Global Chaos

I'm without the advantage of a TV, but I will bet that Pete Giddings' suits are still tailored just a little too tight. The airtight look agrees with a studio backdrop - trim, concise, uncluttered. Pete Giddings predicts weather on camera.

When Mike Pechner calls you on the telephone you recognize his voice right off: It's a little like a phonograph speaker inside a freshly galvanized Pantastic finish. No mistaking it. Pechner has a distinctive voice, a broadcast voice. Mike Pechner predicts weather on radio.

Nevadans in the know love to quote John James as the official state climate personality, he's quick with a statistic. His Reno Gazette-Journal quotes are usually worth recalling: "In my mind, the chances aren't very good, but who knows." John James predicts weather in print.

James, Pechner, and Giddings are probably as qualified as any to predict weather, or at least as qualified as any attempting to predict weather. But the lesser qualified are everywhere, and they are predicting weather faster than the soapless flock to Amway.

Will it rain Tuesday? Ask a Union Pacific railman, or a flight nurse, or your dog groomer. They will tell you, and with conviction. Will April be snowy? Your neighbor should know, the muffler guy too. Cold and dry or warm and wet over the weekend? Get the answer at the PTA (or search and rescue) meeting. So many forecasts are passed around, the atmosphere itself becomes saturated. Over time, this state of supersaturation has an effect. We become barometric believers. Micro climate missionaries. Doppler disciples...

SLAP!!! Before we sweep all our sense into the bottom drawer, let's stop, take a deep Bill Clinton inhale, and enjoy a refreshing moment of lucidity. There, better? We now remember, when... Pete Giddings flubbed a forecast and it cost the business owners of North Lake Tahoe a ski weekend's worth of revenue. We remember, when... Pechner's four-foot snowstorm turned out to be a partly cloudy day. We remember, that... John James statistical analyses are based on precipitation records from a state that gets no precipitation. Yes, we remember: weather forecasts are not gospel truth, no matter how skilled the forecaster. At best, forecasts are based on mathematical models running time- and space-limited data sets. Even fueled by 1997 technology, the mightiest Cray still isn't fast enough to model the fluid, unstable nature of the global atmosphere. The most synchronized weather satellites blink down upon us, but have difficulty seeing the storm for the cloud.

Wow, the sky looks bluer already.

The Great Ski Race - 1997

For the past two years in a row, weather forecasts predicting impending doom have hovered over The Great Ski Race (these gridlocking blizzards have never materialized). Do weather forecasts, by keeping skiers away, play the bad guy on The Great Ski Race stage? In retrospect I'd say nope, not really a bad guy, just a Harry Dean Stanton-type blowing cigarette smoke in your face. One thing's clear as air: despite a couple inches of new snow, reduced visibility, and every flavor of storm forecast, 635 cross-country skiers vacated their Barcaloungers and lined up for the start of this year's Great Ski Race. When the start gun went off, the field moved forward into the storm, seemingly in slow motion - as if they were all used to it.

30 kilometers later, the gravity-fed finish was as woolly as ever - the punchy new snow tripping up more than one paddling-legged skier. As more and more skiers crossed the finish, the clearer the sky became (contrary to popular forecast). By noon, you could skip around in a camouflage purple T-shirt. (Not too much mud was downloaded into Hilltop Lodge by the circulating masses, as usual it was a bit of a circus inside. The wide variety of matted-hair skiers costumed in everything from gabardine knickers to nipple-revealing lyres were only slightly less of a spectacle than the bar scenes in Star Wars.)

It's remarkable how significant this race is. Not only for Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, but for the blue-jean clad skiers who ski three days a year and labor over the course for five and a half hours; and for the local racers who choreograph their entire season's fitness to peak on Great Ski Race day. The race volunteers, who come forward and put out, remain undaunted by the work - they are the champions of this event! (Everyone seems to have a quip of a good time, too.) Great job all!

By any measure the 21st annual Great Ski Race was a big success. Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team would like to pay special thanks to Jennifer Haag and Mike Smith at Cottonwood Restaurant, Rose and Mike Wolterbeek and the staff of Lakeview Cross Country Ski Area, and Russ Jones from Northstar-at-Tahoe. Couldn't have done it without ya!

