

Women in construction leaving impression in Tahoe

By Alexandra Spychalsky, Moonshine Ink

Construction is a driving force in the Tahoe economy.

The industry is the third largest employer in Tahoe, with 12.6 percent of the local population working at construction-based businesses. And yet, women are underrepresented in the field.

But some women are pioneers in the industry and have risen to the top of their trades, from engineering to architecture, from contracting to sales. They all agree that women face barriers in construction, but assert the industry benefits from the different perspectives that women contribute, and are optimistic about the future.

Patty Heller is the matriarch of Heller Construction, the company she and her husband Bob started together 30 years ago. In the '70s, Heller worked in interior design retail, and Bob was a carpenter. The two joined professional forces in 1987 to form what is now a multi-generational family business that specializes in building custom homes. Their sons Cody and Dan are a partner and a carpenter with the company, respectively.

Read the whole story

Developer wants to build 23

condos in SLT

A 23-unit condominium project is being proposed for South Lake Tahoe.

The owners of the nearly 5-acre parcel on Wildwood Avenue want to build detached units that would be between 2,100- and 2,450-square-feet. Each dwelling would have a two-car garage. Additional parking would be provided.

The existing structure would be torn down.

The Planning Commission will have a public hearing on the matter on July 13 at 3pm at Lake Tahoe Airport.

A mitigated negative declaration has been prepared. Comments on it are being taken until July 10. A copy of it is available at city offices at 1052 Tata Lane.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Sandoval vetoes bill to raise minimum wage

By Associated Press

Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval has vetoed a proposal to raise state minimum wages to \$11 an hour for workers insured through their employers and \$12 an hour without that benefit.

Most employers must currently pay a minimum \$7.25 an hour if they offer health insurance or \$8.25 an hour if not.

Senate Bill 106 would have increased the minimums 75 cents

annually through 2022.

Read the whole story

If you don't like Calif. gas tax increase, you're not alone

By Christopher Cadelago, Sacramento Bee

California voters overwhelmingly oppose a recent tax and fee package pushed by Gov. Jerry Brown and the Democratic-dominated Legislature to pay for road repairs, a new poll finds.

The gas tax law, which ushers in a 10-year program to raise more than \$52 billion for transportation projects, is so unpopular it could backfire on Democrats in upcoming elections.

Fifty eight percent of voters oppose Senate Bill 1, including 39 percent who say they strongly reject the legislation, according to the survey from UC Berkeley's Institute of Governmental Studies. Only 35 percent favor the law, which raises taxes on gasoline and diesel and hikes vehicle registration fees to fix roads and highways.

Read the whole story

Half marathon to impact traffic in Tahoe

Motorists can expect traffic delays on June 17 because of the Rock Tahoe Half Marathon.

The running event goes from Spooner Summit to the Hard Rock in Stateline.

To keep the runners safe, the lakeside lane of westbound Highway 50 will be closed from the top of Spooner Summit to the bike trail at Round Hill Pines. Additionally, vehicle traffic at Logan Creek will be intermittently stopped, allowing one-way traffic through the slide area.

The lane closure will be in effect from 6-11am, with significant delays at Logan Creek from 7:30-9am. Consider Kingsbury Grade during this time.

Additionally, access into or out of the peripheral streets and driveways may be prolonged at times.

Youth volleyball clinics at Kahle

Douglas County Parks and Recreation and Northern Nevada Junior Volleyball Coaches are offering a skills volleyball clinic at Kahle Community Center open to boys and girls ages 7-18.

It will focus on basic through advance concepts of the game. This for players familiar with the game or just starting out. The cost is \$99 for each session.

For dates and to preregister, call Kahle Community Center at 775.586.7271.

Letter: Taxpayers group against senior cuts

Publisher's note: *This letter was sent to the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors on June 7, 2017.*

The Taxpayers Association of El Dorado County requests that funding for Senior Legal Services not be removed from the budget.

