

Idea overload stalls sod replacement project

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

Brittle. That's my front yard. It's a yard, but definitely not grass.

Friends have come by to offer advice about how to transform it, others have emailed, called or told me in person what I should do. All of this has been welcome. The problem is I'm overloaded with information and ideas. Thank goodness I have two years to finish this endeavor.

The best advice I've received is just start – and start it in small sections. I still need to take that advice.

One friend suggested having a girls' turf removal party to get it all done quickly. I'm worried I wouldn't have any friends to enjoy the finished product with. Others said look into using a sod remover device. Why aren't home improvement-machine rental stores open seven days a week in Tahoe?

Grass has some serious roots that I took for granted when all I did in the past was set the automatic sprinklers and mow. My yard is uneven, so that will take some leveling. I still need to mark the sprinklers – sort of like the call before you dig campaign used for utility line identification.

While no turf has been removed as I write this, I have bought plants. The master gardeners' sale at Lake Tahoe Community College earlier this month was fantastic. All of these experts were milling about, suggesting what works well where. And the

plants were so cheap.



The local master gardeners group has an annual plant sale in South Lake Tahoe in June. Photo/LTN

I was told to get there early for the best selection. Those in the know were not kidding. I thought it meant “Tahoe time” early. Wrong. I missed out on the trees.

The \$50 worth of plants I have are mostly sitting along the edge of the house in shade. One looks dead. The edibles are out back in more permanent containers. I’m pretty sure those containers will find their way to the front in the final design.

Design. More procrastination. While Coleen sketched out what the front could look like, I have yet to do a final version.

I’m likely going to take Lisa’s advice and put in gutters. I have someone coming out in July to give me an estimate. This will render the current TRPA-designed (rather ugly) drip line a moot point. I want to add a rain barrel. (Who knew there were so many types – this just added to my sense of being overwhelmed.) The irony of tweaking the drip line is that it plays no role in the turf buy back; it just has a lot to do with the yard design.

I've figured out the work involved isn't just the grass area. Yes, it's my choice – but it's part of the whole scheme. If money and coverage were not issues, the driveway, walkway and kitchen expansion would be occurring. This is because the front yard ties into all of that. Oh well, another day for those improvements.

I have split the wood that was in the way. I've been taking dog walks on streets I don't normally travel on so I can get more ideas. I'm sure people think I'm nutty taking picture of their plants, color, design and yard art. I'm going to steal one idea of having two rounds of wood and making them into a bench. This will be much easier than splitting a couple of these monsters that I can't even move.

I need to create an area for wood splitting that is completely on my property. One friend suggested having the path come from the street. I think it will look better from the driveway, with a little S curve that isn't too decorative to make using a wheelbarrow full of rounds impossible to navigate. But part of me wants to make the path wide enough to drive on to make it easier to unload the rounds. This would necessitate a straight path. It would also mean less area to have to vegetate.

And so, I keep procrastinating. But I do know I can start getting rid of the drip line. That involves moving rocks and probably making the garage inaccessible as I make the driveway a staging area. That should annoy me enough to really start going – and get things accomplished before the snow starts to fly.

What the state is doing

California is considering a statewide initiative, in partnership with local agencies, to collectively replace 50 million square feet of lawns and ornamental turf with drought tolerant landscapes. There will be a meeting about this on

July 2 from 1-3pm in Sacramento. Go online to register for the webinar. Comments on the program are being taken until July 10.

The state Department of Water Resources is also devising a model landscape ordinance at the direction of Gov. Jerry Brown.

The updated draft rules would prohibit installation of turf unless it is used for a specific function such as sports fields or gathering areas, require the installation of efficient sprinkler nozzles, ban turf in street medians and parkways with few exceptions and require use of compost to improve the water-holding capacity of soil.

