

Whooshing down a snow-covered mountain to help an injured skier is second nature to Madera County farmer Jim Erickson.

Jim, a fourth-generation Central Valley farmer who serves as treasurer of the Madera County Farm Bureau, has been a volunteer for the National Ski Patrol for 20 years. His two sons, Jason, 21, and Lee, 19, are also ski patrolmen at resorts in the Central Sierra Nevada. The three men spend their winters patrolling the slopes at Sierra Summit, a ski resort 65 miles northeast of Fresno in the Sierra National

# farm family inclined to HELP OTHERS on the ski slopes

by Robyn Rominger

"You just do what needs to be done,  
and we're happy to do it."

—JIM ERICKSON  
Tree and vine grower  
and Ski Patrol volunteer

Forest, and Badger Pass, located in Yosemite National Park.

Skiing together is one example of the family traditions that are important to the Ericksons.

"My family has a lot of traditions in the things that we do," said Jim, who produces almonds, olives and grapes. He also owns a custom spraying business.

"I started skiing when I was 8," Jim said, recalling his early outings with his parents and two sisters. "Once I started skiing, I'd follow behind ski patrolmen to learn how to ski and try to stay in their tracks, so I was self-taught. I always thought that some day I'd be a member of the Ski Patrol, and 20-some years later, I actually became one."

Members of the National Ski Patrol use emer-

gency skills to aid injured skiers and snowboarders on the slopes, and help make mountain recreation safer for all. Ski patrolers must pass tests in first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and become certified in outdoor emergency care, including how to handle a sled with an injured person aboard. They are also trained in how to deal with avalanches and inclement weather conditions.

Jim said he and his wife, Lori, taught their three children how to ski before they entered kindergarten.

Today, Jason and Lee are students at California State University, Fresno—their father's and paternal grandfather's alma mater. Jason is a senior and Lee is a freshman. They work as ski patrolers on the weekends with their dad.

Occasionally their 15-year-old sister, Kristi, joins them on the slopes.

The Ericksons have encountered injured skiers and boarders with broken bones, people experiencing diabetic shock and children who have become separated from their family members.


"You never know what you'll get into," Jim said.

Jim said they see more problems on the "bunny hill," where beginners learn how to ski and board, than they do in the advanced "black diamond" areas. The most frequent injuries occur from falling, with people hurting their wrists and knees.

Jason noted that accidents can happen when people try to get off the ski lift.

"You have accidents where people fall and if

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*Madera County farmer Jim Erickson, center, and his sons Jason, left, and Lee, help an injured skier as part of their duties as National Ski Patrol volunteers.*

Photos/Robyn Rominger

## SKI PATROL

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they don't move away quick enough, they'll end up hitting their head on the chair," Jason said. "If they don't move away quick enough from the unloading zone, there's the potential for people to run into each other."

On a recent day at Sierra Summit, Jim came to the rescue of a young woman who fell down as she was getting off the ski lift and got hit on the back of the head by the chair. He helped her get up and asked if she was OK. She was shaken, but able to continue skiing.

On the same day, Lee spent the morning helping people who were injured in three separate accidents. In the first incident, a 10-year-old boy cut his fingers while skiing on the bunny hill. "He sliced his fingers on the side of his ski as he was taking off his skis," he said. "His hand slipped off the binding and hit the ski edge. We wrapped his fingers in gauze and controlled the bleeding by applying pressure."

In the second case, a 19-year-old man walked into the Ski Patrol room with a broken arm. "He was snowboarding and fell, and went down on his wrists," Lee said.

The third accident involved a 22-year-old snowboarder who went off a

jump and lost control. "He fell off of a jump on Tollhouse, which is one of the runs, and lost consciousness," Lee explained. Lee performed first aid on both snowboarders before they were taken by ambulance to a hospital in Fresno.

Jim said he was brought up to help others and to have a strong work ethic, and that applies to the Ericksons' volunteer work on the slopes.

"We're there to help people," Jim said. "It was the way I was taught to ski."

Mike Nolen, Sierra Summit's professional Ski Patrol director, has known Jim for about 14 years. "He's an incredible worker with an incredible work ethic that's just outstanding," Nolen said. "What's even more impressive than that is that he brought his family into Ski Patrol."

The Ericksons live on a Madera-area ranch that Jim's grandfather bought in 1920, after moving north from Fresno County.

When they're not on the farm or in the classroom, the Ericksons generously volunteer their time and energy to help out at the ski resort.

"If they ask us to do something, we do it," Jim said. "We don't complain, we just get it done. It's the rural-setting attitude—you just do what needs to be done, and we're happy to do it."

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Jim Erickson uses a sled to transport an injured skier down a mountain.