

# Lights coming on at Kirkwood; lifts could run Sunday

Updated Jan. 2 at 4:51pm.

By Kathryn Reed

Lights are slowly returning to Kirkwood and lifts are expected to operate Sunday after a fire destroyed the power plant at Kirkwood on New Year's Day.

Power was restored to the village area in the late afternoon Saturday, with lifts and some residences to have electricity as the evening wears on. All residences are expected to have power by Sunday morning.

"In the next 12 to 14 hours we expect to have everything online," Tim Cohee, said at 4:30pm Saturday. Cohee is senior vice president at Kirkwood.

He said close to 500 people are still in the Kirkwood valley.

A fire in the power house the afternoon of New Year's Day reduced the building to ash, caused thousands of people staying in the resort community to spend the night without lights or heat, and left many hopeful the days of being off the grid are numbered.

Kirkwood Mountain Utilities provides power to the entire Kirkwood Valley, which has less than 700 residences with only a few dozen year-round residents; the ski resort that straddles the El Dorado-Alpine-Amador county border; and lodging facilities that had a few thousand people staying over the New Year weekend.



Kirkwood's  
power plant  
goes up in  
flames Jan. 1.  
Photo/News 10-  
ABC

Cohee said the delay in getting the power back on was an L-shaped coupling on one of the 300 transformers also went out. It took a while to find it.

Kirkwood employees bought lanterns and flashlights for those left behind. Cohee said it was like a Western movie watching people walk around with lanterns.

The plant that housed six diesel generators is a total loss, with damages in the millions of dollars. The valley usually used three generators at any one time during the winter, with the others considered backup. They are beyond repair.

Then there is the loss in tourism dollars. On New Year's Day lifts were closed two hours early. Those people were offered a 50 percent off voucher on a day of skiing. Lodging guests could get a full refund of 20 percent off they stayed in the dark.

The two-week Christmas-New Year's period is when cash registers go cha-ching at Tahoe resorts. Losing part of this last weekend could add up to big bucks.

Plus, the resort was feeding people who stayed – all gratis.

About 300 people took advantage of free cat skiing on

Saturday. Tubing, snowshoeing and cross country skiing was also available to those who were at Kirkwood. Breakfast, lunch and dinner on Saturday were also provided.

This is not the first time fire has erupted at the facility near the decrepit employee housing structure – which survived unscathed.

In November 2004, a blast at the plant caused about \$100,000 in damage, had skiers stranded on the chairlifts and created the necessity for another backup generator to be brought in.

The New Year's Day fire is significantly worse. However, no skiers were stranded. The resort closed a couple hours early when smoke was seen in the plant.

Officials thought everything was fine when the smoke dissipated, but then the roof caught fire. It was made of wood, while the walls were brick.

Cohee said a filter on one of the generators created so much smoke you couldn't see inside.

"It burned for over three hours. You could see incredible flames," Cohee said.

Caterpillar brought in two more "Cat in the Boxes" by 9pm Friday. This makes three at the resort.

"We have more portable power than we've had fixed power," Cohee said of the diesel units look like 18-wheelers.

Assuming power can be distributed, Kirkwood plans to use the Cat in the Boxes through the ski season, anticipating only needing one as summer rolls around.

Cohee said construction on a new plant could begin in May.

"We will have a chance to modernize (the plant)," Cohee said. "At the point we get on the grid, that becomes the backup

plant if we lose line power.”

In March, the draft environment impact report and statement will be released by the U.S. Forest Service and Kirkwood Meadows Public Utility District for the potential authorization of a 50-year special use permit for the construction, use and maintenance of a KMPUD power line connecting the electrical grid near Salt Springs with Kirkwood Meadows.

The line would connect with an existing Pacific Gas & Electric line. The new line would likely be on Eldorado National Forest land.

The final EIR/EIS could be released in October.

“We would much rather be on the grid. It’s much cleaner more reliable and the power is much less expensive at the end of the day,” Cohee said.

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## **Barton Memorial Hospital welcomes New Year’s Day baby**

By Kathryn Reed



South Lake Tahoe’s first baby of the new year is actually a Gardnerville baby.

Yoni Lopez was born at 12:54pm New Year’s Day at Barton

Memorial Hospital.

