



- Amy Edgett/Sierra Sun

A Toast to Tahoe Skiing: celebrating the Tahoe pioneering spirit

STAFF REPORTS,

OLYMPIC VALLEY, Calif. — More than 300 attendees graced the Resort at Squaw Creek's Grand Ballroom Saturday for "A Toast to Tahoe," the gala affair to kick off the snow sports season and benefit the Squaw Valley Institute.

Buffet tables held sumptuous European faire, including a braised beef short rib, served on toasted brioche with Stilton cheese and huckleberry compote, salmon en croute stuffed with spinach and boursin cheese, wiener schnitzel and fondue.

Squaw Valley Institute Executive Director Erin Casey introduced the evening. The festivities commenced when the ever-lively Master of Ceremonies Eric "T" Brandt introduced keynote speaker Mark Wellman, a Paralympian and nationally acclaimed author, filmmaker and adventurer.

Wellman presented inspirational accounts of recreational and professional achievements after losing most use of his legs during a climbing accident. Wellman helped revamp adaptive equipment, and rips the mountain just as thoroughly as any able-bodied skier. "I get face shots all day long," said Wellman of low-riding sit ski.

He crossed the Sierra Nevada on a pioneering sit-ski journey, worked as a park ranger and summited El Capitan. Wellman asked the audience "What's that summit in your life, the one you want to conquer?" and advised "Think about that for tonight."

Mark McLaughlin, whose book "Longboards to Olympics: A Century of Tahoe Winter Sports" will be released in late December gave a presentation on the evolution of skiing and the rise of the resorts at Lake Tahoe.

Eric T continued as emcee under the bright lights for the 2009-10 winter fashion show, with snowboard and ski styles from Squaw Valley Sports, Squaw Creek Sports and Sports Tahoe, ramped up a notch by models Nancy Wendt, Debbie Dutton, Tamara McKinney, Ingrid Backstrom, Hans Standhiener, Errol Kerr, Savannah Cowley and many more.

Homemade ice cream, petit fours and crepes with bananas foster and a grand marnier glaze were sweet treats were served during a live auction with Karey Todd.

Rob and Scott Gaffney paid tribute to a true Mountain Dreamer and pioneer, toasting Shane McConkey with words and heart-stopping, heartwarming McConkey film footage. "He was a true pioneer, venturing into the uncomfortable, pushing people to join him," said Rob Gaffney. "He was an extraordinary skier and an even more extraordinary man," said Scott Gaffney as he and the audience raised glasses to honor McConkey's no-holds-barred life.

The evening concluded with local clips from Warren Miller's new film, "Dynasty."

A Toast to Tahoe: An evening of education, entertainment and inspiration. Get ready to rip, Tahoe.

Upcoming at the Institute

Squaw Valley Institute will bring Mountainfilm Festival to Tahoe on Dec. 10 at the Resort at Squaw Creek. Mountainfilm is an assembly of people who have come together to see what the human spirit can achieve. The festival is a place for understanding how another human being's struggle is also our own; a place for both asking impossible questions and explaining the previously unexplainable; a place to learn, be inspired and to celebrate indomitable spirit. Squaw Valley Institute will feature six films varying from four to 58 minutes all from the 2007-2009 Mountain Film Festival. Our feature film will be a 2009 Film titled "Solo." Andrew McAuley, the subject of "Solo," attempts the first-ever kayak crossing of the Tasman Sea – a 1,000-mile journey from Australia to New Zealand. Visit www.squawvalleyinstitute.org.

<http://www.sierrasun.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20091109/COMMUNITY/911099991&parentprofile=search&template=printart>