

Spreading hope for those with mental illness

Publisher's note: *This is one of several stories about mental health issues in the Lake Tahoe Basin that will be running through October.*

By Kathryn Reed

Recovery is possible. That is the overriding message from parents of a mentally ill son.

Jeanne Nelson cried in the shower every day for a year grieving for the loss of the life her son could have had, she struggled with guilt for not knowing sooner and therefore not getting him help sooner.



"I wonder if he had gotten help sooner, if his cognition would be higher," she said.

Nelson and her husband, Alan, are the NAMI – National Alliance on Mental Illness – representatives on the South Shore.

Their son is doing fine; lives on his own, has a job. He's on medication, with long lasting injectables his solution. It's just not the life he had dreamed about. Adjusting expectations – that's another thing everyone in the family has had to do.

The couple spoke April 13 at Temple Bat Yam in South Lake Tahoe about what they have learned and now what they have to offer others. There was a time when they didn't believe their son had any hope for a normal life. That is why they are quick

to share that things can get better – for everyone.

NAMI started in 1979 in New York with two moms with grown children who had mental issues. The grass-roots movement has expanded to every state.

One of the big issues with any mental condition is the stigma. NAMI is helping to break down those barriers. The hope is one day mental issues will be talked about the same way physical conditions are. After all, the brain is an organ just like the heart and no one winces at discussing heart issues.

“Telling someone to snap out of it is like telling someone who is deaf to listen harder,” Jeanne Nelson said.

Considering 20 percent of the population is living with a mental health condition, the topic is relevant. One problem, though, according to Jeanne Nelson, is that on average the delay in getting treatment is eight to 10 years after symptoms first arise.

Signs to look for include excessive worrying or fear, mood swings, a high-degree of sadness, confused thinking, avoiding social interaction, cutting and change in sleep patterns.

Types of brain disorders include depression, bipolar, schizophrenia, obsessive compulsive disorder, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, and eating disorders.

It’s also good to know one’s family history because mental illness can be hereditary.



Jeanne Nelson on April 13
talks about mental illness.
Photo/LTN

Even after a diagnosis it can still be difficult to get help. Psychiatrists are in short supply throughout the country. In-patient treatment programs – especially in rural areas like Lake Tahoe – don't exist.

Many who are in jail are there with some sort of mental illness. Help for them varies from facility to facility. Substance abuse and mental health often go hand-in-hand.

Jeanne Nelson said there is a tremendous difference between what happens in California and Nevada.

"There's less oversight in Nevada. It has the worst mental health care in the nation," she said.

The *Reno Gazette-Journal* this year exposed some of the squalid conditions of clients in Northern Nevada that has gotten the state's attention.

The couple said it's important for the advocates of those with mental issues to be vocal, file grievances when necessary and document everything. And while health care officials cannot share information about a patient who is 18 or older without that person's permission, it is perfectly fine to provide doctors with insight about the patient that might help with a diagnosis or care.

Notes:

- NAMI support group meetings are the second Tuesday of the month from 6-7:30pm at the South Lake Tahoe Library.

Opinion: EDC has good CAO candidate in-house

By Larry Weitzman

Who will be the next chief administrative officer for El Dorado County?

In another recent failure of the CAO's office, EDC's Economic Development Policy J-7 allowing the county to give tax incentives for businesses to locate in EDC lapsed during some potential negotiations to locate a small to medium business enterprise in El Dorado County. In February 2015, the policy was extended to Nov. 10, 2015.



Larry Weitzman

No one in the CAO's office calendared Policy J-7 for renewal,

clearly the fault of CAO Larry Combs. He has made so many mistakes I am losing count; never mind his recommending no General Fund funding for road maintenance or his own potentially illegal employment contract that I discussed recently. His record as a CAO here and other places is below dismal, yet he continues ruining our county, never mind recommending raising taxes and reducing road maintenance. He even told the BOS more than once he doesn't even have a handle on the budget. This is also the fault of the board for not demanding intensive background checks for high ranking employees, including Combs, which they haven't done in six years, maybe eight.

There is a solution to hiring competent administrative people, especially in light of employing a new CAO. It's called rigorous and responsible background checks, something that hasn't been done in the last three CAOs appointments, HR director and other department heads. As long as Larry Combs is in charge, it is doubtful it will happen. Maybe it's laziness or incompetence, but with Combs in charge, he will not recommend the best applicant, but will recommend a friend of Combs who he already hired as ACAO, Shawne Corley, less than two months ago. Sounds like Combs is trying to cover (up) his own tracks as CAO, including his illegal employment contract.

Corley, the ACAO for Sutter County already had a chance to be an Interim CAO in Sutter County, a county one-third the size of El Dorado, a general fund budget one-quarter the size of EDC and a county population (about 20,000) that is one-seventh our size. Reports indicate that she failed in that job in a matter of months (see June 2015 Sutter County Grand Jury Report).

