

Freestyle moguls all about Sho-time

Sho Kashima may have been born in El Paso, but he is clearly more comfortable in ski boots than cowboy boots.

The 23-year-old is vying for a spot on the U.S. mogul team.

Home resort: Heavenly Mountain Resort



Sho Kashima

Why did you choose this resort?: I moved to Tahoe when I was 4, and Heavenly was right in my backyard. My dad had a job there, and that's why we moved to Tahoe. Heavenly has been really supportive throughout my career on the U.S. Ski Team.

How often are you in Lake Tahoe?: 6-8 times a year now because of competitions/training.

When you aren't training and competing where can we find you and what would you be doing?: There's not much downtime, I feel like I'm always going. I'll rarely have time to myself when I'm not doing anything. I like playing Xbox if I have nothing else going on.

After you win gold in Vancouver, what is your next goal? Hopefully, that's the case! I'm actually not sure what I'll be doing in the future. I'd like to finish up school and hopefully some opportunities open up so I can have a nice

career after my career in skiing.

How long have you been participating in your sport? I've been skiing since I was 4 years old. I started skiing competitively in moguls when I was 11.

Who inspires you most and why? My family and friends. They give me so much support, and I'd love to make them proud by having a lot of success. I owe my community so much, they've been awesome.

Your life is devoted to an event that is over in minutes, how do you prepare for that thrill of victory or agony of defeat? It's hard to think about. I know my event is over in about 20 seconds, but I've been training most of my life to be where I am now. I'm really only prepared for the thrill of victory in my head, I never want to be prepared to fail. All I can do is keep training and competing hard, and ski my best runs, and keep improving my skiing no matter what I'm ranked in the world. Even if I become the best skier in the world, I will have room to improve somewhere.

Anything else you would like to add? My twitter: shotime2010, I usually update that once a day.

Squaw offers the complete winter experience

By Susan Wood

OLYMPIC VILLAGE – With avalanche-control dynamite blasts rippling across the valley on a recent Sunday, comfort isn't the first word that comes to mind to describe skiing at Squaw

Valley.

It takes skill to navigate the steeps, powder stashes and rock formations at Lake Tahoe's premier ski resort. First, the KT-22 Express chairlift provides access to a run named after Jonny Moseley, the Olympian who made death-defying maneuvers on skis an art form. Second, that same lift provides access to Julia's Gold, named after the resort's other Olympian – Julia Mancuso. Third, the Headwall Face requires even the advanced intermediate to pay attention. Fourth, the rocks on top of Granite Chief remind most people of the humility necessary to take on this massive mountain.



Squaw Valley
Inn is steps
from the
slopes.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

And, that's all on a good day.

No matter what the slopes bring, true luxury and comfort are steps away when skiers and boarders come in from the cold to eat, drink, be merry, soak in hot water and sleep at PlumpJack's Squaw Valley Inn.

Across from the Squaw Village, guests are invited to plop down and take a load off from the day at the PlumpJack Cafe bar, where comfort-food appetizers, refreshing drinks and an open pit fire await. Seating there is prime real estate unless snuggling on a sofa off the main bar area is the goal.

For hotel guests, the bar is transformed into a full complimentary breakfast buffet. It's open to others for a fee.



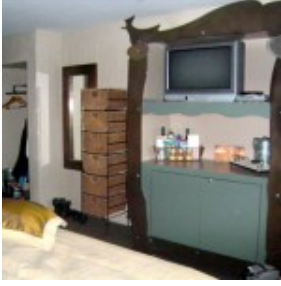
Snow continued to fall at Squaw Valley on Dec. 13.

Those with a penchant for more a substantive nighttime meal can enjoy a full menu of fine dining and wine tasting that will satisfy a variety of foodies and wannabes. Even dessert is an experience. (Click [here](#) to read about dining at PlumpJack.)

Just outside on the patio, two hot tubs set at the ideal 102-degrees attract angry and tight muscles. In the winter, the patio becomes a surreal scene with Mother Nature's abundant snow on the patio tables forming what looks like marshmallow snow lollipops.

After a major Sierra snowfall, the serenity of going outside to the tubs can only be upstaged by the beauty of the mix of Aspen and pine trees blanketed with snow.

It's hard to imagine the scene completely changes in summer as the inn hosts patio parties with disc jockeys to entertain guests.



Rooms at Squaw Valley Inn are modern and comfortable.