Mom, Cindy, was resting comfortably when *Lake Tahoe News* tried to reach her a few hours later. Dad, Guilmer, sounded proud as he talked about his third child. But he also admitted that by the time No. 3 three comes along, it's all rather routine.

Guilmer Lopez said his newborn son, with all of his hair, looks like his 7-year-old sister at this early stage. Yoni also has a 12-year-old brother.

Yoni didn't have any competition to be the New Year's baby because his mom was the only one in labor Jan. 1.

In 2009, the first Barton baby didn't arrive until Jan. 4. It was Jan. 2 the year before.

The custom is to take the New Year's baby's footprint for the hospital's wall.

A gift basket is also usually part of the tradition, though hospital officials said the basket is still being assembled.

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## **Olympic torch runner gearing up for historic honor**

**By Susan Wood**

Few people would admit to improving their skiing ability without the use of their legs.

But Bill Bowness isn't just anybody. The 51-year-old disabled skier from Truckee turned a tragic car accident in 1977 that rendered him a paraplegic into an opportunity "a

journey of sorts in the building of personal character and a rewarding career.

“I’m a much better skier than I ever was standing up,” he said of his accomplishment. “It’s hard to know what my life would have been like (if not for the accident).”



Bill Bowness

He runs the adaptive skiing program at Alpine Meadows, where he started as a student, later a volunteer and now serves as an instructor. His latest venture involves being asked to run the commemorative torch from his home ski resort to the base of Squaw Valley, which is marking its 50th anniversary of hosting the Winter Games with a slew of activities for Olympic Heritage Week.

The torch relay slated for Jan. 8 starts at Sugar Pine Point State Park and is scheduled to arrive at Alpine about 1:15pm. It ends at the Olympic Village at the base of Squaw Valley at about 3:30pm, when an Opening Ceremony is set to commence.

Bowness told *Lake Tahoe News* he plans to cherish the 1.5-mile run. He figures it will last 10 minutes.

“This is another huge milestone in my life. As it gets closer, I expect to get very excited,” he said.

This isn’t the first time the Winter Olympics have placed Bowness in the spotlight. The paralympian represented the United States in Lillehammer, Norway, during the 1994 Games. He took home three medals in the four events he competed in:

downhill, giant slalom, slalom, and super-G.

“That was an awesome experience,” he said.

Bowness insists he’s never missed the Winter Olympics “even though he enjoys summer sports, too. He and his wife split their time between Truckee and a small town near Jackson, Miss., where he teaches at a water ski school. Unlike many snowbirds, the couple leaves the Lake Tahoe region in the summer because they prefer it here in the winter.

“It’s white gold around here,” he said.

Although Bowness knows his work involves play, he’s not afraid to get down to business when he needs to. He lives up to his commitments with zeal and looks forward to the latest “honor” that is in some respects quite nostalgic.

“I’m looking forward to giving back to a sport that has taken care of me,” he said, adding even more affection for his Truckee community.

Bowness and all the spectators aren’t the only ones enthusiastic about the upcoming festivities.

Linda Williams, project manager for the Squaw Valley Ski Museum Foundation and Olympic Heritage week executive producer, sounded giddy when she pointed out how the commemorative torch participants “will each be carrying a replica of the 1960 Olympic torch.”

More details on the activities will be featured in an upcoming article focusing on the Olympic Heritage Week organized by Squaw Valley and affiliates.

**Publisher’s note:** *Read about Olympic hopeful Andy Finch on Jan. 3.*

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# Gypsy moves onto another stage – retirement

By Denise Sloan Smart

STATELINE – For more years than many of us have been alive, James Haake has been basking in the glow of stage lights, then movie lights, then TV camera lights and back to stage lights.

Tonight, when the lights go dark on “Carnival Cabaret” at the Horizon Casino Resort, Haake – who is just as well known as Gypsy – will call it quits.



James “Gypsy”  
Haake

The 78-year-old Gypsy is retiring after 59 years in show business.



James “Gypsy”  
Haake



“I’ve talked about retiring before, but now it’s really time,” Haake said after the Dec. 27 show.