After Combs was let go as CAO by Merced County, in late 2012 the Sutter BOS hired Combs for about \$5,000 to recruit a new CAO for Sutter. I have written this story and the mess this new CAO, Jim Arkens, made for Sutter. It was so bad, the Sutter BOS advised Arkens they were not going to renew his

three-year contract about two and a half years into it. While Arkens got paid for the next four or five months, he stopped showing up for work.

Arkens biggest failure was binding the county to a \$10 million contract with a \$9 million, 3.7 percent loan for a solar farm, illegally keeping an illegal separate bank account for it, kept it secret from the auditor (violations of the County Charter) until sometime after signing it and as of a couple of months ago and almost two years after signing, the project is not even finished. This is the guy who Combs recommended. Of course if the EDC BOS had done a background check, they would have known all this information. It was all over the media and even in the Sutter County Grand Jury report for 2015.

And now our Board of Supervisors is trusting Combs to select our new CAO as he has been assigned to do by our BOS. That idea is not only outrageous, but an abdication of one of the most important duties of the BOS, to choose the best candidate. Combs is incompetent not only as a CAO, but in selecting a new CAO not only because of his hiring friends, but his failure to perform background checks. It is something never to be overlooked.

An April 1 letter to the BOS and signed by all seven elected department heads forcefully recommended that Don Ashton be EDC's next CAO. Ashton is the current head of the largest department in the county, Health and Human Services. He did receive a rigorous and comprehensive background check, not from HR, but from the county sheriff about six years ago who performed the same background check as hiring a new deputy. EDC sheriff's detectives did much of the legwork not only investigating everything on his resume, but interviewing prior employers, prior work associates, work history, and interviewing and checking on his education, neighbors, friends and other references.

Ashton was hired to be the sheriff's chief financial officer,

where he put in place new money saving procedures and processes that saved the department tens of thousands of dollars. Ashton has a B.S. in environmental health and a master's in public administration (both from Cal State Northridge) and has worked in the public sector for most of his adult life. His last position before EDC was deputy executive officer of Administration and Finance for the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, a county of 10 million people and over 4,000 square miles. He is not only eminently qualified, he went through the most thorough of background checks.

When the position of ACAO came open a few months ago, Ashton applied. He didn't get the job as it was given to a friend of CAO Larry Combs, Shawne Corley who at one time served as ACAO to Combs in Sutter County. She hired in at a base salary of about \$162,000 (not counting benefits) annually. I doubt any background scrutiny was done by HR. Comb and/or Knorr recently also hired another Sutter County alumnus into the job of EDC risk manager at a salary of over \$120,000, plus benefits. The new risk manager being from Sutter might just be a coincidence.

I asked Supervisor Brian Veerkamp whether a background check was done on Combs by Pam Knorr, our current HR director, and he said yes. If anyone had done a simple Google search as I have, Combs questionable background would have been obvious. Combs is here because he was a friend of Knorr who begged the BOS privately to hire this guy. Any interview with past and current public officials from Sutter or Merced counties would have sunk Combs. And then there is the lack of a background check on HR Director Pam Knorr. Knorr was a good friend of Terri Daly who recommended Knorr to the BOS. No interviews were conducted with members of the Alpine County BOS or other public officials where she was CAO of an 800 square mile county with a total population of 1,150 where many of the county employees live in Nevada.

Combs has been here about 10 months and admits he doesn't know much about the county due to his two days a week schedule. Our seven electeds who wrote the recommendation letter praising Don Ashton's work history and qualifications have worked for the county longer than any BOS member, many for over two decades and have known Ashton for his entire EDC career (six years). ACA0 Corley has been employed in EDC a month and a half. And Ashton, in less than four years working in EDC, was appointed department head of the county's largest agency. If anyone knows the quality and thoroughness of Ashton, it is Sheriff John D'Agostini, who was one of the seven electeds who signed the recommendation letter.

Ashton will take EDC forward in the tradition of government that is honest and completely transparent, back to the tradition of "government of the people, by the people and for the people." He will demand excellence and thereby get our fiscal house in order. Is the BOS afraid of that possibility? Failing to appoint Ashton would be the biggest failure of this board in the last six years. Failure of the BOS to do the right thing for our county would then warrant a serious recall effort.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

House GOP reopens bidding on Calif. water bill

By Michael Doyle, McClatchy Washington Bureau

House Republicans intent on storing more California water and redirecting it to farms have resurrected some familiar and controversial ideas, this time as part of a must-pass spending

bill.

The provisions, including a freeze on an ambitious San Joaquin River restoration program and mandated pumping from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, are now folded into a Fiscal 2017 energy and water appropriations bill. It's a new tactical move, designed for leverage.

