installed. It's even more magnificent at night illuminated by a handful of lights.

It is Gareth Curtiss who created this nearly 11-foot bronze work of art.

When the City Council saw the first version the three beings were clearly male. Anderson, who is a native of the South Shore and won gold in slopestyle in 2014, voiced her disappointment to those who would listen – as did others. The council told the artist to try again. Curtiss listened. One of the three is a woman, the other two are clearly male.

I first noticed the art piece earlier this month, driving by with my mom and two of my sisters. I explained to them how it came to be. We swung into the parking lot, got out and looked at it. And we all had a similar reaction – *what the hell?*

One of the male figure's hands is on the ring, while the other two are reaching for it. I felt like I had been hit in the gut, the wind knocked out of me. This sculpture is an assault on all women – athlete or not. It is hard to believe two female councilmembers and a woman city manager could sign-off on what is clearly a piece of work that puts women in second place (second class?) again.

"I honor the artist's interpretation of the spirit of competition with those in competition reaching for excellence as represented by the ring," Councilwoman Wendy David told *Lake Tahoe News*, adding that she "approves" of the sculpture as is.

JoAnn Conner was the councilwoman at the time.

I say shame on anyone who had something to do with approving this \$75,000 sexist piece of art.

All hands should have been on the ring or none at all.

Maybe I won't nominate that tennis team; maybe Douglas County will figure out a way to honor athletes without a gender bias.

Kathryn Reed is publisher of Lake Tahoe News.