Opinion: SLT – 50 golden years and counting

Publisher's note: ***This is the final article in the series of stories about South Lake Tahoe's 50th anniversary. The other stories may be accessed by going to the top of the page, select Special Projects, then SLT Turns 50.***

By Wendy David

Leftovers are in the refrigerator and the feelings of gratefulness for being alive, having snow, wonderful snow and living in South Lake Tahoe are keeping me warm in spite of the cold temperature outside. We are fortunate indeed.

Fifty years ago today, I imagine many of the feelings were the same, but with a bit more excitement as the city of South Lake Tahoe was born. Happy Birthday South Lake Tahoe. As the only incorporated city in the Lake Tahoe Basin even 50 years later, the achievements of our forefathers are even more momentous and appreciated by all of us whom have followed.

My family came for vacation in June 1973, spent a month enjoying all the outdoor fun that a young family of four could have. At the end of July, we decided to stay. Staying and making South Lake Tahoe our home meant a commitment to investing in the future of our community. As the years passed we helped as new businesses were started, youth sports were initiated and expanded, bonds were promoted and passed, amenities were added and South Lake Tahoe grew and matured.

Those that came to ski "just for the winter" bought homes,

became parents, perhaps started a business and became leaders. Some of those leaders retired and moved to the sunshine. Children grew up. Some stayed and many left. New leaders emerged, loving South Lake Tahoe too, having the same dreams for their children as those of the previous generation. Our past has been celebrated all year as we thank and remember the people, the projects, the accomplishments and the evolution of the last 50 years of our city.



Wendy David

We have learned much in the last 50 years. We have learned that we cannot depend on the gaming industry to sustain our local economy. We certainly know our winter weather, or should I say the absence of such, can be devastating to our economy. We learned we are a community that cares for each other through good and bad times, as evidenced by the way we leveraged our collective resources during the Great Recession and every other recession: through a landslide that closed Highway 50 for months; through the devastation and loss of the Angora Fire; and in the good times we've come together to celebrate.

The flight of our middle class as home prices soared and families cashed in on the windfall also changed our community. We lost 25 percent of our school age population and some of our schools closed. Our neighborhoods changed from local, full-time families dominating ownership to having 75 percent of our homes owned by second homeowners. Change is indeed the only constant.

The past is written and the future is yet to be. We are fortunate to be a part of the future for South Lake Tahoe today.

We are fortunate to be more collaborative than ever as we plan for the future. The TRPA adoption of a new Regional Plan that allows for a higher level of cooperation and partnership is leading the way. Douglas County, El Dorado County, the city of South Lake Tahoe and our public and private partners have been working on establishing a Legacy Action Plan together that will guide our future with shared goals.

The city of South Lake Tahoe is an integral leader declaring we are a premier recreation destination foremost. We are committing our efforts and investments in this priority. This goal includes the exciting expansion of our bike trail system and our new community play consortium in partnership with Lake Tahoe Community College. The consortium will add up to three additional fields at the college and renovate the existing soccer field, creating a central sports complex. In addition, we are continuing our progress on the master plan for the renovation of Regan Beach and will be inviting our community to help us envision a new city of South Lake Tahoe Recreation Complex on Rufus Allen Boulevard.

We continue our strong focus of economic development that improves our city. A citywide area plan will provide economic opportunities, and provide incentives toward improving the built and the natural environment. We will revitalize our hotel districts, implement our Tahoe Valley Area Plan, continue to invest in private and public partnerships while also continuing to restore and protect our neighborhoods and watersheds. We will encourage and incentivize partnerships and projects that will remove development from and restore environmentally sensitive areas.

I am often asked these two questions about being on the City Council. First question: Why did you run? The answer is

simple. I have lived in and loved my community for more than four decades and want it to shine as it should. Second question: Are you crazy? Answer: I guess you need to be a little crazy to believe that you can make a positive difference. I extend the invitation out to join in being a little crazy with the rest of us in creating a bright future for our city as we begin our second 50 years.

This city is yours and at 50 years young, even with some of its age showing, and ours too, we have a very bright future together. Here’s to you on your 50th, South Lake Tahoe. Cheers!

Wendy David is mayor pro tem of South Lake Tahoe.