The provisions included in the 82-page energy and water bill are a familiar wish list, largely reflecting previous California water legislative packages that have failed to clear Congress over the past four years. There are some differences, though.

Read the whole story

Keys fuel spill cleaned up; source unknown

Crews on Friday finished skimming the entire cove at the Tahoe Keys where an oil spill was first reported on April 11.

"We have not identified a source or what exactly it was," Cathe Pool with Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Samples taken Monday and Thursday were sent to a lab for testing.

Several boats were looked at, but none was the source of the leak that caused a slick, thin sheen to cover much of the lagoon and boat slips near the professional buildings.

"[Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association] said when they first

saw it, they could see rainbows. That's typical of gas, but it didn't smell like gas and we didn't see the rainbows after that," Pool said.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Construction to tie up much of Hwy. 89

Caltrans intends to resume work on Highway 89 along the West Shore starting next week.

The \$70.1 million water quality improvement project is building new drainage facilities to collect and treat stormwater runoff. It includes adding curbs and gutters, widening the highway and repaving an eight-mile section of Highway 89 between Tahoma and Tahoe City.

This season the focus will be on the remaining four miles between Eagle Rock and Granlibakken Road.

Caltrans has two other water quality improvement projects on Highway 89 that will be in construction this summer. A \$24.4 million project from the Y in South Lake Tahoe to Cascade Road, north of Camp Richardson, is in its second season of construction and will be completed this fall.

Picking up where that project ends, the final segment of Highway 89 to be rebuilt for drainage improvements will be from Cascade Road to just north of the Eagle Falls viaduct over Emerald Bay. The \$13 million project will take two seasons to construct.

Highway 89 from Tahoe City to Alpine Meadows Road will be

repaved this summer as part of ongoing preventive maintenance.

Utility work on Highway 50 in South Lake Tahoe will continue this season between the Y and Trout Creek. The utility work is in advance of a Caltrans EIP project that will begin next season and run through 2019.

4 Tahoe bear cubs get human help



These Stateline cubs will be cared for in Reno before being returned to the wild.

Photo/Nevada Department of Wildlife

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Four bear cubs orphaned near Stateline will have a chance to grow up near Reno, at least until next winter.

That's according to the Nevada Department of Wildlife which rescued the cubs last week after discovering their mother died, apparently of natural causes.

The cubs had been living under a walkway since their birth in January, according to a homeowner who reported the family of bears on her property.

Read the whole story

Expect to see smoke for controlled burns

Weather permitting, Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District, Nevada Division of Forestry and U.S. Forest Service may continue prescribed fire operations April 18.

On the East Shore, operations may take place on the north side of Spooner Lake off Highway 28, Spooner Summit, Camp Galilee and on Kingsbury Grade near Edgewood Drive. On the South Shore, operations may take place near Lake Tahoe Boulevard and Sawmill Road, Panther Lane near South Tahoe High School, off Highway 89 near Spring Creek, and off Santa Claus Drive and West River Parkway near Christmas Valley.

To view a map with project locations and details, go **online**.

Residual smoke may be seen in locations where operations have taken place over the last several weeks.

South Tahoe pool available for kayakers

South Lake Tahoe is offering kayakers an opportunity to practice rolling skills at the city pool.

No instruction will be offered. What is available is a controlled and calm pool environment.

People need to bring their own kayak. Helmets and personal floatation devices are recommended.

The pool is available on Saturdays from April 16-May 21 from 3:30-4:30pm. Cost is \$6 each day.

For additional information, call 530.542.6056.

Report: Nev. No. 5 for domestic violence homicide

By Marcella Corona, Reno Gazette-Journal

Nevada has the fifth highest rate of domestic violence homicides involving guns nationwide, according to a report released by the Nevada Network Against Domestic Violence.

The report showed that Nevada women are 65 percent more likely to be shot and killed by their current or former partners than

women in other states.

The report identified 46 gun homicides by intimate partners from 2010 to 2014, advocates said.

Read the whole story

Tahoe scrap wood transformed into ukuleles



Friends are turning old wood into much sought after musical instruments. Photo/TyDe Music

By Jenny Kane, Reno Gazette-Journal

When Devin Price and Tyler Joersz craft a ukulele, they don't see it as just making an instrument.

They see it as breathing life back into nature.

On a warm spring morning in their company studio, they admire one of the ukuleles in the works. The front of it is made from wood collected from a weathered Lake Tahoe pier. The back, from a friend's cabin. The instrument bears signs of its past life, a pinch of lichen embedded in the wood, a faint bird poop stain and a rusty nail hole.

Price, 34, and Joersz, 31, are the co-founders of TyDe Music, a custom ukulele company that creates ukuleles inspired by the natural surroundings of their home base in Kings Beach.

Read the whole story