The Taxpayers Association recognizes the difficult position the BOS is in as it attempts to allocate limited resources to a large list of services and programs. However, Senior Legal Services has provided direct assistance to a large number of seniors at a very modest cost. In addition Senior Legal Services has provided, again at a relatively low cost, negotiated and /or civil remedies to problems that could very well have impacted workloads in other departments that deal with elder issues.

We believe it would be fiscally prudent to maintain Senior Legal Services.

Respectfully,

Bill Carey, vice president El Dorado County Taxpayers Association

Angora Fire: A decade of healing and recovery

Publisher's note: *Lake Tahoe News this month will be running several stories leading up to the 10th anniversary of the Angora Fire on June 24, 2007.*



Ultimately 254 houses burned to the ground in the Angora fire.
Photo/LVFPD

By Susan Wood

A Lake Tahoe Unified School District teacher overcame a critical test of resilience with her husband while confronting

the loss of her trees, her roots and her neighborhood.

A dispatch supervisor essentially camped out at police headquarters and turned losing her home and her parents' into a way for the neighborhood to heal.

A businesswoman raced home like a NASCAR driver only to later find out she and her husband would need to postpone their retirement.

A longtime newspaper advertising representative didn't realize at the time that he and his wife were preparing for a barbecue at their house that would have been their last one.

A South Lake Tahoe mayor, who was thrust into the spotlight at ground zero of a catastrophic local disaster, channeled her husband's grace-under-pressure public safety skills while he was far away in the woods.

An LTUSD school board member, who is now the county supervisor, wondered if the high school would be lost in one direction or if the swirling wind would consume her home in Christmas Valley.

A newly elected El Dorado County supervisor, now former, had just walked the region to talk about "living with fire," then made it her mission to help those rebuild from it.

These are just some snapshots of the lives affected by the Angora Fire, one of the most disastrous events to hit the Lake Tahoe region in modern times.

The fire, which erupted from an illegal campfire near Seneca Pond at 1:13pm on June 24, 2007, swallowed 3,100 acres, burned 254 homes, cost \$23 million to fight and caused more than \$150 million in damage.

Remarkably, no one was seriously injured.

However, the blaze whipped by huge gusty winds that Sunday

afternoon left an indelible scar on the landscape of a predominantly local's area as well as the emotional well-being of citizens in and out of the neighborhood who saw their lives turned upside down.

With all the varying stories, one thing remains certain: We will never be the same after the Angora Fire.



Leona Allen at her parents' property, which is now a garden in the burn area. Photo/Susan Wood

Leona Allen: A dispatcher dealing with her own crisis

"The first call came in at 1:13pm," Allen recalled as if it were yesterday.

She had decided to come in to work despite taking a vacation day and as supervisor told the other two dispatchers to go home because "it was dead."

"My famous last words," she said sarcastically.

The resident on Grizzly Mountain who called had seen a plume of smoke on the ridgeline.

"I knew immediately it was bad," she said. (Veteran dispatchers can sense the severity of an incident in just a tone of voice.)

Then, the calls wouldn't stop. She had dispatched units immediately. She told *Lake Tahoe News* her voice must have sounded "a little edgy." (This reporter can attest to that being true; as being the one listening to the police scanner that day and beating the law enforcement barricade at Sawmill Pond as the first reporter on the chaotic, devastating scene.)

Embers were blowing everywhere, residents were throwing valuables in open vehicles, people were running east for their lives. In a moment of altruism, a motorcycle rider stopped to stomp out a small blaze as he descended from the ridge. An eerie roar accompanied a wall of fire that quickly crowned in the massive pine trees, only to be regenerated by brush serving as ladder fuels and slash piles that were once due to be burned. The temperature in the fire zone resembled a hot summer day in Palm Springs or Las Vegas.



Remains of a snowblower belonging to the Allens. Photo/Leona Allen

Mass evacuations were ordered in the North Upper Truckee and Tahoe Mountain areas – where the hot, fast fire swirled in different directions tornado style and shot up the ridge burning many homes on Mule Deer Road, Coyote Ridge Circle, Mount Rainier Drive, Clear View Drive on up to Uplands Way from Boulder and Granite Mountain Circle. All but two homes burned down on Pyramid Circle. Most of the damage happened in the first eight hours.

