

Landscaper transforms sod into garden



Raised mounds planted with perennials will look dramatically different in a year. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Publisher's note: *This is one in a random series of stories about what it's like to go through the South Tahoe Public Utility District turf buyback program.*

By Kathryn Reed

A spiral herb garden, raised mounds with endless plants and a dry riverbed. Those were not part of my plans when I decided to remove my turf. Those were Brian Hirdman's ideas when he was hired to take over my landscaping project.

Hirdman's passion, creativity and desire to reuse products attracted me to him. Plus, he shops locally. He had a vision that never would have crossed my mind no matter how many magazines I looked at or friends I spoke to. With his iPad he showed me other yards he had transformed. I was inspired knowing I could have something unique and well beyond my

ability.

His brand of landscaping expanded my vocabulary to include permaculture and hugelkultur.

He was able to combine my need to use the yard for wood splitting, wanting relatively low maintenance and his sense of style.



Dead grass has been replaced with the prowess of Brian Hirdman's landscaping .

Enlisting help

I knew I was in over my head I when rented the **sod cutter last month** and started to pick up the pieces. Dirt is heavy.

That aspect of the project alone could have taken me all summer to finish. And the grassy area was only 804 square feet.

I initially met Hirdman in May 2014 when he was putting in a **garden at the Family Resource Center**. We reconnected when I ran into him last month at Ahern's where we were both renting sod cutters.

Fortunately, he called that weekend. I turned the machinery over to Hirdman and his helper Garrett Murphy. With two cutters they had the yard sliced and diced in no time.

The two took the sod and made them into mounds, then covered it with newspaper, followed by horse poop and soil with some repeating – like making lasagna. No need for the black gardening cloth. The newspapers will breakdown. The horse poop from Camp Richardson stables is weed free based on what the animals are fed.

The beds will compact a bit, but for the most part will remain raised.



Newspapers, which will decompose, are part of the process to create the mounds.

Beyond the basics

Naturally, all of this comes with a price. Hirdman is adept at knowing what South Tahoe Public Utility District requires so I will get my rebate check. His base price is three times the square footage of the sod being removed. This includes removing the sod, planting the plants, irrigation, manure and wood chips.

Initially I had hoped to stay close to my rebate of \$1,200. That was pre-Hirdman.

An unexpected infusion of cash into my bank account that had nothing to do with work didn't stay there long. I wanted to do more than the basic turf removal. Hirdman became the financial beneficiary and I no longer have the worst front yard on the street.



Brian Hirdman, left, and Garrett Murphy work on the main raised area.

I love that everything in the spiral herb garden is edible or has medicinal purposes. It's one of Hirdman's signature designs – creating these out of rock from Tahoe Sand and Gravel. The choice of where plants go is based on the microclimates that are formed from the tiered garden.

This along with the dry riverbed that will catch the excess water from the rain barrel were extras.

Before hiring Hirdman I was most worried about figuring out the irrigation system. Based on the number of hours he was digging in the dirt to deal with a busted line and needing to adjust the pressure, I'm glad all but the extra parts were part of the bid price.

I also didn't skimp on the number of plants. Oddly, today it looks like more could be planted because there is so much openness between greenery. In a year, though, the yard will look dramatically different, full of color, and taller foliage.

One of the mounds the guys created is designed to attract butterflies, insects and humming birds – my own little ecosystem that goes beyond the squirrels and bunnies (and occasional bear and coyote) that exist today.

Hirdman and Murphy also moved the chairlift swing, which in itself was monumental. I remember how hard it was to get it to where it had been. It's now in a spot between two large pines that look out onto a California Tahoe Conservancy lot. The plants to the side and behind make a sanctuary of sorts, which in the coming years will be more pronounced as things grow.



Brian Hirdman and Garrett Murphy create the spiral herb garden

More to do

The whole yard is not completely done. I'll be getting gutters this fall that will drain into a rain barrel that still needs to be purchased.

I have rounds picked out to create a bench, but still need to find a couple snowboards or some skis to turn that into a reality.

I'll probably move more sand around from the badminton court to put under the swing.

Next spring I'll bring the wine barrel from the back, which today has thriving tomato plants in it, and place it in a preselected spot. Most likely annuals will go in it.

Oh, and I need to get my South Tahoe PUD inspection so I can get my rebate.

Landscaping without sod

Landscaper Brian Hirdman talks about how he took sod out of a yard in South Lake Tahoe and transformed it to be a parcel that needs very little water.

Opinion: Body cameras on cops just the beginning

By C. Robert Gibson, Aljazeera America

The grass-roots push to equip police officers with body cameras has been effective: One-third of all police departments now have them, a significant increase since 2013, when the US Justice Department found that 75 percent of surveyed police departments didn't use the technology.

Recent incidents in Cincinnati and rural New Hampshire have shown that the cameras simultaneously hold trigger-happy cops accountable and exonerate police officers who only pulled the trigger when they had no other option. Now, it's time for local governments to start listening to and implementing further demands of the police-accountability movement.

Body cameras thus prove themselves to be indispensable. One officer who acted recklessly is facing murder charges, and two other officers who acted out of self-defense won't be charged.

