

Markleeville resort could transform tiny town

By Susan Wood



Sometimes professional development is all about the personal path one takes in life.

A project that makes this philosophical theory evident is Markleeville Village.

The proposed LEED-certified development features a 38,000-square-foot lodge and spa named Mahalee “ which means acorn in Washoe. The 49 alpine-style cabins and town center will be built off Highway 89 on 38 prime acres overlooking Alpine County’s hub.

South Lake Tahoe developer Tom Abdoo, who owns close to half the town in California’s least populated county, dreamed up the more than \$80 million project in the early 1980s as he was undergoing a private nightmare. His wife, Joan, was dying of cancer and in a great deal of stress.

“She got obsessed with the idea of being under stress,” he said in the serene setting of his Christmas Valley backyard.

An inventor of sorts, he developed a biofeedback capsule in which she could decompress. After dedicating his life to making her as comfortable as possible, he made it his mission in life to honor her struggle with an alternative to stress. He designed a project that would not only occupy him for almost 30 years, but would provide wellness practitioners in

the retail center set just off Montgomery Street, the road leading to Grover Hot Springs.

“This is my passion now,” he said.

He is relieved to have passed the major milestone of the Alpine County Board of Supervisors a month ago approving a tentative map for his ambitious project. But the little victory seemed bittersweet at having to recall his wife’s suffering. His eyes welled up with tears at the thought of how in their 15 years together, he and his wife so often enjoyed visiting Markleeville.

The project has come a long way. In 1994, he introduced a draft of a larger project that has since been scaled down. Four years ago, the Friends of Markleeville filed a legal challenge against the county alleging environmental violations related to the project. A settlement has since been reached, county counsel Martin Fine reports.

Abdoo incorporated an advanced public water system and onsite wastewater treatment plant as part of 98 conditions of approval mandated by the county Community Development Department. One such provision includes permits from the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board and California Department of Public Health. The latter measures must be met before a final map may advance, planner Zach Wood cited.

Abdoo, who transformed the Cutthroat biker bar into a fine-dining restaurant a few years ago, said he wasn’t surprised there would be hurdles to overcome. He also realizes the turtle-like pace of government.

He’s convinced the economic slump will end by the time the project is completed in 10 years. Abdoo also believes there’s still a demand for fractional ownership units based on the advice of Global Resorts of Las Vegas. President John Sweeney, who worked on The Ridge Tahoe, said the fractional concept has “proven to be a desirable vacation home

alternativeâ€” in the \$8 billion vacation ownership industry.

The luxury cabins encompassing more than 1,600 square feet will be offered in five- to 10-week intervals starting at \$160,000. The lodge will operate like a hotel.

The entire project is intended to use Sierra green standards featuring a progressive stormwater collection system, solar insulation and a sod-based living roof. Abdoo hopes to create a website touting the latest advances in green technology because â€œby the time this gets built there will be thousands of new products and ideas,â€” Abdoo said.

With Markleeville businesses coming and going, the Alpine County Chamber of Commerce welcomes the idea of the project, chamber officials say.

Susan Wood is a freelance writer based in South Lake Tahoe. She may be reached at copysue1@yahoo.com