“I’ve loved performing so much and have had a wonderful career, but I’m really looking forward to spending time with friends and family.”

Haake “- pronounced Hawk “- began his career nearly six decades ago as a dancer on Broadway. His first job was working along side a very young, pre-“Brady Bunch” Florence Henderson in a musical titled “Wish You Were Here,” which starred Jack Cassidy.

Moving from Broadway to the cabaret, Gypsy was the original host of the first “La Cage Aux Folles” show, which took the country’s rich and famous by storm. It was in Beverly Hills on stage in an upscale cabaret 30 years ago that Mel Brooks “discovered” Gypsy and his movie and TV careers were born.

“It was like being an instant celebrity once Mel Brooks takes you by the arm,” Haake said in an earlier interview. “And I had such a blast working with Mel and Ann Bancroft.”

Brooks cast Gypsy in his classic film “To Be Or Not To Be,” starring himself and his real-life wife, Bancroft.

Gypsy went on to co-star with Jane Fonda in “The Morning After;” with Shelly Long in “Troop Beverly Hills;” and in the movie “Clifford.”

His TV roles included characters on “Matlock” and “Dynasty” and his recurring role as Uncle Otto on “Married With Children,” which is still in reruns.

On a cabaret stage, in front of a live audience is where Gypsy’s star has shined the longest and the brightest. Between his wry sense of humor, his gorgeous legs, his

stunning designer wardrobe and his hilarious banter with the crowd, Gypsy is as much at home on stage as an emcee, as he'll ever be lounging in a recliner in retirement.

Gypsy, lounging in a recliner? Never! He'll be out there somewhere, entertaining someone and making every one laugh. Just as he did last Sunday evening.

Gypsy sauntered on stage wearing a sexy one-shoulder siren-red gown with black stockings and black designer stilettos. A gentleman in the front row eyed him a little too long.

"Get over me man! I ain't a real chick," Gypsy belted out in a deep Bronx accent.

His banter with the audience is part history lesson, part jokes and part insults. When the audience members don't get the insults, it's all the funnier.

His self-deprecating humor is peppered throughout the show while three beautiful women - who are also really men - impersonate the likes of Barbra Streisand, Dolly Parton, Reba McEntire, Bette Midler and Beyonce.

Gypsy claims his gown is by Bob Mackie. Face by Forest Lawn. The crowd roared.

Under the talented production and direction of Dan Gore, "Carnival Cabaret" opened at the Horizon in February 2000. This reporter and Gypsy became friends that same month.

"Carnival Cabaret" is the longest running cabaret show in the South Shore's history. For Gore and the rest of the cast, the show will go on and it'll still be good, but they'll never find another Gypsy to emcee. When we say "Gypsy leaves big shoes to fill," we're not just talking about the size 13 stilettos.

*Denise Sloan Smart has been covering entertainment at Lake Tahoe since the 1970s. She remains friends with many of the*

*performers she interviewed over the decades.*

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# Embracing Squaw Valley's Olympic heritage

By Susan Wood



When enthusiasts of the Winter Games mark a half-century milestone during Squaw's Olympic Heritage Week at Lake Tahoe next month, few will boast a national and regional pride like Martin Hollay.

The 89-year-old native of Hungary escaped his war-torn country in 1956. He has lived in South Lake Tahoe for more years than Squaw's milestone – 52. He has made the most of his time by advancing his passion for skiing.

Among other volunteer duties, he helped build the 20-kilometer 1960 Olympic Nordic Trail system



Martin Hollay

near Sugar Pine Point State Park, a course designed by former U.S. Olympian Wendall "Chummy" Broomhall and Dartmouth University ski team coach Allison Merrill. The trails are considered part of the first cross country ski area in the United States and run between the park, Quail Creek Meadow and McKinney Rubicon Road. They've been resurrected in time for the historic Olympic ceremony slated for Jan. 8-17.

During that time, the Nordic ski trails' home base – Granlibakken Resort near Tahoe City will host a special dinner featuring a multi-media presentation with rare footage of the winter that shaped Tahoe in honor of the cross country ski and biathlon participants, coaches, groomers and supporters.

"Our Olympic roots run deep, tracing back to the 1932 Olympic ski trials held here at Granlibakken," resort manager Kay Williams said of the Jan. 15 event.

