

**Vern Sprock, Longtime Owner of Sierra Ski Ranch,
to be Honored with Far West Ski Association's 2013 Snowsports Builder Award June 8th**

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Vern Sprock, Sierra Ski Ranch, 1970

Vern Sprock (b. 1921), bought Sierra Ski Ranch with its two rope tows in 1953 and expanded its services over the next 40 years as a family friendly and family operated ski area. The Sierra Ski Ranch was noted for its offerings of affordable family and weekend packages and a number of imaginative innovations as well. The tradition begun by Sprock was to provide a great value on legendary terrain. He and his family made an indelible imprint on snowsports. The Sprock family has moved on. But their four-decade heart and soul investment is a testament to perseverance and a family approach to area services. Snowsports is indebted to Vern Sprock and his family for the operation of Sierra Ski Ranch from humble beginnings in 1953, through trying times and circumstances, to 1993 when it had nine chairlifts. Sprock sold the Ranch to Fibreboard then and its name was changed to Sierra at Tahoe.

Starting with the two tows in 1953, he proceeded to expand the lift capability at the Ranch to three rope tows and two Poma lifts. The venture had trying days ahead. Caltrans required that the entire area move due to a planned Highway 50 relocation. Successful in relocating further east on the highway, Sierra Ski Ranch reopened on Christmas Day 1968 and was immediately overwhelmed by a record snowfall. That year was a challenge, but the area reopened in three weeks and struggled through the remainder of the season – at a loss. In 1977, the Ranch was hosting more than 300,000 snowriders annually. In the 1982-1983 season Echo Summit received 747 inches of snow, the largest recorded snowfall ever in California. This time, Sierra Ski Ranch was prepared.



The Sprock family in 1993 when Sierra Ski Ranch was sold: Vern and Bobbie (d. 2009) with children Kathy and Peter. Each had assigned responsibilities in the operation of the Ranch.

Vern Sprock's last big challenge was his 1988 proposal to the USFS for a 3-phase, 10-year plan for the Sierra Ski Ranch. The proposed 1988 Huckleberry Base Area would include 11 ski lifts, 1 tram, 1 day lodge, 2 hotels, 200 condominiums, 2 service stations and other infrastructure. This project was scouted out by Vern, the USFS District Rangers and others. In the hearings and media leading up to the ultimate rescission by the USFS, local groups such as "Friends of the Echo Summit" brought the spotted owl into the discussions. There was no known outcome to a study of neither the owl's habitat nor a timeline for its completion. This situation, while not fatal for the ranch, made its future course indefinite. The backcountry gates to the Huckleberry area were opened in 2001. Sprock's vision was in part fulfilled.

The Ranch was a family operation. He moved to the Ranch in 1953 with Bobbie, his wife of three years. His daughter and son were born over the next 6 years. The four of them operated Sierra Ski Ranch in two locations and with many improvements for the next 40 years. The children had chores as early as four years and they were there when the area was sold in 1993. The four family members each had assigned responsibilities in the area's operation. Among these duties, Bobbie did a snow report each morning, one of the first areas to offer this service; she was also an official weather observation station for the National Weather Service. She was honored by the Tahoe Heritage Foundation in 2005 for her service.