Cadre of people working to keep Tahoe clean

By Kathryn Reed

A whole lot of trash talk was going on Wednesday afternoon in South Lake Tahoe.

Those tasked with cleaning up after the rest of us spoke about how the plastic bag ban in the city is working, trash left out for animals to rummage through is still a problem, and that Tahoe does have a bit of a garbage problem.

South Tahoe Refuse in 2014 took in 10 tons of film plastic – the category plastic bags fall into. In 2015, that number fell to 6.6 tons.

While the South Shore garbage company is seeing fewer grocery store bags since the city implemented the ban, there has been an increase in reusable plastic bags – the thicker ones. The value of them is next to nothing when it comes to STR recycling them. Some stores have gone to paper only, like BevMo and Ross.

An advantage to paper is that it breaks down and the money is slightly better as a commodity.

Jeanne Lear with STR explained that to reuse plastic the original item must be shredded, washed, dried, made into pellets and then repurposed.

She said Coca-Cola is developing plant-based bottle to try to get away from using fossil fuels.

Marilee Movius with the League to Save Lake Tahoe touched on the five large masses of plastic floating in the oceans, with the biggest being off the Pacific Coast. Plastic isn’t biodegradable. It just breaks apart into tiny pieces that

animals can ingest, and litters the land and waterways.

Her mantra is to not only reduce, reuse and recycle, but to also redesign and refuse. The latter means bringing a bottle, bag, utensils and other items so they are used multiple times instead of being discarded after one use.

The League has also been instrumental in hosting cleanup days throughout the basin – mainly at beaches.

Also at the April 20 talk at Lake Tahoe Community College were reps from Clean Tahoe and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Catherine Cecchi of Clean Tahoe, a nonprofit operating on the California side of the South Shore, last year collected 490 cubic yards of litter that had been illegally dumped. Her crews pick up trash in neighborhoods and along the roads. Mattresses and appliances are often abandoned.

In 2015, Clean Tahoe dealt with more than 600 animal–trash incidents.

“It’s a major problem,” Cecchi said. It’s locals, tourists, owners and renters, single family and multi-family, as well as commercial entities that are putting out trash before pick up day or having dumpsters overflow.

Devin Middlebrook with TRPA spoke about the collaborative effort under way called Take Care. It’s aimed at those who don’t have common sense manners – the ones leaving trash behind, throwing cigarette butts off ski lifts or grinding them into the sand and leaving them on the beach, and not picking up after their dogs. The messages are clever, like “Nobody wants to see your dirty butt” and “If it’s your dog, then it’s your doody”.

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Notes:

· Earth Day is being celebrated April 23 at Bijou Community Park in South Lake Tahoe from 10am-3pm.

· Dump Day is June 4. For $5, people may unload a pickup worth of trash at South Tahoe Refuse.

· Report litter issues to Clean Tahoe **online**.

· More info about the Take Care campaign is **online**.

· The League to Save Lake Tahoe is having a community cleanup day near Heavenly Village on April 22. Go **online** for details and to sign up.