Hollay plans to take part in the Heritage Week festivities at Squaw Valley and the North Shore, which also include a commemorative torch relay from Sugar Pine Point to Squaw and an "Opening" ceremony of sorts complete with fireworks and live music on Jan. 8. The next day features a re-enactment of the sport of biathlon, and with good timing. It has just received its due recognition at Northstar-at-Tahoe. The Truckee ski resort installed the West Coast's one official course this year.

In addition, a cross country ski expo is set for Jan. 10 at Granlibakken. There, the first-sanctioned Scholastic Nordic Race held since the Winter Olympics and other events at Squaw will round out the week of activities.

Parties, events and venues aside, Hollay has another motive for taking part in the historic ceremony that for him is a bit more nostalgic.

"I'm wondering who's still going to be alive," he said one recent afternoon, while glancing around his home located a few

steps from Heavenly Mountain Resort.

Outside his humble abode, Hollay mounted cross country skis to the cabin. Inside, a large, framed photograph hangs high on the wall to showcase him skiing the official Olympic torch at Heavenly when it made its way through South Lake Tahoe in 2002 on its way to the Salt Lake City Games. A book – “Snowball’s Chance” by Tahoe resident David Antonucci on Squaw’s long shot to host the 1960 Winter Games sits on his end table.

Hollay reflects fondly on his 35 years of skiing at Heavenly, where he worked a dozen years as a ski patroller. In the early days, he recalled being impressed when he met the little-known ski school director – Stein Eriksen, now a legend in long-time skier circles.

Hollay still skis the slopes about every day with his signature knickers and wool sweater.

Upon asking to be his native homeland’s guest, Hollay dreams of making it to the Opening Ceremonies in Vancouver, British Columbia, for the Winter Games’ return to the West Coast in February.

“I’m very excited about that,” he said.

“Fifty (plus) years ago I came to Tahoe. Squaw had one lift. I carried a telephone box around to the aid station,” he said of his volunteer work leading up to and during the Games. The technology was lacking – but not the piercing drive of the athletes and community pride of their supporters. A humbled Hollay gingerly pulled out a medal for volunteers like he won gold.



Reno Tahoe  
International  
Airport  
Olympic  
exhibit.  
Photo/Squaw  
Valley

Holley hasn't given up skiing or a zest for life, but he has surrendered his skis and boots from the era of the eighth Olympic Games for an upcoming Squaw Valley Ski Museum. For now, Squaw foundation organizers have erected a temporary version at the Reno Tahoe International Airport until the permanent facility goes up near the Ehrman Mansion in May. The 500-square-foot display at the airport is adorned with international flags and other memorabilia including a uniform from U.S. Ski Team member Bev Anderson.

"It's received amazing attendance," said Carolyn Wallace Dee, the Squaw Valley manager of business administration and mayor of Truckee.

### **Catch the spirit**

Those wanting to get up close and personal with the Olympic Heritage commemorative torch relay



Re-creating  
the Olympic  
torch run will  
be Jan. 8.  
Photo/Kathryn  
Reed

may view the spectacle during the lighting at and departure from Sugar Pine Point State Park at 9am Jan. 8, at Homewood Mountain Resort at 10:45am or Sunnyside Resort at 11:40am.

From there, it will continue to Granlibakken at noon, Heritage Plaza at Tahoe City at 12:35pm, Alpine Meadows Ski Resort at 1:15pm, Resort at Squaw Creek at 2:25pm. The torch will be skied down Squaw's Red Dog run at 3:05pm. One may also get a glimpse of it at the Village at Squaw at 3:30pm, where the ceremonies will kick off. All times are approximate.

During the 10-day celebration, ski enthusiasts may simulate the challenge of negotiating the original 1960 Olympic men's and women's downhill courses on Squaw's slopes. The festivities culminate with a 1960 Olympic Legends Ball at the Resort at Squaw Creek.

[Click here for more information.](#)

**Publisher's note:** *On Jan. 1 read about adaptive skier Bill Bowness' story as it relates to Olympic Heritage Week.*

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# Hope Valley yurt is gateway to miles of cross country skiing

By Kathryn Reed

HOPE VALLEY – Walking into the yurt, Joyce Coker greets a family of four by name. They are regulars at Hope Valley Outdoors, even though they visit just once a year.