“Firefighters started calling out addresses of houses up in flames,” Allen said. Then, her two dispatchers returned to work to help out despite being evacuated themselves.

“Their trucks (in the police headquarters parking lot) looked like the Beverly Hillbillies,” she said describing their belongings thrown into the vehicles.

No one had enough time.

The Emergency Operations Center opened at the Lake Tahoe Airport. Allen used a sleeping bag at police headquarters to man 12-hour shifts. Even South Lake Tahoe city staff answered phone calls from frantic residents. Fire academy graduates were showing up to try to help.

Allen rigged a television in the dispatch center, sensing the magnitude of the crisis she was handling and knowing the television news crews would be on the scene.

"I couldn't visualize the massive amount of flames," she said, sighing.

"I've got your dad." Allen recalled the sense of relief when her police officer husband Mark gave her this news. Her elderly father, Owen Evans, lived at 1383 Mount Olympia, a focal point of fire destruction.

Evans' home was reduced to ash. But like a Phoenix, the half-acre of land was later donated by him as a community garden.

"It was his idea," Allen said in a sentimental, poignant moment sitting there on a recent quiet evening.



The Evans' lot is now a demonstration garden. Photo/Leona Allen

She ended up moving into a home with her 90-year-old father off North Upper Truckee Road, after having gone through a rare shopping spree for furnishings given the insurance company's deadline.

"Dad was well-insured," she said.

A little more than a week after the fire he got a check and a mandate to spend almost \$1 million in six months.

"It was horrible. We had a week left and had to spend \$6,000 on antiques that of course under normal circumstances wouldn't be a problem," said Allen, who grew up with a modest

upbringing.

She regrets her father lost his photo slides of the wilderness region that he was going to donate to the Lake Tahoe Historical Society.

"He cried when he realized the pictures were gone," she said.

Her father spent the next few days with the clothes on his back and his wallet, riding around in a police squad car with his son-in-law.

"I think it was a good distraction for him," she said.

Allen was emotional upon running in the fire area about a week later and stopping to focus on the simplicity of the spring bubbling up in what little grass was left. Her recreational paradise had changed forever.

"It was the biggest event of my lifetime," the 57-year-old lifelong Tahoe resident said. "It has to be defined individually."

But when asked how the fire had changed her, she thought of the community.

"It's made me have a strong desire to be a better community member – to be more involved, more caring, more watchful. I want to take care of the people who took care of my parents and who were doing so much for each other. I felt selfish before. Now I want to give back," Allen said, pointing out the togetherness of the community far outside the fire zone.

A large community fund to help fire victims was established after the fire, and benefit events became the gatherings for citizens of the South Shore.

People from all over opened their hearts and wallets, despite bouts of depression many experienced. Allen referred to it as CIS. "Critical Incident Stress," while others left with a

standing home expressed survivors guilt.

"I celebrate the resilience of the Meyers community," she said, as her eyes glazed over. The residents still put on a July 4 parade, a patriotic gesture that also marks two days after the fire was fully contained.

The day after the holiday of that year, a bi-state Blue Ribbon Commission was formed to review forest management practices in the Lake Tahoe Basin. It was led by California and Nevada Govs. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jim Gibbons, who used the Lake Valley Fire Station in Meyers as a backdrop.

"This event defined us," she said. "But my fear now is at the 10th anniversary we're forgetting what we went through. Yes, it's nice to have snow in the mountains this year. But it's dry down here."



Tara Brennan and Tony Colombo are still dealing with the

aftermath of the fire. Photo/Susan Wood

Tony Colombo and Tara Brennan: 'If we had known then, what we know now...'

The duo on Mount Olympia has always been two hard-working business people who have rolled with the punches – he with his burger joint, she with her clothing store. But nothing could have prepared them for the emotional turmoil that occurred the day of the Angora Fire – and long after in dealing with the aftermath.