Officials say the law would reduce water use at a new home by 16,000 gallons a year, or 30 percent. Water use on new commercial landscapes would be cut by approximately 40 percent. California is expected to add 472,000 single- and multi-family housing units with an associated 20,000 acres of new landscape over the next three years. The state's population is expected to grow by more than 11 million, reaching nearly 50 million people by 2050.

State law requires all land-use agencies, such as cities and counties, to adopt a water-efficient landscape ordinance that is at least as efficient as the model ordinance prepared by DWR.

Opinion: EDC Grand Jury has

outlived its usefulness

By Larry Weitzman

While the precursor of the grand jury system dates back beyond the Magna Carta (which just had its 800-year anniversary on June 15), after reading the political claptrap from the current El Dorado County Grand Jury (2014-15), it appears that its usefulness has past.

One of the reports, "Time to Admit & Correct a Mistake" (Case GJ 14-15) wants to abolish the County Charter and revert to a general law county, which is a step backward in democracy. The appropriate title for this report should have been "Putting political Gain Above what's Right for the County." As stated in my column from a year ago, the grand jury is no longer a fact finder but a political body out to create political power for certain individuals. In fact, this grand jury and the several before it are pursuant to the Quadra Case (411 F. Supp 451) very likely illegally constituted.



Larry Weitzman

In my column from July 14, 2014, explained that the 2013-14 grand jury was an illogical attempt to neuter the Board of Supervisors and enhance the power of the chief administrative officer by first eliminating elected department heads and then giving the CAO the absolute power to appoint all department heads – including all department heads currently appointed by the Board of Supervisors – was among the many power hungry charter changes sought by the CAO. This current grand jury –

which is composed of some members from the previous grand jury – is trying another approach by claiming that we should revert back to a general law county where only three department heads are elected, the sheriff, the DA and the assessor, the rest of the current electeds should be appointed by the CAO.

Using illogical or specious facts, the GJ commences its rant by claiming that only 14 counties of California's 58 counties are charter counties, leading the reader to believe that El Dorado County is in the extreme minority, one of the outcasts. This is a good example how liars figure and figures lie. While that fact may be true, is it relevant? What is relevant is who the charter counties are. It turns out that about three-quarters of California's population live in charter counties. It is mostly low population counties that are not charter counties, like Alpine, Modoc, Calaveras and Amador. In mid-size counties, Tehama, Butte, Placer and El Dorado, the voters have chosen a charter county. Tehama is the smallest population-wise with about 63,000 people, about a third of El Dorado County's population.

The population of charter counties exceeds 25 million. Charter counties give the voters more democracy and a bureaucracy that is more responsive. Ever try to fire or get a response from a non-elected bureaucrat? An appointed auditor or tax collector might be beholden to the appointing body or official, creating areas of mischief. Independent checks and balances are the key to a vibrant democracy.

Attacking the Charter Committee

This GJ claims the Charter Review Committee ignored the prior GJ (13-14) charter changes such as remove term limits for supervisors or create them for elected department heads. I attended every CRC meeting except the first meeting, which was perfunctory. Nearly every item from the GJ recommendations was extensively discussed. The CRC did make five recommendations to the BOS, three of which the voters approved with two more

set for the next election.

Chairman interrogated

Chairman of the CRC, Kris Payne, was interviewed by the current GJ and wasn't asked about the accomplishments of the committee or what was done, except the GJ says, Payne said that the CRC "didn't have the authority to consider the GJ's report unless directed by the BOS." So the current GJ is saying those recommendations needed to be reviewed by a new CRC.

I have news for the GJ, in the meetings I attended which were effectively all of them, the report was discussed and found to be ludicrous for the most part. It would usurp most of the BOS' power, meaning the voters' power by placing too much power and authority into the hands of one person, the CAO; that the voters could then do little to change as the BOS would be effectively neutered. It was an attempted takeover of power by Terri Daly, CAO at the time of the 2013-14 grand jury. In fact, the Charter changes that were written appeared to be designed by Daly.