“We are not downhill skiers. We like the nice family time,” Nancy Vernon said of being able to cross country ski together.



Joyce Coker finds equipment for Isaac and Annabel Vernon.  
Photos/Kathryn Reed





Joyce Coker

She and her husband, Walt, have been making the trek from the Bay Area to this outdoor playground at the junction of highways 88 and 89 since before their twins were born 12 years ago. They stay at Sorensen's Resort down the road and then ski on Coker's trails with her equipment.

"We come back every year at Christmas," Vernon said. "We love to cross country ski."

Cocker has been in the business for about 25 years, with this being her third year in the yurt. This season started the weekend before Christmas. Usually she is open until about Easter. Snow dictates actual opening and closing dates.



The yurt --  
home to Hope  
Valley  
Outdoors.

More than 25 miles are groomed – including Secret and Hope Valley meadows. What's incredible is that she doesn't charge to use all this acreage. She takes donations, though.

In the round contraption that takes several people multiple days to erect each year are a slew of snowshoes and cross country skis. They are for rent and for sale.

The lousy economy has helped Coker's business.

"People come up for a week and can't afford to downhill ski

for the whole time,” Coker said. “My prices are so cheap they can afford it.”

She even posts what it costs to ski/snowshoe at other locations in the basin so people know the deal they are getting at Hope Valley Outdoors.

Inside the yurt is a propane-fueled stove that gives off a little heat. A skylight keeps the place bright – at least on sunny days.

Phone service is nonexistent at the yurt, so Coker returns calls at night when she gets home.

A multitude of activities are planned throughout the season. For more information, go to [www.hopevalleyoutdoors.com](http://www.hopevalleyoutdoors.com).

### **Events:**

Dec. 30, 10am-3pm; Learn the history of Nordic skiing and the differences of skiing groomed and ungroomed snow. Meet at the yurt.

Dec 31, 10am-1pm; Snowshoe Day. Learn about different snowshoe styles, technique and safety measures with winter terrain, and Leave-No-Trace principles. Meet at the yurt.

Dec. 31, 5-7pm, Blue Moon Tour. Meet at the yurt. After the tour, return to Starlight lodge to bring in the New Year, listen to music, or hot tub or sit out and enjoy the moonlight.

Jan. 1, 10:30am-3pm, Backcountry Lesson Ski Tour. Let those skis show how they are capable of performing with the terrain that surrounds the center. Meet at the yurt.

Reservations required – call (530) 694.2266.

**Directions:** From South Lake Tahoe, take Highway 50 toward the Bay Area, turn left onto Highway 89 toward Kirkwood, after

crossing Luther Pass you descend into Hope Valley; at the stop sign go straight; the yurt will be in front of you on Burnside Lake Road.

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# **Sierra – a breeding ground for top level athletes**

**By John Rice**

We are keeping our fingers crossed that our athletes earn a chance to compete for their country in the Olympics. Our program to groom athletes at Sierra is newsworthy I think, as it is not accidental that our athletes fare so well against the competition.

I started my career at Squaw Valley, which had a long tradition of producing world-class athletes and attracting those who were looking for a big name mountain to train. In the summers I worked for the U.S. Olympic Committee at Squaw in operations. I did everything from fix the athlete residences to drive them to their training sites. From that experience I learned a few simple lessons:

1. The best of the best share certain characteristics; they are conditioned, focused on goals, generally have good nutrition habits, are confident, have a support system, and are free of distractions. They weren't always the biggest, the fastest, the flamboyant, or those who come from money.



John Rice

2. The support system behind the most confident athletes extended from their family and friends to their home resort. Even if they were training out of Squaw, they were loyal to their home.

3. They had good coaches, who worked on the whole being, not just the athletic side.

We try to provide all those things to our athletes, which may be part of why we have so much success. When I started at Sierra in 1993, I was approached by two young boys named Travis Ramos and Travis Cabral, then 9 and 11. They told me they had dreams of representing their country and being on the winner's podium. I asked what they needed, to which they replied "a season pass, a locker, and a shovel to build their course".