The Squaw Valley Inn, (not to be confused with the Squaw Valley Lodge timeshare complex at slopeside) is a PlumpJack property. This hospitality company with wineries, wines, resorts and retail was founded by San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom.

The inn was built in 1959 as a home for the delegation of the 1960 Winter Olympic Games.

In 1995, PlumpJack completely renovated the place, offering 60 luxury guestrooms, 34 king and 21 queen rooms and a host of suites. The hotel is more than pet friendly. Canines will feel like royalty as they find their own bowls, treats and pillows to make their stay memorable as well.

“This is important to us,” said Inn General Manager Kristina Jetton , herself a dog lover.

For human comforts, rooms feature down comforters, cozy, hooded terry-cloth robes, slippers, televisions with DVD players and wireless Internet service. Views are good from most rooms and even better for groups in the 3,000-square-foot banquet facility on the second floor.

As companies have cut back on their business trips, resorts like Squaw Valley Inn are forced to be more creative with honing the market they want to attract.

“We do a lot of weddings here,” said Rob McCormick, director of sales.

The rooms provide subtle touches that enhance the comfort level. The headboards appear to be ergonomically designed for reading in bed. Tile at the entryway allows snow enthusiasts to kick off and put away their gear with no guilt of trampling on the carpet in the living space. Sample shampoos, conditioners and lotions make cleaning up in the full-size shower an inviting experience with scents like Lemon Grass, Sage and Mountain Breeze.

The decor is one that commands a second look. The lights in the bathroom look like something off a street lamp, providing a feel that complements a metal entertainment center, textured walls, recessed lighting, unique artwork and even a clip-on book light on the nightstand.

Rooms start at \$195 a night and work their way up to \$750 for a penthouse suite.

Squaw Valley is pulling out all the stops on its celebratory season that recognizes 50 years since hosting the 1960 Winter Games and six decades of being in business. An entire slate of events is scheduled for Olympic Heritage Week starting Jan. 8, including a special torch run that honors its own contribution to the history of the Olympics and the Games’ return to the West Coast when Vancouver, British Columbia, kicks off its opening ceremonies the following month.

Whistler Blackcomb has already touted record snowfall, and Squaw has much to be proud of in this early season as well. With winter officially beginning this week, Squaw lauds 35 to 60 inches. Coming off a full week of storms on Dec. 13, “Let It Snow” blasted over the speakers at the entrance to the Funitel.

The trees looked like an absolute wonderland. And, as one avid skier from Reno pointed out on the Squaw Creek chairlift, she

had every intent of taking advantage of a seemingly end of the three-year drought with her now affordable season pass. To mark its big year, Squaw slashed its pass price by at least 60 percent because, as spokeswoman Savannah Cowley put it, "It was the time to do it."

The inn maybe reached by clicking [here](#) or calling (530) 583.1576.

LTCC students move out; money and culprit still missing



By Kathryn Reed

The Alder Inn and Lake Tahoe Community College's ties are no more. All of the students who had called the hotel home moved out when fall quarter ended last week.

The trouble came earlier in the school year when Joseph Balius, who claimed to own the Ski Run Boulevard complex, left town. He is whom the students paid their rent to.

The real owner of the property is June Stefani. She never saw the students' rent money.

Balius had a lease option to buy the property from her, but he was delinquent on his payments to Stefani. That agreement expired earlier this fall and that's when everything came to

light.

But some of the transactions remain murky.

A document dated Sept. 29, 2004, lists former South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Ted Long as the one on the lease to buy agreement with Stefani. No other document of record could be found showing he sold the lease to Balius for \$1 as he told *Lake Tahoe News* in October.

Stefani and her attorney also say Long has not been involved in the property for years, but evidence of that fact has not been found at the El Dorado County Records Office.

Trudy Hancock was best friends with Kira Balius for five years, watched their kids and lived at the Alder Inn – and still does. She, too, believed the couple owned the hotel. She also said Joseph Balius and Long were best friends.

Long did not return a phone call.

“I would have bet my bottom dollar they would not have done this,” Hancock said of the Baliuses. “I thought I was a pretty savvy lady. We all got ripped off.”

Hancock is staying on to keep an eye on the property as a contract employee. She said Stefani plans to turn it back into a hotel during peak periods like this week and not operate it as an apartment complex like what Balius had done.

