

Abundance of LTUSD employees calling it quits

By Kathryn Reed

When classes start Aug. 31 for the next school year, many familiar faces will no longer be roaming the halls of Lake Tahoe Unified School District. Many longtime employees are retiring.

More than 600 years worth of educational experience are walking out the door as the school year comes to an end next week. The changes are coming in the classroom, administration and elsewhere.

Steve Morales, facilities director, is one person whose presence in the district for the last 33 years has touched all the campuses and most components of the district.

He had worked in construction since he was 18, and then got an electrician's job with LTUSD when he was 29. By 30 he was in his current role. The difference is the job description has changed quite a bit in the intervening years.

"As the district continued to mature and grow, this position did the same," Morales told *Lake Tahoe News*. "It' been continuously growing and challenging so it never became a stagnant position. There was never a time when I was bored with the work."



Steve Morales is retiring after 33 years working for Lake Tahoe Unified School District. Photo/LTN file

When he started in the early 1980s the buildings had been neglected, landscaping near non-existent, the ball fields were not irrigated, and the schools looked run down with peeling paint. The superintendent at the time and board decided to turn things around.

The basic maintenance needs were addressed, including getting the mechanical and electrical systems working properly.

The state made some money available and local voters approved a bond in the early 1990s for facilities. This is when South Tahoe Middle School's multipurpose room was built as well as the science-technology building at South Tahoe High School.

This was the first major construction in LTUSD since Sierra House Elementary School was built in the mid-1970s.

Hiring skilled laborers like electricians and plumbers has helped to keep the facilities in better shape. Depending on the season 30 to 40 people work for Morales.

Each year the financial responsibility he has changes. It's fluctuated from a few million dollars to about \$40 million.

"What I'm most proud of in the facility improvement and expansion side of the coin is the fact that within months of passage of local bonds for school facility improvement the district was spending that money and the projects were started," Morales said. "By the time people saw these taxes on their tax bills typically we were already in construction. We were putting their money to work almost immediately."

Morales is also proud in all this time with well more than \$100 million of construction occurring under his watch that a project has never been stopped nor has there been the claim of a bid going awry.

He was essentially the project manager overseeing the work accomplished from the latest bond – \$64.5 million in local money, plus more than \$30 million in state matching dollars. The bulk of that work was at South Tahoe High School.

Superintendent Jim Tarwater calls the oversight of the 2009 bond and getting the work done by 2014 Morales' "legacy."

But all of Morales' work is not done. He will be overseeing the bleacher project at STHS, which starts next week.

"For a person who moved up through the ranks and has been part of all the construction and maintenance for a district in the mountains, that has a lot more challenges just because of the weather, and transportation, he has done an outstanding job," Tarwater told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Also part of Morales' job is to oversee transportation. The fact there was never a major accident on his watch, is another thing Morales is proud of.

Initially, IT fell under Morales' purview.

"The original backbones of the computer and software systems

came out of this department. We provided the infrastructure, the cabling," he said.

Morales, who turns 62 at the end of the month, will be back on a limited basis. Retirees are allowed to work for benefits.

What else he does in retirement remains to be seen. He has three kids and seven grandkids to help fill the time.

As for a replacement, Darryl Quandt who is a supervisor in the department will be interim director of facilities.

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Here are the others who are leaving LTUSD:

Classified retirees, with their last job listed:

- Eleanor Heckendorn – hired October 1984, instructional assistant
- Wilma Hoppe – hired April 1992, executive services specialist
- Angie Keil – hired May 1992, secretary
- Paul Mitchell – hired February 1998, custodian
- Darlene Morris – hired August 1987, accounting assistant
- Michael Kezer – hired December 2011, campus security assistant
- Nancy Tesh – hired September 1988, human resources analyst
- Debra Yates – hired July 2006, chief financial officer.

Certificated retirees:

- Betsy Benavides, teacher, 24 years in education
- Karen Boyer, speech therapist, 20 years in education
- Howard Coleman, teacher, 32 years in education
- Beth Delacour, principal, 32 years in education
- Madeline Fernald, teacher, 16 years in education
- Joann Hernandez, counselor, 15 years in education
- Deborah Kushner, teacher, 31 years in education
- Ivone Larson, assistant superintendent, 26 years in education
- Marie Meagher, director of special services, 36 years in education
- Carol Murdock, teacher, 36 years in education
- Elizabeth Roeser, teacher, 37 years in education
- Laretta Ross, teacher, 36 years in education
- Dennis Sarosik, assistant principal, 34 years in education
- Louise Ann Simon, teacher, 27 years in education
- Pamela Taylor, teacher, 30 years in education
- Susan Willmetts, teacher, 19 years in education.