As the young boys honed their skills, and their fathers found coaches to take them to the next level, the two remained committed to their goals. Result, both were crowned U.S. Freestyle Champion at nationals in different years, and Cabral won the overall World Cup, the youngest to ever accomplish that feat.

Cabral also competed in the Torino Winter Games.

The two boys came from modest homes, had great support from their parents, coaches and from Sierra. They had a strict diet and workout regimen, and both were focused on their goals. Sierra gave support in the way of reimbursements for gas and groceries, event fees and an occasional plane ticket to help

get them to the events.

The return on investment was huge, and it forged the way for other athletes to believe they could come from a mid-sized mountain and go against the best in the world some day.

Travis Cabral was concerned he was missing out on educational opportunities because of his world travel schedule as a teenager, so Sierra joined some of the local season passholders in starting an educational fund for him at the local Bank of America. That kind of support allowed him to finish his studies and find his way after his competitive run.

We found the best support to be tailored to the individual, what are their needs, their goals, their challenges, and how can Sierra help. It starts when the kids are little.

Sierra is a supporter of youth recreation and education, and as such Sierra banners can be found at every soccer, baseball, swim meet, football or other facility in the region. By supporting the feeder system, young talented kids can get to know Sierra and stay in shape. Through support of education, Sierra is able to attract many talented kids, as many students over the years have earned free season passes and become part of Sierra's race teams.

The feeder system brings quality to the resort, and the various step functions along the way provide a path for focused athletes to excel through the programs and reach their peak performance. It's no secret that athletes remain loyal to the resort they learn at.

When winter comes around, the Buddy Werner ski program offers local kids from Tahoe and the West Slope the chance to hone their skills and compete with each other at a young age. Coaching is voluntary, and from the Buddy Werner ranks come some of the high school team's best athletes. It is common to see the top skiers in high school racing with roots in the Buddy Werner Program.

Sierra hosts five high school teams, which allows the athlete/students to compete against each other and train with the best. There are junior ski programs in place like Rippers, and the competitive teams in skiing and snowboarding.

Finally, Sierra hosts a number of competitions that allow the athletes to test their skills. On the ski side, Sierra has training facilities and ski trails that are wired for timing, combined with top talent in the area that produces high quality events like Far West races and high profile freestyle events. Some of the more talented athletes move on to USSA racing and travel, and some have gone to college on scholarships in winter sports.

The best of the best, however, go from local events to national and then world-class events. Sierra has been fortunate to be a proving ground for winter sports athletes over the years. From training programs to hosting world-class events – even national championships – Sierra has provided opportunities to kids to realize their dreams of competing on the world stage.

A great example of athletes moving through the programs is the current successes shared by the Anderson sisters. Both grew up at Sierra, were part of the development teams, won their events locally and then went on to win gold medals at the Winter X Games. Jamie is currently ranked the No. 1 female snowboarder in the world, was honored by *Transworld Snowboarding* and *Snowboarder* magazines last year with that title.

The two sisters received the same kind of support the two Traverses shared in their young career, from reimbursements to scholarships on the race teams. While either one could easily sign a contract with another resort for the money, both are loyal to Sierra because of the support they have received over the years.

Jamie is vying for a spot on the U.S. Team for the Vancouver Olympics, while Joanie is aiming for the X Games next month. If they qualify, great, if they don't, they are still both world champions. We have no expectations of them other than to have fun and do their best.

Beyond the hype of the Olympic Games, in winter sports the contest is one more in a series of season long events. There is no denying that it is high profile and a gold medal can lead to lifelong endorsements for the athletes, but we try to keep it in perspective.

So, why would a gold medal winner from the Torino Games, Hannah Teter, call Sierra her home mountain? Call it luck or destiny, the Teter family found a home in Tahoe, and looked around at the various resorts to find a place to train and call home. Elijah and Abe Teter both came to Sierra for a day in the powder and asked if they could ride for the day. Finding it to their liking, the brothers approached us to see if we would support them as athletes. They weren't asking for much, passes and a halfpipe.