Term limits were also extensively discussed and left alone. The committee understood that terms limits on legislators, i.e., people who make laws and land-use decisions are one thing, but term limits on professional department heads are completely different as they have no lawmaking ability or far ranging power. Why would you limit your right to use a CPA, doctor or lawyer to just eight or 12 years? In real life most people keep their professional help for life.

Payne said the questions he was asked by the GJ were always leading and they seemed to want to find fault with the CRC. Payne says the CRC did not abdicate its legal responsibility. It appears that this GJ wants a do-over on the CRC. Pack it with its people and try and have five people remake the county in its image. In the GJ report it clearly states the BOS and

the CRC have been unwilling to consider the need for repeal or amendment to the charter. As CRC chairman said they and the BOS approved five changes. All the other recommendations were rejected. What makes this GJ so smart?

Payne was extremely proud of the performance of the CRC. Meetings were done in the evening so there could be more public participation. It was set in a conference room and while attendance was large, well beyond the five committee members, everyone had a seat at the large conference table and Payne encouraged public participation on all issues. Meetings were always timely noticed on the BOS agenda and Payne carefully maintained Brown Act compliance.

Still pulling puppet strings

In another twist this GJ biggest complainant appears to be none other than Daly, who was seen continually going in and out of the GJ room. She failed to get her ridiculous power-grabbing ideas effectuated last year so she went at it again this year. As with last year's GJ, this GJ became a pawn of Daly's manipulation.

Kill the messenger

If their report isn't laughable already, then it's their claim that "the absence of a local robust media market means voters in EDC lack reliable information about county government." And with that claim, the GJ even attacked the *Mountain Democrat* for its columns and several editorials; first demeaning the newspaper, saying it is only "published but three times a week and has a circulation of only 10,300..." The words "but" and "only" demonstrate the political editorializing of the GJ. Why are they demeaning the *Mountain Democrat*? Maybe their next move will be an attack on the First Amendment. Maybe the GJ should inquire of Terri Daly about the *MD's* impotence. Perhaps the GJ never heard of the Internet and social media.

What makes the GJ media experts anyway? All it does is

demonstrate their bias with specious, unfounded claims and a lack of real knowledge of the media and the lack of transparency within the CAOs office who often won't talk to the press.

IT disaster

Without showing that every claim they make is a virtual spin job, perhaps the most obvious is the GJ's failure to understand the Cost Allocation Plan that is the responsibility of the auditor-controller. The GJ shows it has no understanding of the plan, the law or department responsibilities under the plan. The Cost Allocation Plan was more than adequate and passed muster during a recent State Controller's audit. This plan was in existence for over 10 years and never had a problem in its operation among the various departments until Daly's handpicked director took over Information Technologies. It's at that point IT failed to do direct billings properly. This has nothing to do with the plan, but everything to do with the IT department.

But the GJ tried to blame the auditor for the mistakes of the IT department and its inept and totally incompetent director appointed by Daly. The loss of funds was the failure of the IT to do proper record keeping and billing. The BOS finally removed the IT director where she had no business being in the first place. The auditor can't replace the records lost by the IT director. The facts are clear on this issue and it is just another fabrication created by the GJ. In other words the GJ for the last several years has become a purely political body and not a fact-finding body. It was this way last year as well.

The county spends a lot of money on the GJ. (The \$80,000 annual budget is more than double the Yolo and Placer budgets of \$35,000.) We should abolish the GJ or at a minimum, defund it. Of the 50 states in the United States, only two have civil grand juries. Forty-eight states don't or have abolished them.

And only about 13 percent of the U.S. population suffers under this political tomfoolery. This GJ and many of the recent GJs before are not properly composed as provided by law with respect to diversity in age, race, and location and are supposed to be picked from a cross-section of EDC and a large jury pool. Because there are so few applicants a recruitment process is almost necessary, allowing cliques to form or special interest groups to take over the process which becomes a witch hunt as demonstrated here with its entirely bogus findings. They should all be rejected.

