

By the end of Tahoe 2010, Discount Tire will have passed out 153 such awards, with a total value north of half a million dollars.

After the first night's stash of thirty-five prizes has been awarded, Halle and his son work their way down the beach toward the snack tent, but the elder Halle is waylaid as guys from Discount Tire Direct and the Nevada region indoctrinate him in the finer points of beer pong. He watches for fifteen minutes, until the business expert has figured it all out.

"If I was a beer distributor, I'd go broke," he concludes. "Nobody ends up drinking any beer."

Halle plops two slices of pizza on a plate before joining Bill Sweatt, who is rooming with Halle this week. Halle grabs some food for Sweatt and sits for the first time since dinner, roughly five hours ago. It's 11:35 p.m. Halle and Sweatt talk about life for a few minutes before Bruce Jr. sits down and makes plans for a tennis game the next morning. At 11:50, the octogenarian and his friend pick up some oatmeal cookies for the road and call it a night.

Monday and Tuesday at Tahoe bring a steady stream of golf, tennis, bicycle, boat and parasailing excursions, along with massages by the pool. For two hundred guys who work in tire stores all week, the perks are a major motivational tool.

The biggest motivator, though, is Bruce Halle. He's the tire jockey who made it big, who remembers his roots and keeps the doors open for the next generation. One by one, the men in the Discount Tire T-shirts will describe what they see when they look up the corporate ladder, and what they see is themselves. From store managers to assistant regional vice presidents, regional VPs and corporate operations executives, it's a parade of people who started their careers busting tires and, at the top, tire-buster Bruce Halle.

The Tahoe trippers describe Halle as a role model, both for the path of his own life and the path he's opened for them. He's "Mr. Halle," the icon on a pedestal, but they feel comfortable calling him Bruce and, occasionally, slapping him on the back at the bar. The balance is challenging, and most business leaders fail to achieve it. Halle is more a father figure than a boss to many of these people, even though he is clearly the boss.