It led to much more than that, including a movie spot and training support. When Hannah was in town she asked if Sierra would be interested in supporting her as well. Sierra supported her by donating to her charity through the sale of Hannah's Gold Syrup, and she gave back in numerous ways including advertisements like the famous Burton "I love affair" ad where she talked about why she loves Sierra.

The relationship has blossomed to where the level of trust between the Teter family and the resort is at a high level. Sierra is fortunate to have them as loyal athletes. The deal clincher for Hannah was when Sierra proposed a personalized parking space next to the administration building. The Hollywood Walk of Fame style star that marks her spot was the least we could do to seal the deal.

Perhaps the biggest win for Sierra is having such talent to encourage younger athletes to follow their dreams. When a young 8 year old sits next to Hannah or Jamie, they realize they are real people, and that someday they can achieve the same success as these two world-class athletes.

Sierra supports four levels of athletes. Starting with amateur skiers and riders, those who podium at USASA or USSA nationals are given a free pass, some stickers, a team shirt, and attend events to represent their resort.

As they get more experience and begin to excel, they can move up to the Professional team. This level is comprised of skiers and riders who are competing in large scale events, such as the Dew Tour, Winter X Games, or other regional series. Some of the Pro team contract with photographers and filmmakers, and many have outside sponsors to help with their expenses.

Next comes the Elite team, which is comprised of the top echelon of talent like the Teters and the Andersons.

A new category was added last season, called the Legends division, to which Sierra's "retired from competition" athletes belong. The Travis duo and two-time world record holder Mark Bennett belong to this group.

Any of these athletes could find another mountain to sponsor them, even provide a lucrative package to claim that resort as their home. Sierra's philosophy has never been to "buy" our athletes, but rather to clear the path for them to excel. That may differ from athlete to athlete, some need financial support, others need training and coaching. They all ultimately want a resort to call home, one that appreciates who they are and will do what it takes to help them realize their goals.

As they move to the next level, maybe even the Olympics, Sierra will be rooting for them back home. Win or lose, they are champions.



*John A. Rice is general manager of Sierra-at-Tahoe.*

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# Illusionist keeps audience guessing

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – It was hard to applaud when all I wanted to do was figure out what just happened.

I never figured it out.

Joseph Gabriel, the 2009 Best Stage Magician, dazzled a nearly full house Saturday on opening night of his nine-day stint at MontBleu.



Joseph Gabriel is at MontBleu through Jan. 3.

Birds are something this illusionist is known for. They kept appearing and disappearing without any rhyme or reason.

Why they don't just fly off is a mystery unto itself.

Audience participation is a huge part of the night. Don't

sit up front if you are shy.

Ashley, who lives on the South Shore and isn't fond of birds, was selected to hold a box. She looked "nothing in it. Before she knew it a bird flew from the container she was holding.

She told her tablemates she didn't feel any movement in the box, nor did the weight of it change.

Hmmm.

Head scratching was a big part of the evening as Gabriel and the women he works with, including his wife, Katalin, kept pulling off one illusion after another.

People seemed to be cut in half and stuffed in boxes. Just when Gabriel walked into a box he came out under a drape of sorts. How he got from Point A to Point B is still a mystery.

One woman ended up in the audience " even though the audience thought she was in a box on stage.

Gabriel brought a guy from the Bay Area on stage who was supposed to mimic his every move and voice command. The guy did OK right until the end. Gabriel was able to turn shredded paper into a hat for the guest. The participant could only place pieces of paper on Gabriel's head.

Juggler Bryson Lang added to the show with his ability to bounce, toss and spin various size balls.

This is one of those shows where sitting close is a good idea. Gabriel isn't Siegfried + Roy of Las Vegas and white tiger fame, but he is good. The price for the 90-minute show is worth it. Plus, it would make for a good family outing.

Things to know:

¢ Joseph Gabriel will be at MontBleu in Stateline through

Jan. 3

â€¢ Adult tickets \$29.95, \$12.95 for those 17 and younger

â€¢ [www.tickemaster.com](http://www.tickemaster.com), 800.648.3353

â€¢ Show starts at 8pm, doors open at 7:30pm

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# Heavenly almost lives up to its name

By Kathryn Reed

Friendly – that is the word to sum up Heavenly Mountain Resort.