Donna Hall, a parent of one of the students, had only good things to say about the college’s role in the matter. LTCC had long boasted about the Alder Inn as being a great place for students, even promoting it on the website.

“They went beyond their legal liability. They have agreed to split the damages with us,” Hall said. “The college is just being wonderful.”

A spokesperson with the college did not return a call asking

how much LTCC has paid out.

The students who are continuing on with their studies at LTCC have found other living arrangements.

Hall has no intention of going after Balius in civil court, but she does hope law enforcement tracks him down.

“Everyone took their lumps. The owner and students are victims of this man,” said Bob Henderson, Stefani’s attorney.

Henderson said his client also does not intend to pursue civil action against Balius.

Stefani was not available for comment.

Henderson added, “I think he should be pursued by law enforcement. The total amount of damage looks like between \$20,000 and \$30,000. That is substantial.”

Officer Rick Martinez with the South Lake Tahoe Police Department is investigating the case. He doesn’t return phone calls. All his superior Lt. David Stevenson could say is that nothing has been forwarded to the District Attorneys Office.

Those close to the case speculate Balius and his wife, Kira, and their children are in the Las Vegas area.

Moseley ‘retires’ to broadcast booth for Vancouver Olympics

By Kathryn Reed

OLYMPIC VILLAGE – Jonny Moseley will finally see the Olympics.

He vaguely remembers going to a hockey game in 1998 when he competed in the Nagano, Japan, Games. He skipped the opening ceremonies. He admits to having been obsessed with the competition. It paid off. He won gold that year in moguls.



Squaw's Jonny Moseley will be the voice of NBC Sports for some Olympic events.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

Four years later in Salt Lake City he made a point of going to the opening ceremonies. But that was it. When his event was over he flew to New York to be host of "Saturday Night Live" while the competition in Utah continued.

Moseley enjoyed Torino, Italy, more " where he was able to hang out because he wasn't competing.

In February, Moseley will see at least three events – moguls, aerials and skiercross – because he will be providing color commentary for NBC Sports. He will be in Vancouver (aka Whistler) from Feb. 7-27 to do prep work and on-air work.

This week he is in Steamboat to work the U.S. Olympic trials.

Travel is a big part of Moseley's life. He'll be in Canada before the Olympics to work on the next Warren Miller movie. For the last three films he has been the voice of the ski film.

Moseley told *Lake Tahoe News* he was nervous when first approached to be the narrator of the almost cult-like films. He didn't know what people would think of him taking over for the iconic Miller.

It seems to be working.

In this year's movie, Moseley is back tearing up the slopes. Eight minutes is devoted to Lake Tahoe. He hopes to get some of the multitude of Tahoe resorts on film at least every other year.

Skiing has been a part of Moseley's life since he was 3 when his family moved to the Bay Area from his native Puerto Rico.

It's hard to know if the skiing gene was passed on to his 2-year-old son Jack.

"My No. 1 goal was to make him not hate skiing," Moseley said. Jack doesn't even like to see after-ski boots. This happened after Moseley had Jack on skis last year.

Moseley didn't intend to start his son skiing so soon, but his buddy and fellow Olympian Daron Rahlves put on the peer pressure by showing off his twins, who are the same age as Jack, on skis.

"I hope I didn't scar him," Moseley said.

He might take it slower with his next child who is due in May.

Even though Moseley has a bachelor's degree from Cal, the 34-year-old hopes to make a living in the ski industry for years to come.

At Squaw last week, he talked about how it was difficult at first to do television. It's one thing to participate in the sport; it's another to know the intricacies of the judging and nuances of the competitors to be able to sound articulate on air. He didn't realize how much research is involved.

Another interesting aspect is being in a studio in Los Angeles and doing the color for an event that is hundreds or thousands of miles away.

When he is at Squaw skiing with friends or acting as ambassador for the resort he stays at the family cabin just down the road from the slope. The rest of the time he calls Marin County home.

As Squaw's chief mountain host it means he will be taking guests around the mountain Dec. 26-Jan. 2 at 1pm each day from the top of the Funitel. After his Olympic obligations are over, more days may be scheduled.

He doesn't mind being used in this way " nor does he see it as being used.

"I have a huge affinity for Squaw. It's easy for me to tell people about the virtues of Squaw," Moseley said. "My whole career I've been on display so I'm used to it."