February Member Of The Month

At the February 24 Nordic Team meeting, Team President Gerald Rockwell, freshly sawed off of his leg cast, announced Karen Honeywell as the February Team Member of the Month.

When it comes to ideas for the Team Education Committee, Karen never fails to pull new tricks out of her trenchcoat (literally and figuratively). She has educated and entertained local fourth-graders and Team members alike with her witty, upbeat, and fast-paced Winter Awareness programs. Karen recently was interviewed on the local Truckee television station where she most eloquently furthered the good word on how to stay healthy and safe in the winter wilderness. Karen, you're awesome! Way to go!

Steep And Deep

About 200 raccoon-eyed skiers and boarders showed up for the annual Steep and Deep avalanche awareness presentation held March 12 at the Plaza Bar, Squaw Valley. This event is put on by the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski patrols and highlights winter action - adventure photography peppered with sound advice for treading the off-piste steep and deep. Nordic Team members Jeff Rieger and Randall Osterhuber were among the many presenters who laid out some boiler-plate advice; Jeff gave a talk about the Team's John Wilson (found by the Team unconscious and unconscious.)

If you can spare the time, please read on...
deeply hypothermic on Castle Peak) search of March 1995, and Randall was featured in an avalanche safety video sponsored by Ortovox. Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team was a sponsor of this event.

History: 15 Years Ago

Always matter-of-fact and well spoken, Larry Heywood, ski patrol director for Alpine Meadows ski area, is one of several avalanche practitioners interviewed on the Discovery Channel’s avalanche presentation Avalanche (this is one of the more entertaining avalanche videos). In the film, Larry talks about the large, destructive avalanche that swept Alpine Meadows destroying the Summit lift building and killing seven people, including mountain manager Bernie Kingery. That fatal avalanche released 15 years ago this month, on March 31, 1992. Many members of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team responded to the accident; the memory of those scenes remain indelible.

Larry comments in Avalanche that at the time no one at Alpine Meadows envisioned those particular slopes capable of producing an avalanche of such magnitude. And it is no wonder. After the storm ended on April 6, the Central Sierra Snow Laboratory on nearby Donner Pass had recorded 466 centimeters (191.5 inches) of new snow. This storm remains by far the snowiest on the Lab’s records. This should act as a reminder (while reading this newsletter the last week in March) that “late season” snowfall in the Sierra Nevada can be formidable. A reminder, mind you, not a forecast.

Nordic Team Trainings

April 8: An overnight trip to the Benson Hut. Meet at the Team garage (223 Fairway Drive, Tahoe City, behind the Tahoe City Chevron) at 8:30 A.M. Call Peter Sporleder to reserve a bunk in the hut.

April 13: Meet 8:00 A.M. at the Nordic Team garage, fed, watered, and lookin’ good. Of tall order is a Gerald Rockwell-conceived all-day ski tour.

April 17: One more all-day tour (never enough). Meet at the Nordic Team garage — 8:00 A.M. Call Dirk Schoonmaker for info on this one.

"All mountain good."

—Sherpa Dawa Tenzing, when asked which was his favorite peak to climb

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Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team Officers

President: Gerald Rockwell 583-2876
Vice President: Joe Pace 583-1206
Treasurer: Scott Schroepfer 546-2909
Secretary: Jackie Thomas 546-2902
Board Members: Dirk Schoonmaker 583-2929
Steve Tomayko 525-7280
Madora Weiser 525-9248
Chris Worcester 582-4648

Committee Chairs

Cuisine: Debra Schroepfer 546-2909
Dispatch: Madora Weiser 525-9248
Education: Mona Treat 581-5759
The Great Ski Race™: Douglas Read 583-6881
Newsletter: Randall Osterhuber 587-3922
Snowcats: Tony Remennik 583-2929
Snowmobiles: Ray O’Brien 581-4388
Training: Dirk Schoonmaker 583-2929
Peter Sporleder 546-0588
Truck/Equipment: Jean Wernette 546-2288
Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team garage 581-4038
All phone numbers area code (530).

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