Brennan headed to San Francisco to buy merchandise for her store that morning, and Colombo decided to tag along to knock off an item on his bucket list. It was Gay Pride weekend. In Vacaville, they stopped on the way home for a bite to eat and at mid-afternoon called Sara, a family friend, who looked after their home.

“Tony, you got 20 minutes. There’s a big fire. The whole neighborhood’s going up,” Colombo recalled her saying on the telephone. Sara lived close by, so she had her own issues.

“I told her: ‘Take my truck and get all the animals you can’,” he said. The couple had four exotic birds, three cats and two dogs. One dog was with them. One cat, Chinchy, didn’t make it.

A teary-eyed Brennan recounted how she drove faster than anyone would ever want to up the windy mountain road to South Lake Tahoe. She had figured it seemed she got from Vacaville to home in about an hour, inconceivable since it’s 134 miles.

Still, the miracle was that other vehicles sensed the driver’s distress and parted like the sea as she approached. And there was not a highway patrolman in sight.

“There was so much cell phone activity you couldn’t get through,” he said.

Their friend, Keith Cooney, got through and asked what they wanted out of the house. Brennan tried to explain rare flatware that resembled “sparkly stuff.” She had accumulated beautiful furnishings since living on the street for 40 years.



Tony Colombo and Tara Brennan rebuilt on Mount Olympia Circle. Photo/Linda Fine Conaboy

As she was approaching, she noticed residents with refrigerators and mattresses in their trucks going the opposite direction.

“I thought what is wrong with these people,” she said.

They were stopped by the public safety barricade at Highway 50 and North Upper Truckee.

They stayed in a motel close by. Colombo drank away his reality at the Turn 3 bar, but Brennan couldn’t because of the adrenaline rush of the catastrophe.

“I couldn’t sleep either,” she said. “I kept watching the television coverage until I saw our house burn. I knew it was ours because of a (distinctive) shed we had,” she said.

"A lot of it was a blur," he said.

On that Monday, they went to the American Red Cross center at Lake Tahoe Community College where a large community bulletin board outlined home damage.

"That's when it hit me. We had nothing but the clothes on our back," Brennan said. To this day, tears well up in her eyes discussing it.

It was almost too much to bear.

She even recalled having a breakdown and collapsing to the floor in the store buying replacement clothes.

"I am not buying Kmart underwear," Brennan recalled belting out to a friend.

"We didn't see it coming," she said.



Tara Brennan looks through windows that have been damaged by the intense sun. Photo/Suans Wood

Yet in some respects, she could. She recalled dreaming about a fire earlier that week

And then the nightmare continued. They learned they were underinsured and ended up fighting their insurance company for two years. They not only lost personal belongings and the structure, but she figured she stored about \$75,000 worth of merchandise in their home for her Pandora's Closet store.

"Not a day goes by I don't think of something I lost," she said. "The house is the embodiment of your soul."

Then, when they rebuilt, the housing market collapsed and they soon became upside down financially.

"We were a prisoner in our own home," Brennan said.

They should've been retired by now. But that idea went down the drain with the home and its expenses.

Today's battle is with Mother Nature on many fronts. There are voles, severe wind, a high water table and intense sun.

The fire changed the whole environment of where they live. The voles burrow through the sod they planted creating undulating waves through the grass. Already the "e-windows" thought to be environmentally better need to be replaced because the sun's rays are so severe the seals are cracked. You can even get a sunburn if you're standing close to them. The water runoff from the barren ridge behind their house has made landscaping more difficult especially following a severe winter like this last one. Their trees tilt, and \$60,000 worth of shrubs need replacing. The wind is so strong in the area it broke off the top of a weather vane she bought from a company in Maine.

To think the salesman laughed and said: "Lady, this weather

vane can survive nor'easters," she recalled while holding up the broken part. She admits the whole experience has darkened her sense of humor.

"If we had known then what we know now, we probably wouldn't have rebuilt," Colombo said, while looking out the back deck into the yard.