We will never know how the GJ concocted this hack report and the 14 others, as it is secretive and unaccountable. But it is obvious several of the reports are a simply another attempt at a county coup motivated by politics. What needs to be abolished are not the County Charter and the disenfranchising of the voters, but the El Dorado County Grand Jury itself. If that can't be done, then it should at least be defunded.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of rescue.

Interviewing for a job is taking longer than ever

By Jena McGregor, Washington Post

If it seems like it's taken a long time for that recruiter to call you back, or for that first interview – and second, and third – to turn into a job offer, you have company. According to a report by Glassdoor, the interview process looks to be taking longer than ever.

The report, released on this month, analyzed more than

340,000 “interview reviews” that job candidates and employees have submitted on Glassdoor’s careers site over the past six years. It examined differences in how long it takes to interview in various job categories, sectors and cities. Washington, D.C. is the slowest city in the nation by far, job seekers say.

Its findings also suggest a sharp rise in the overall length of the average interview process in the United States – 23 days in 2014, up from about 13 days in 2010. (After controlling for some factors, that rise looked somewhat smaller but still significant.)

Read the whole story

Free music at Valhalla

On consecutive Sundays, the sprawling lawn outside Valhalla’s Grand Hall will transform into a free concert haven.

Bring a picnic, lawn chairs and the whole family.

The music goes from noon-2pm.

Dates and artists:

July 5 – The Empty Wallets: roots rock, jam band from Tahoe and the Sierra Foothills

July 12 – CW and Mr. Spoons: western ragtime, cowboy croons and swing

July 19 – New World Jazz Project: a South Tahoe funky favorite of locals

Aug. 2 – The Yolos: jazz, French folk, roots influenced combo from Sacramento.

For more info, go online.

Washington Fire 45% contained; roads opening



More than 1,100 people are working to suppress the lightning-caused Washington Fire near Markleeville. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

Updated 8:15pm:

Firefighters are getting a handle on the Washington Fire burning near Markleeville. It is 45 percent contained, with 17,786 acres burned.

Highway 4 through Markleeville, south over Ebbetts Pass, is

open to through traffic. Highway 89 starting at the junction with Highway 4 and continuing over Monitor Pass remains closed, as does Wolf Creek Road

Hotshot crews on the eastern fire edge are constructing a direct hand line in steep and rocky terrain while being supported by helicopters.

The lightning-caused fire started June 19. It is still three miles from Markleeville in Alpine County.

Updated 12:50pm:

U.S. Forest Service crews are working to extinguish nine small fires resulting from last night's lightning strikes in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Most of the fires are single-tree fires with some ground fire, and the largest is only a half-acre in size.

The Forest Service is staffing all nine fires with the assistance of Tahoe-Douglas and North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection Districts. The fires are scattered between Kings Beach and Cave Rock in hike-in only terrain. A helicopter is assisting with reconnaissance and water drops as needed.

Updated 11:50am:

East Fork Fire Protection District reports that all six fires that were reported June 27 are at 1 acre or less in size and, have been extinguished or have crews on scene mopping up the fires. The crews have orders for full extinguishment.

Concerns are the potential for new fires starts due to the multiple lightning strikes that occurred during Saturday's storm that pushed through the valley. This concern is going to continue through the week.

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While today's afternoon thunderstorms are expected to bring more rain than Saturday's, fire personnel are worried about

flash floods in the Washington Fire area that could make roads slick and dangerous, as well as bring debris down from charred slopes.

The 9-day-old fire is 37 percent contained, with 17,697 acres burned near Markleeville.

Keeping the fire from reaching the town is still the goal of firefighters. On Saturday the precautionary evacuation order was lifted for this Alpine County town.

One structure has been lost, but no details have been released about it.

Road and campground closures still exist as nearly 1,200 people continue to battle the fire that is burning in a steep, remote area.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Sheriff's office collecting prescription drugs

El Dorado County residents on July 12 from noon-5pm may get rid of expired, unused, and unwanted prescription medications.