When a police officer is equipped with a body camera, he or she will be more likely to think before pulling the trigger, knowing that his or her actions will be under public scrutiny.

However, body cameras only scratch the surface of what it takes for police departments to become fully accountable to the communities they're meant to serve.

[Read the whole story](#)

Poll: Not all agree about slavery's role in Civil War

By Samantha Ehlinger, Tribune News Service

WASHINGTON — A century and a half after the war ended, Americans still fundamentally disagree about slavery's role in the Civil War and what to teach schoolchildren about it, according to a new McClatchy-Marist Poll.

Fifty-four percent of respondents think slavery was the main reason for the Civil War. A sizable minority, 41 percent, do not think slavery was the main reason, the national survey found.

Echoing that divide, they also are split over what to teach children. A majority, 54 percent, believe schools should teach that slavery was the main reason for the war; 38 percent think they should not teach that.

[Read the whole story](#)

Sierra to host vigil for fallen firefighter

Sierra-at-Tahoe will be the site of a candlelight vigil for Michael Hallenbeck on Aug. 12 at 7pm.



Michael
Hallenbeck

The 21-year-old U.S. Forest Service firefighter died Aug. 8 while fighting a lightning-caused fire south of Echo Summit.

Hallenbeck was a Sierra-at-Tahoe employee for the past two seasons and a firefighter for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

During the 2015-16 ski season, an organized Ride for Mikey will take place on the slopes of Sierra.

Candles for the vigil will be lighted at sunset on the Solstice Plaza in the base area of Sierra-at-Tahoe. Candles will be provided.

El Nino meets 'the blob' – but will it help?

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

There's El Nino, and then there's "the blob."

Both are phenomena associated with warm water in the Pacific. Both could have some impact on the weather, including building hopes for a big winter that might help pull the West out of protracted drought.

No one really knows.

"This is a little bit of an unprecedented situation," said Kelly Redmond, deputy director of the Western Regional Climate Center in Reno. "It's like two sets of dice that influence the atmosphere. But do these sets of dice have a string connecting them?"

El Nino is characterized by warmer-than-normal surface water temperatures in the equatorial Pacific stretching from the coast of Peru to west of the international dateline. After a year of anticipation, conditions came together last March for an El Nino to be officially declared, with scientists now saying there's a better than 90 percent chance the condition will stick around into next winter.

Read the whole story

Mom killed, husband arrested in EDC crash

By Sarah Heise, KCRA-TV

A solo vehicle crash in Georgetown killed a mother of two and resulted in her husband being arrested on DUI charges, according to the California Highway Patrol.

The family of four from the Georgetown area was driving about 10:30 p.m. Sunday on Wentworth Springs Road, east of Quintette Court, officers said.

The father, 32, was driving their pickup when he lost control of the vehicle and it overturned, CHP said.

Read the whole story

Charges likely in personal watercraft collision

By Kathryn Reed

Four people from the Bay Area were injured in a personal watercraft accident in Zephyr Cove, with one man lucky to be alive.

Antonio Villobos, 26, of San Francisco and Scott Alexander, 26, of Campbell were driving and the women – Marisa Borelli, 22, of San Francisco and Erica Sempolski, 26, of San Ramon – were their passengers.

“I don’t think it will be fatal accident. We weren’t sure that

was always going to be the case,” Ed Lyngar, boating education coordinator with the Nevada Division of Wildlife, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Villobos sustained the most serious injuries. The others at a minimum were bruised and banged up.

“Right now it appears there will be charges for both operators of the Jet Skis. Call it a textbook case of reckless operation,” Lyngar said. “This is a common occurrence when Jet Skis buzz each other and spray each other.”

Nevada law dictates vessels must stay five lengths from the next closest vessel. In this case that would have been 50 feet.

Investigators are still trying to determine who turned into whom.

The accident occurred Aug. 1 at 3:15pm about one-quarter mile from shore. The watercraft were rented from the marina at Zephyr Cove. Lyngar noted the resort is not at fault and that employees there are good about giving the safety briefing to people who rent watercraft of any kind.

Alcohol wholesalers push for Nev. recreational pot law

By Conor Shine, Las Vegas Sun

Alcohol wholesalers play a crucial role in providing the Nevada economy with an important lubricant – and they have the political clout to match.

Now, many of those same companies are angling for a piece of what could be Nevada's next big vice – recreational marijuana.

The 2016 ballot will feature a measure that would fully legalize marijuana.

Read the whole story

Treasures revealed as Calif. drought drains lakes

By Javier Panzar, Los Angeles Times

The Lakeview Motel's name is false advertising these dry days.

The same thing is true for the Paradise Cove Lodge down California 178.

That's because the water level in man-made Lake Isabella has dropped about 59 feet since the last big wet year in 2011. There are 32,632 acre-feet of water in the lake – 5.8 percent of the lake's capacity, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The water level is low enough that dozens of ghostly white cottonwood trees at the bottom of the lake have emerged from the water.

The roads leading to three submerged towns beneath Lake Oroville are being slowly exposed as well, said Mike Hubbartt, a state park interpreter at the lake. Officials are checking to make sure hikers don't steal old artifacts there, he said.

In many ways, unearthing the past is a ritual of the drought

cycle.

Read the whole story