

Wirth out as president of Squaw-Alpine resorts

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Andy Wirth's tenure as president of Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadow is over. Photo Copyright 2018 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

Andy Wirth is no longer at the helm of Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski resorts.

Wirth has been a polarizing figure in the Olympic Valley and greater Lake Tahoe-Truckee areas.

Why exactly the 54-year-old abruptly left has not been disclosed. A statement by Wirth issued by the resort called it a retirement. "It is after careful consideration and reflection that I have made this decision. My retirement will allow me to not only spend more time with my family, but focus on some of my passions, including the active support of wounded warriors and environmental causes – advocacy and action."

Wirth did not return *Lake Tahoe News*' phone call.

He could have easily decided to step away after nearly dying in an October 2013 skydiving accident that ripped off most of his right arm, causing extensive bleeding.

Wirth has been leading Squaw since August 2010, when he was appointed to be president after Nancy Cushing stepped down from that role. She had been president since 1994, but was running the entire resort after her husband, Alex, died in 2006. It was Alex Cushing who brought the Winter Olympics to the resort in 1960.

KSL Capital Partners of Colorado bought Squaw in November 2010 and kept Wirth on board. Since then, Alpine Meadows has come under the same ownership umbrella.

In April 2017, KSL partnered with Aspen Skiing to buy Intrawest Resort Holdings' six resorts, and then went on a buying spree that included Deer Valley in Utah and Mammoth in California. The new company, named Alterra Mountain Company, kept Wirth on as the leader of Squaw-Alpine.

While Wirth described himself as an environmentalist, environmental groups saw him as the enemy. This largely has to do with him being the mouthpiece for KSL's plans to spend \$1 billion over 25 years to build more than 1,000 residential

units, hotels, retail, restaurants and bars, and an indoor adventure center.

Lawsuits have been filed regarding that project.

Then there is the controversial proposal to build a **gondola** that would link Squaw and Alpine on the outskirts of Granite Chief Wilderness Area.

Deaths and accidents, while part of the reality of the ski industry, have also plagued the resort during Wirth's tenure, with some questioning safety and how incidents are handled.

Wirth has also overseen millions of dollars in improvements, mostly at Squaw. His leadership has also brought in a more customer service oriented approach to dealing with guests. He was also instrumental in bringing the **World Cup** back to Squaw in 2017.

In the interim, Ron Cohen, Alterra's deputy general counsel, will serve as president and COO in Wirth's place. David Perry, Alterra's president and COO, will also be having more of a say regarding Squaw-Alpine until someone is hired to run the Tahoe resorts.