Drop-off locations include:

- El Dorado County sheriff's substation, 4354 Town Center Blvd., Suite 112 in El Dorado Hills.
- Holiday Market, 5030 Ellinghouse Drive in Cool.
- Fire Station 61, 6281 Main St., Georgetown, (8am-noon).
- Safeway Supermarket, 6498 Pony Express Trail, Pollock

Pines.

- El Dorado County Sheriff's Department, 300 Fair Lane, Placerville.
- U.S. Post Office, 6040 Grizzly Flat Road in Somerset.
- Safeway Supermarket, 3380 Coach Lane in Cameron Park.
- Lira's Market, 2977 Highway 50 in Meyers.

The service is free and anonymous, no questions asked.

Study: Nevada losing business-friendly status

By Brian Deka, Las Vegas Sun

A cable news channel this week released its rankings of the nation's top states for business, and the results were not kind to Nevada.

The state fell 16 places to No. 45 in this year's CNBC rankings, which evaluate states based on factors such as infrastructure, education, quality of life, economy and the cost of doing business. The study ranked Nevada 46th overall in 2013 and 29th last year.

"The Silver State offers a ready supply of employees, but the workforce is tarnished by the worst education system in the country," the report said.

Read the whole story

Science behind keeping tomatoes out of the fridge

By Julie R. Thomson, Huffington Post

By now you've probably been told a million times that you should never put tomatoes in the refrigerator. But aside from knowing they'll get soggy and taste a little worse for the wear, do you really know why? We're about to get to the bottom of why you should really store tomatoes on the counter.

Tomatoes originate from warm, desert-like climates, so they prefer to be hot. Tomatoes stored in the fridge aren't just unhappy, they undergo a chemical change that weakens their flavor and alters their texture.

The beloved tomato taste – that deep, grassy flavor – is the result of aroma volatile compounds. Refrigeration not only stops the production of new aroma volatiles, but it also deteriorates already existing ones, a study from French National Institute for Agricultural Research proved.

Read the whole story

Letter: Soroptimist serve up Bread & Broth meal

To the community,

Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe hosted its fourth Adopt A Day of Nourishment this past year on June 2. They sent a wonderful group of Soroptimist members to help at

the dinner.

Kathleen Brown, treasurer, "had a fun time ... great crew and very rewarding." Joining Brown were past Soroptimist presidents, Pat Disney and Cheryl Chambers, and new member Connie Chang. In addition to these four women, regular B&B fourth week volunteer Cindy Archer, and Vicki Gonzales, fourth week cook, made a total of six Soroptimist members helping at the dinner.

Soroptimist is an organization dedicated to improving the quality of life by providing service. Under the leadership of now past president, Archer, Soroptimist International of SLT has focused on hunger in the Lake Tahoe South Shore community and hosting four Adopt A Days was just one of the many projects in the last year that the organization participated in to help ease hunger in our community.

Personifying the Soroptimist mission of "dignity of service", B&B would like to acknowledge member Vicki Gonzales who has been a dedicated cook for B&B for over 25 years and has helped prepare hundreds of meals. Although she "loves working with everyone so much", Gonzales has decided to pursue other areas of interest and cooked her last scheduled meal with B&B in the company of fellow Soroptimist members.

Thank you to all of the generous members of the Soroptimist International of SLT for all of the wonderful service, scholarships and grants that they provide to enrich the lives of our community members.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



- Personal fireworks of all kind are illegal in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

- Northstar Beerfest & Bluegrass Festival is July 3 from 3-6:30pm in the village. Advanced tickets are \$30 and day-of tickets are \$38.

- The Art of Gelato is open in the Ski Run Marina center in South Lake Tahoe.

- Here are the El Dorado-Tahoe and Sierra roadwork schedules from Caltrans for the week.

- Kaitlyn Dias of Cameron Park discusses her role in Disney/Pixar's "Inside Out":