Moseley's Career Highlights:

2007 Inducted into Ski Hall of Fame

2005 Hosts first-ever urban big-air contest on the streets of San Francisco " ICER AIR

2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympic Games " 4th Place

2000 U.S. Open Champion in Slopestyle

1999 X Games Big Air silver medalist

1998 Olympics Gold Medal, moguls

1998 World Cup moguls champion

1998 U.S. moguls champion

1998 World Cup moguls Champion

1996 and 1995 World Cup Overall Champion

28 World Cup top-20s including 17 wins

15 U.S. Championship top-10s

Parking garage keeps losing money; rates to increase

By Kathryn Reed

Owning the parking garage at Heavenly Village continues to be a financial quagmire for South Lake Tahoe.

The albatross will be on the books until at least December 2012. Based on how the bonds are structured, the city cannot attempt to unload the concrete facility until then.



It will cost more to park at Heavenly Village in

January.

The 425-space garage is 50-60 percent empty most of the time. Projections are for another year of losing money – about \$140,000 this fiscal year. It costs \$1.3 million a year to operate the garage and pay the debt on the 7-year-old facility.

Raising rates is the prime way to increase cash flow. That will happen Jan. 15.

The City Council this month approved going from 30-minute increments to 20 minute. It now costs \$1.75 per half hour and next month it will be \$1.25 every 20 minutes. This is an increase of 25 cents an hour.

The daily rate will go from \$23 to \$25.

Winter is the busiest time of year for the garage because skiers and boarders park there to access the gondola to ride to the top of Heavenly Mountain Resort.

Blaise Carrig, chief operating officer for the resort, was at the council meeting to see what would be approved and how it might affect his guests. The bulk of Heavenly's riders access the mountain via the gondola, though many of them walk from the surrounding hotels.

Carrig and Gene Palazzo, who oversees the Parking Authority and Redevelopment Agency for the city, have talked in the past about creating a lift ticket-parking package. Nothing has come of those discussions.

"We see the fee being nominal, but during the current economic climate we would like to see prices remain steady for guests," Russ Pecoraro, Heavenly spokesman, said.

Palazzo had recommended the four-hour validation for the movie theater be reduced to three. In 2007 the council boosted it to

four hours from 2.5 hours. The council this month chose to leave it at four hours.

Jerry Bindel, who is on the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority board and president of the South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association, has suggested to the city that it have a couple free days of parking a year for locals in an attempt to drive traffic to Heavenly Village. The city isn't biting on that suggestion.

Locals tend to park at Harrah's for free and walk over to the village.

One moneymaker for the city is selling advertising space in the garage to merchants in Heavenly Village.

Becoming automated has also cut costs – and it eliminated jobs, too.

The city got stuck with the garage when the developer of the entire project backed out of building it. This forced the city to meet parking demand and infuse another \$6 million into the redevelopment area.

This is on top of the \$7.2 million that was "borrowed" from the general fund to build the center. The Redevelopment Agency is paying back that money in \$500,000 increments each year.

Tahoe fishermen tired of waiting to get on the lake

By Kathryn Reed

Fishing is often a waiting game. But it's usually done on

the water, not in a parking lot.

Waiting on dry land has been the case lately for a number of fishermen trying to access Lake Tahoe at the Cave Rock boat ramp.



Locked gates after 6am are frustrating fishermen.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

It's getting fairly irritating. (Friday) there were three boats waiting at 6 and (the inspectors) show up at 7:30," Chuck Bartlett of South Lake Tahoe said.

The ramp is supposed to be open from 6am-4pm. The reason for the gate is so boats can be inspected for invasive species.

Cave Rock, on the South Shore in Nevada, is one of two public launches open this time of year. The other is on the North Shore in Tahoe City. The former is on Nevada State Parks land and the latter on Tahoe City Public Utility District property.

Nicole Cartwright with the Tahoe Resource Conservation District did not return a phone call. Her agency is responsible for the inspections and therefore locking and unlocking the gate.

It's the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency that is mandating the inspections. Quagga and zebra mussels are the main threat.

The worry is if these species enter Lake Tahoe, they will destroy the ecosystem, cause billions of dollars in damage and ruin this tourist destination. The Great Lakes and Lake Mead in Southern Nevada are two areas that have been devastated by these mussels.

