

Lakeside gambling on workers for future success

By Kathryn Reed

Lakeside Inn has long been the favorite casino for locals. Now it wants to be the preferred employer.

The hotel-casino **a couple years ago** had designs of re-creating itself so it would be a focal point when driving in from the east. Those plans have been shelved and instead the owners are focusing on the locals and not just the tourists.

Yes, physical improvements are under way that are designed to modernize the property and appeal to the guests, but there is also a renewed emphasis on the employees.

“We want to be the preferred employer,” Stacy Noyes, president of Lakeside, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We want a happy staff who feels supported and are given the tools to do their job. Then the guests are rewarded and it’s profitable for the business. When you forget about the staff no one wins.”

She sent out a memo to workers at the start of the summer season outlining Lakeside’s goals. In part it said, “In the past we have explored the possibility of redeveloping our site to a newer hotel and casino, but last year, turned our energy and focus toward growing our business. We spent many years saving our way to success after the economic downturn. Now it is time to invest and improve.”

For the employees it means rewarding them with things that are meaningful to them. While wages were increased in 2015-16, that did not bring in more applicants. It is doing things like resurrecting the “blue bucks” program that had been disbanded in 2008 that workers like. This gives them money on each check that can be spent at the casino. This in turn is increasing

the camaraderie among coworkers as they hang out together in their off time.

Studies show that happy employees are more productive employees. *Harvard Business Review* says, "Close work friendships boost employee satisfaction by 50 percent." Multiple studies show that people want autonomy at work, to be respected and to have an employer with a social conscience.

Noyes said her managers meet regularly to talk about employees' environment, what they value and what is important to them.

Still, many positions go unfilled. Lakeside is not alone in having difficulty filling job openings. Practically every employer in the Tahoe basin-Truckee area is having a hard time finding workers. Lakeside, Harrah's and Harveys no longer test for marijuana, which was a concession to realizing so many people today are inhaling. Today's worker doesn't want to work nights or weekends. When there is a powder day they opt for the slopes and call in sick or are a no-show. Lack of affordable housing is another hurdle.

While workers may be different today, in many ways the work is the same as it has been for decades. The benefits are what can change.

At Lakeside there are 50 employees in food and beverage with J1 visas, and more in housekeeping. These are people from other countries.

"They are a Band-Aid. They don't replace the full-time, local who lives here," Noyes said.

As she works to hire more locals, the owners are also investing in the physical aspects of the business. Consultants have been hired to "make our casino floor more modern and attractive and our marketing promotion more contemporary and fun for our guests." Technology had been improved, heating and

cooling systems upgraded, new carpet installed. The parking lot will be resealed; a new roof is on the to-do list.

Noyes isn't releasing the dollar figure being invested.

Her memo said, "The goal with the investment in our buildings, property and technology is to improve our cash flow. As we being operating at a higher level, we will then be able to reward you, the staff for supporting Lakeside thought the challenging years."