

Get ready to eat out for a week

Later this month, Tuolumne County will have its first Restaurant Week. Now, I'm no chef or cooking columnist, nor do I prefer fancy to plain-and-simple foods. But I do love food, even if I'm a picky eater, and I'm sure I'm not the only one who salivates at the words "steak" or "gourmet cheeseburger" – that is, if you're hungry.

Food is easy to appreciate and love, as are the restaurants that provide it, whether privately owned or part of a chain. Tuolumne County Restaurant Week gives everyone the chance to appreciate the delicious offerings of Sonora and other surrounding areas. From Jan. 20 to 26, various participating restaurants offer special menus for the evenings they are open for dinner. The menus will have pre-fixe dinners set at a price of \$25 per person and will come with a choice of one appetizer, one entrée, one dessert and, at select restaurants, special beverages.

The food-driven event takes place yearly across the United States and

Tuolumne County's Restaurant Week coincides with California Restaurant Month. California, by itself, had 28 locations participate last year. Tuolumne County added itself to the list, thanks to Lisa Mayo, director of sales and marketing for the Tuolumne County Visitor's Bureau, who started the program here.

"Restaurant weeks can be done many different ways, with themes, using certain local foods, etc.," Mayo said. "Because this is our first one, we decided to be fairly straightforward with it."

"There is an exclusive set menu with a set price that includes three courses. If you were to add up the prices of purchasing each course separately, you may find it would be more expensive, so there is value for the consumer. The restaurants all have special decals identifying them as participating in California Restaurant Month," even though Tuolumne's event lasts only a week.

Participating restaurants include

Emberz in downtown Sonora, Seven Sisters at Black Oak Casino, The Homeplace in Sonora, The Cellar Door at the Groveland Hotel, The Willow Steakhouse and Seafood Grille in Jamestown, Banny's Café at Mountain Springs Gold Course, Standard Pour in Sonora and the National Hotel in Jamestown.

"There are so many great restaurants throughout Tuolumne County and this program is designed to highlight the restaurants and help both visitors and residents become more aware of the variety and quality of our restaurants," Mayo said. "Additionally, by having our restaurant week as part of (Visit California's) restaurant month, we get to tag onto many of their promotions, thereby leverage our marketing dollars and outreach."

Mayo has high hopes for the present and future of restaurant week in Tuolumne County.

"With the special menus and the

Tuolumne Talk

Harmony Wheeler



restaurateurs coming together to make it a fun week that highlights the restaurant industry in general, we're hoping that chefs get a chance to step out of the kitchen and welcome their customers, talk about the food, etc.," Mayo said. "This is just the first restaurant week and my hope is that it will be the catalyst to do another, perhaps during the summertime when we can highlight locally grown foods and also include some of the smaller restaurants or those that aren't open for dinner. I'd love to get ideas from the restaurant community on what they would like to see. After all, this is about them and driving people to not only their restaurants but their towns and shops."

Give Mayo a call if you have any

Tuolumne County Restaurant Week

WHEN: Jan. 20 through 26

WHERE: Various Tuolumne County eateries

COST: \$25 per person at the restaurants

MORE INFO: yosemitegoldcountry.com/restaurantweek

ideas at 533-4420. Meanwhile, enjoy your meal!

Send your Tuolumne County events to Harmony Wheeler at hwheeler@sierralodestar.com and mtaylor@sierralodestar.com.



It's a winter wonderland

of our terrain. With the fabulous forecast we hope Granite Bowl will be open for Christmas."

With cold Alaskan storms that moved through the region well into the following week, Dodge Ridge received slightly better snowfall accumulation than predicted and was not only able to open on Dec. 21, but did so with a nice layer of fresh powder that lasted well into the holiday weekend.

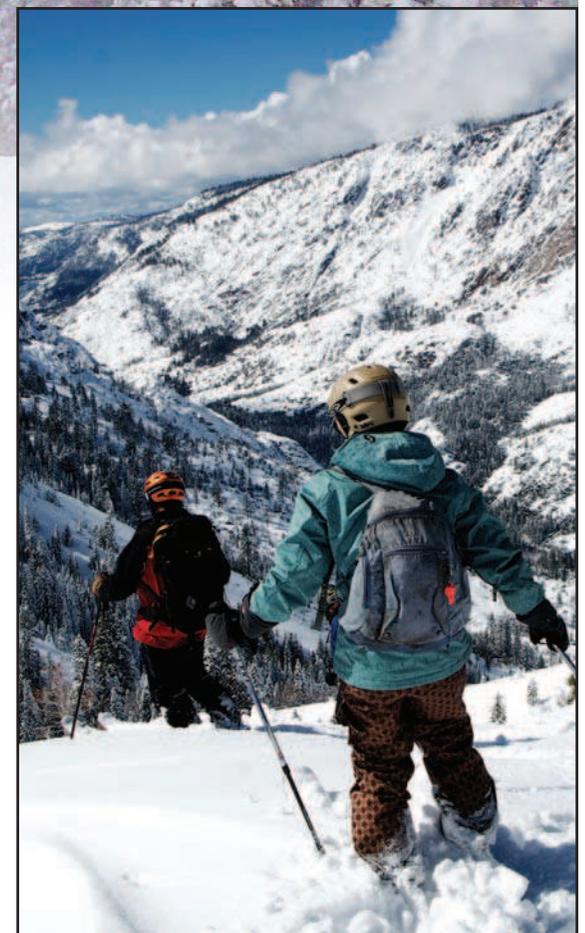
Just north at Bear Valley Mountain, resort management had planned to open on Dec. 20. With some early season snow at the base and new accumulation received just before the holidays, the resort was easily able to meet the required snowpack levels – in some areas the resort had such significant accumulation that the mountain's avalanche advisory was bumped to "4, high," a level that indicates fairly serious avalanche danger at some out-of-bounds areas.

In an almost serendipitous fashion, Bear Valley's opening day coincided with its annual Free Ski Day. With an early open-

ing date and free lift rides to boot, Bear saw some pretty heavy traffic on Dec. 20.

"With opening day being free for all, it could turn out to be very, very busy, so we are working to have as much open as we can, as fast as we can, but want to do it in a safe, reasonable and prudent manner," said a post on General Manager Jim Gentling's blog at bearvalley.com. "If you intend to attend that day you may consider arriving early, get your turns in and perhaps escape before it gets too crowded. After all, it's only day 1!"

The big rush for ski resorts always comes in the days and weeks just before Christmas. For all of the Sierra's ski resorts – including Dodge Ridge and Bear Valley – the few days before the busy holiday weekend provided huge snowfall at relatively low elevations. Dodge Ridge effectively opened 65 out of 67 runs and all of its lifts after a colossal storm swept the mountain on Dec. 22. In the midst of the storm, Dodge reported a base depth of 31 inches and a summit depth of 51 inches. Bear Valley reported depths of up to 67



Courtesy photos

Skiers prepare to swoosh down the slopes of Bear Valley Mountain.

While some were preparing for the end of the world on Dec. 21, 2012, the folks at Dodge Ridge and Bear Valley Mountain ski resorts predicted another kind of monumental event: between 2 and 4 feet of heavy snowpack that would successfully open both resorts before the busy holiday season.

On Dec. 18, Dodge Ridge announced it would be operational on that fateful day with at least 85 percent of its terrain open, including more than 30 groomed runs.

"The blend of recent snowfall, cold temps and the anticipated storm predicted to deliver over 2 feet of snow will allow us to open the majority of the mountain," said President and CEO Sally Helm. "It is always exhilarating to open for the season and we are very pleased to offer 85 percent