“We need those inspectors present at the time they are supposed to be there,” Dennis Oliver, spokesman for TRPA, said. “There is a full contingent of folks who want to and need to get out on the lake for sport fishing. The inspectors are definitely supposed to be there during the posted hours.”

Blue Ribbon Charters out of South Tahoe uses Cave Rock as its boat ramp.

“Usually the bites are a lot better in the morning. If they open later, you miss the bite,” Eric St. Denis, who is part of the family run operation, said. He added, if they close the ramp early, it’s hard on afternoon charters.

Mackinaw, brown and rainbow trout are primarily what people are catching. Many of the recreational fishermen are there for the fun “catch and release.

Ray Damato of Gardnerville is in his 19-foot boat once or twice a week. He’s been casting a line on Lake Tahoe for about 30 years.

“We like to get out there right at 6 o’clock. Mackinaw fishing seems to be best in the morning,” Damato said. “We only bring home maybe one fish if we are going to eat it that night.”

When the gates are closed the fishermen call the number that is posted. Sometimes they reach a person who says they’ll see what’s going on, other times only a message can be left.

“If nobody shows up, nobody can fish,” Damato said.

Vacancy signs up and down Highway 50

By Kathryn Reed

Coming off the worst November on record, lodging properties on the South Shore are hoping the holiday season will resurrect their businesses.

Jerry Bindel said many properties have dropped their prices to lure tourists to Lake Tahoe. But he isn't sure this brings new people to town, but said instead it is more likely to get the people who are on the fence to make a decision.



Business owners hope more tourists fill hotel rooms.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

As general manager of Lakeland Village, president of the South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association, member of the Tourism Improvement District and board member of Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, Bindel has his pulse on what is going on in town.

But one only need look at all the vacancy signs and empty parking lots to know the crowds have yet to arrive. With this being the last day before winter break for many schools throughout the country, the headlights are likely to be streaming toward Tahoe in the days to come.

The trend of last-minute bookings is continuing. Fortunately, the snow has the phones ringing. This time last year it was dry roads and dirt on the slopes.

Bindel said the number of bookings for the two-week holiday period is decent, as are holiday periods in 2010, but otherwise it's lean.

"If you are by the (Heavenly) gondola, the numbers are better (than this time last year). If you're not, you're lucky if you are doing the same as last year," Bindel said.

Marketing dollars are needed to drive business to Lake Tahoe. Starting today lodging guests in South Tahoe will pay a \$1 or \$1.50 more per night. The assessment by the Tourism Improvement District was OK'd by the City Council earlier this month.

It means hotel-motel guests will pay a \$3 assessment and time share-property management operators collect \$4.50 a night.

For the 2008-09 fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, the TID collected \$1.2 million. With the new rates, the TID expects to generate \$1.8 million in 2009-10.

South Lake Tahoe councilmembers a couple years ago stopped allocating funds for marketing, despite tourism being the primary business in town. This is why the lodging association decided it needed to take matters into its own hands.

When heads are not in beds, it affects nearly every other business in town " no one is in town to gamble, get a massage, eat out, buy products or ski.

The money is used for marketing. Ten percent of what is collected goes directly to events. Bindel has long been a proponent of bringing more events to town “ ones locals and tourists would be interested in and possibly midweek when things are slow.

The irony is the transient occupancy tax the city collects from hotels is one of the three main revenue sources for the general fund. Sales tax is another. Without tourists, those coffers are bare.

In years past the city has allocated more than \$300,000 a year to the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority. No more. Instead it spent about that much money in the last year fighting to get rid of two employees who won their right to stay employed.

One has to wonder if the money had been spent on marketing the town, if the economy would be better and unemployment not close to 20 percent.

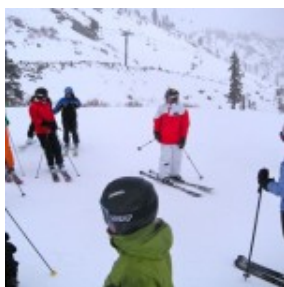
Squaw WOWs women with instructional slope time

By Kathryn Reed

OLYMPIC VILLAGE – “You have to look ugly to get better,” Fran Tone told the group of women huddled in Squaw’s Funitel.

The nearly 20 women “ all at least advanced intermediate – had gathered for a two-hour session of schussing under the guidance of several instructors. It’s not about standing around watching an instructor ski and having her critique you.

It's about being taught the nuances of the sport and getting down terrain that might have seemed inaccessible at the start of the day.



