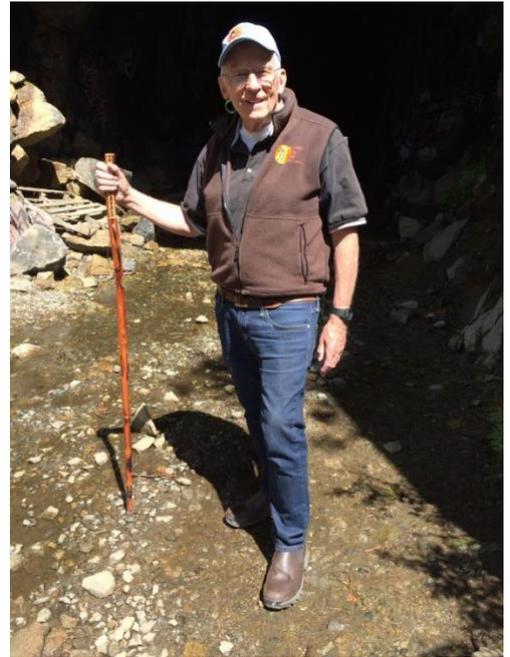


A Cutting Edge Pioneer

Jerry Blackwill has always been on the cutting edge. After obtaining his bachelor's degree in economics, he went to work as a programmer for the very first pure software company to be in existence. Yes, you read that right . . . the very first software company! Up until then, only computer manufacturers like IBM wrote software. For his company, Systems Development Corporation, he developed real-time computer programs to be used by the USAF Air Defense Command. Later, after obtaining an MBA, he used his computer and statistical skills to build an early credit scoring system to guide in risk analysis for consumer loans.

He wasn't all business though. With an interest in hiking he guided many Sierra Club hikes as well as backcountry ski trips in the Sierra.



Jerry Blackwill stands in front of a granite tunnel constructed for the trans-continental railroad.

In 1993 Jerry retired and began building a home in Truckee. His living room picture window has a magnificent view of Donner Lake, Donner Summit, the Sierra Crest and the Union Pacific railway. He says it is estimated that up to twenty-four trains (one per hour) cross those tracks every day!

His interest in trains started when he began volunteering for the [Truckee Donner Railroad Society](#) (for which he currently serves as president.) In the year 2007, his first activity was developing exhibits in an old Southern Pacific caboose that the Railroad Society had converted into a downtown Truckee museum. That caboose still serves in that function today.

With Jerry's and other members help, the Railroad Society developed a small-sized, but fully functioning, train and tracks in the Truckee Regional Park. This train operates in the summer season and gives children free train rides. Approximately four thousand children ride each season. For most children, this is their first train ride! The Society also developed a similar kid-sized train that operates next to the Squaw Valley ski resort one week per year . . . the week before Christmas. And, of course, Santa is near the passengers on every ride.

With the year being 2019, this is the sesquicentennial (150th) celebration of the completion of the trans-continental railroad in 1869. The two railroad companies (Union Pacific from the east and the Central Pacific from the west) joined together at Promontory Summit in Utah on May 10th, 1869. One of the most amazing and fascinating parts of the transcontinental railroad story was the engineering of the route through Truckee and the tunneling through the granite of Donner Summit by Chinese workers.

To participate in this celebration, the town of Truckee has looked to Jerry as a leading authority on train history. Jerry's Railroad Society, along with the [Truckee-Donner Historical Society](#) and

the [Donner Summit Historical Society](#) are involved in setting up over thirty events celebrating the 150th anniversary of this incredible achievement. To view details of these celebratory train history events, go to the web site at [GoldSpike.org](#).

One of the final events of the summer will be the Donner Party Hike event on September 14th and 15th. On these days, approximately 150 hikers from all over California and Nevada will gather at Sugar Bowl ski resort at Donner Summit to participate in one of seven different historical hikes. Again, Jerry is involved with these hikes. He started leading history hikes for this event in 1997. He originally led what is known as the “Roller Pass” hike. This hike visits three different passes that pioneers used to cross the Sierra crest with their wagons. Jerry still leads hikes for the Donner Party Hike event, but this year he will be leading the Summit Canyon hike, which visits the history of “firsts” over Donner Summit. This includes Native American trading routes, pioneer wagons trails, the trans-continental railroad, the Dutch Flat wagon road, the Lincoln Highway and even the first transcontinental air flights! Jerry says, “It’s an amazing experience to walk in the footsteps of these rugged people and to see these fascinating historical spots firsthand!” To learn more about the hikes offered on Donner Party Hike days, visit the web site at [DonnerPartyHike.com](#). At the Donner Party Hike event, be sure to introduce yourself to Jerry and thank him for his work and expertise on Truckee and Donner Summit history.