This hasn't always been the case for this Lake Tahoe resort that straddles California and Nevada. Less flattering words were often associated with the resort in the past and still linger with those who don't call this their home mountain.



Done with their work, reindeer take to the slopes at Heavenly on Christmas Day.

Photo/Kathryn

Reed

As an extremely infrequent skier at the South Shore resort, I was told by season passholders this friendliness wasn't just Christmas cheer being dispersed – it's the norm.

When Vail Resorts bought Heavenly in March 2002, one goal was to work on guest services. From the lifties to the food service workers to security to people dealing with less than patient media – everyone was great on Christmas Day.

Skiing Christmas Day is a present unto itself – usually it's less crowded. For two locals who got there at 8:30am, they had the mountain to themselves.

Cathy Donovan of Los Gatos was with her three sons – ages 24, 22 and 14 – taking in some runs.

“No one believes in Santa. Christmas is one of the less crowded days of this week,” Donovan, a 1977 South Tahoe High grad, said of why she was on the slopes.

The Zarenba family has skied at Killington and Mammoth, with this being their first trip to Tahoe. Living outside of London means they don't have the luxury of driving up to Tahoe every weekend.

Dad Stefan, 7-year-old Jay and 15-year-old Chelsea all said Heavenly was better than the other U.S. resorts they've been to.

“There is more night life, shops, skiing – the whole town is better,” Stefan Zarenba said.

He also commented on the friendliness of the resort and how it's better organized than other places he's been to.

Being Jewish meant Beth Gelles didn't have to worry about what her family thought of skiing on Christmas Day – just another

day on the calendar for them.

“With the economy, we didn’t take a big trip this year,” said Gelles, who lives in San Mateo. Deer Valley is usually where she and her husband and their children, ages 10, 8 and 4, like to ski.

Christmas was their third day of being on the slopes at Heavenly – and the least crowded.

“The views are exceptional,” Gelles said.

Heavenly has the best views of Lake Tahoe. Homewood, on the West Shore, makes you feel like you’re descending into the icy water, but Heavenly has more expansive views than any Tahoe resort.

The calm water on this blue bird day was almost inviting – well, maybe to be on the paddle-wheelers that plied the waters in the distance.

It was a bit disconcerting, though, to read the resort’s website about what’s open – “We couldn’t ask for any more this Christmas than being 100% open” – and finding this to not be the case. The same posting was up hours after the resort was closed for the day.

The six of us were about to go down Canyon. Nope. Closed. Snowmaking in progress. Yes, the website says as much, but after reading the home page about 100 percent being open, why would one venture deeper into the site?

A bit more snowmaking (or Mother Nature) could be used on some of the trails. And the resort could improve marking the rocks and other obstacles.

Don’t even get me started on the \$10 bland veggie burrito at East Peak Lodge, the \$9 beer or small hot cocoa for more than \$3. If the resort could spread the expertise in hospitality to quality of food and fair pricing, it would make for a more

positive skiing experience.

Amanda Olson in the California Bar gets the employee of the day award for her exceptional service and friendliness. Maybe it has something to do with her hometown being Paradise.

One touch that was new since I was last at Heavenly is pulling down the security bar on the Canyon chair and finding a map of the resort. That sure beats taking off gloves and fiddling with a paper map, especially had it been snowing.

But when you have three women skiing together, it did seem a bit sexist for the advertisement for private lessons to say something like start the day as Bob, Bill and Walter and finish it as Hans, Franz and Werner. Why not start the day as Kae, Sue and Brenda and finish it as Hannah, Lindsey and Picabo?

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## **A bright tradition glows throughout Tahoe**



The evolution of decorating the outside of a house or business at the holidays started years and years ago with Christmas trees having candles on them.

We now know that's not the safest of traditions.

Edward H. Johnson, a peer of Thomas Edison, is credited with bringing electric lights to a Christmas tree in 1882.

In 1900, businesses strung lights inside to frame their windows. With electricity being so expensive, this was not something the average person took part in.

It took until 1930 for most homes to use electric lights instead of candles on trees.

Rockefeller Center first had lights on its famous tree in 1931.

Now all sorts of things – inside and out – are brightly lighted this time of year.

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