Jonny Moseley offers advice Dec. 16 during Squaw's WOW session.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

Wednesday marked the first WOW (Women of Winter on Wednesdays). It's neither a clinic nor a lesson. Skiing is the emphasis; not talking.

Tone stressed the importance of making good tactical choices.

On this particular day the visibility is horrible, the moisture coming down would make it nice to have wipers on the goggles, depth perception is gone.

Tone imparts some wisdom " use your poles more to feel the terrain and keep one on the ground at all times when it's hard to see.

"It helps your brain process whatever pitch you are on," Tone said.

Other instructors " some on skis, some on snowboards " talked about balance being important, especially when it's hard to see. Having a strong core, and relying less on quad

and hamstring muscles is important.

Squaw plans to offer six more WOW days. Some of them will include a special guest. The first Wednesday featured Olympian Jonny Moseley.

His advice on the ride up the Funitel, "Stretch your neck." Just in case you fall it will be a little looser.

Moseley is Squaw's ambassador of sorts.

This wasn't the only chance people had to hang out with Moseley. He will ski with people at 1pm Dec. 26-Jan 2 " for free. He'll start off easy and move to more difficult terrain, like the run off KT-22 that bears his name. It will be up to the riders to decide if they can keep up with this skier who turned the dinner roll from something one eats into something one does on the slopes.

WOW dates: Jan. 6, Jan. 20, Feb. 3, March 13 and March 17. Each starts at 10am and is two hours. Cost is \$49, plus lift ticket. A package of five is \$159. Call (530) 452.7263 for information or to book a session.

People not slowing down on sending gifts

By Kathryn Reed

Little packages, big packages, light ones, heavy ones, cards in colorful envelopes " you see it all this time of year at the post office.

Toni Passot, postmaster in South Lake Tahoe, said Dec. 14 was

the busiest day of the holiday season, with next Monday likely to be the second busiest.



Lines at post offices are normal this time of year. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Normally one semi-truck takes mail from the South Shore each night to the regional center in Reno. On Monday, the letters and packages heading to destinations near and far filled two semis.

Cristina Martin of South Lake Tahoe was standing in a line about 10 people deep on Tuesday afternoon waiting to send items to her mom in Los Angeles and sister in Arizona.

“Every year I mail packages the week before Christmas,” Martin said.

A woman in front of her mailed off a half dozen boxes that all looked like it might be See’s Candies inside. But the woman sending them wouldn’t reveal what was inside.

Some people needed the front door opened for them because the boxes they were carrying were so cumbersome.

Passot said the amount of mail being sent is about what it was last year. She said it didn’t appear the economy was affecting the volume of packages and letters being sent.

Just like last year, the post office is not having extended holiday hours.

To reach the recipient by Christmas Day, it's suggested all priority mail be sent by Dec. 21. Letters should go out the same day or Dec. 22 depending on the destination.

Research is still being conducted to know if the Bijou post office in South Tahoe will be open this time next year. The U.S. Postal Service is researching the possibility of closing offices throughout the country as a means to save money. Locally, a decision could come at the end of January.

History lesson turns into giving project

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – Any day now several boxes will arrive at a Marine base in Afghanistan with the return address of Meyers, California, USA.

“It was kind of amazing to me,” Annie Brejc said of collecting things to send the soldiers. It hit home with her how she sleeps in a warm bed every night, but the soldiers aren't so fortunate.



Annie Brejc
and Tatum
Bunnett

She and her fourth-grade classmates at the Environmental Magnet School in Meyers filled box after box with items for soldiers so they would have something special to open at the holidays.

Tatum Bunnett said some of the items were every day things that she takes for granted " like a toothbrush and toothpaste.

Teachers Kim Ilvento and Jen Seely put the project together as they were preparing to teach a lesson about Veterans Day last month. It morphed into something bigger.

They chose a particular troop from a website because these men and women wanted ornaments for a tree they'd dubbed "things worth fighting for".

The fourth-graders decorated wooden star ornaments with words that they wanted the soldiers to fight for " things like family, freedom and peace. A picture representing what America means to the students was part of the ornament as well.

Poems by the students were also sent to the soldiers.

"The outpouring from the kids was amazing," Ilvento said of the donations.

Eight boxes were full of things like blankets, DVDs, cocoa, popcorn and current magazines. These were all things the soldiers had requested.