The two toyed with the idea of living in a recreational vehicle, but the desire to have a home base was too strong.

Despite all the hardships associated with the fire, the views are outstanding now since many of the trees are gone.

The two have jobs and are learning to live with their fate and their surroundings.

"I live here. People spend thousands to come here. Why would I leave? Where would we go and start over. We're going to die here," the 67-year-old Brennan said. Colombo, at age 62, nodded in agreement.



Renee Gorevin and husband Mark are happy to have the neighborhoods rebuild. Photo/Susan Wood

Mark and Renee Gorevin: They can survive anything

To the Gorevins, their home goes well beyond the walls of the structure.

When the Angora Fire raged up Tahoe Mountain, their house miraculously survived – but the landscaping was decimated.

A call from their daughter alerted Renee to the potential danger that afternoon.

“I remember her saying: ‘Go outside Mom,’ (to look essentially,)” Gorevin said.

By the time she got home, a large tree just outside was engulfed with flames. They lost about a dozen trees in the aftermath.

“The wind was whipping in circles. I had never experienced

wind like that before,” she said.

Her son had just come down from the ridge because he was watching it with a friend. She grabbed a computer and documents. Her husband was stopped in his vehicle at the Sawmill Pond barricade but ran up Tahoe Mountain Road to the house.

“I yelled: ‘What are you doing? We’re leaving’,” she said.

He needed to see their home. He needed closure.

“It was pretty overwhelming,” Mark said.



The Gorevins' house stands among the cleared lots. Photo/Renee Gorevin

It's funny how the little things can pop into one's head. Renee remembered seeing a neighbor with the sprinklers turned

on and thought: "I should have done that."

It was shortly after 2:30pm when the couple left the house. By 6pm, the neighborhood was gone.

They stayed with friends that week, attended community meetings and thankfully found out at the Red Cross center their house survived.

They were one of the lucky ones.

Theirs was one of two houses on their Granite Mountain street that remained standing.

"I looked around (afterward). It should have burned," Renee said.

The fire was so hot it bubbled the paint on the walls, but there was no smoke damage. They were able to get everything clean through a restoration company and resumed their remodeling efforts planned before the fire.

"There were burn holes the size of a quarter on the deck," she said. A wheelbarrow sitting inches from the house burned completely.

Still, the grief was consistent – even with their house still standing.

"I came back and remembered sitting on the stool looking at the emptiness and cried," she said. "It was the loneliest, quietest winter."

Those tears of sadness turned to tears of joy when she drove up her street and saw homes being rebuilt.

"I miss having the trees around, but I was really missing the people. It's nice to have the community again. I have a greater appreciation for our neighbors," Renee said, adding: "We have roots."

Acceptance is a virtue to the Gorevins, especially with her having survived cancer within this last trying decade.

“It was a trial we ached again. We did what we had to do,” Mark said.

The Gorevins planned a get together to celebrate their remodel – on June 24.



Flames from the Angora Fire could be seen miles away.
Photo/LVFPD

John and Louise Simon: Moving on with their lives

John vividly remembers working on his boat at the marina when his wife called him on his friend's cell phone.

“She said: ‘There's a fire. Come home’,” he said at their new home in Tahoe Paradise.

Little did he know, it would be the last time he would be at the house.

"I remember thinking we were going to have a barbecue, but they'll put it out. We'll leave, then we'll come back and have the barbecue," he said.

They spent the night at the friend's house, then camped out at the Station House Inn near Stateline.

"There were so many uncertainties. Did my house burn? But I always knew it was a major fire area," he said, further admitting to having a bag of pictures packed for such an unfortunate occasion. At least their insurance company didn't drag on the misfortune.

Their home and most of their belongings not thrown in the car in 10 minutes were reduced to ash, with the most emotional treasure being Louise's wedding ring. She had removed it the night before.

The couple wept and held onto each other upon seeing their land for the first time after it had burned down to thick soot. She rummaged through the debris and figured out where the nightstand would have been. They found the ring.

The cleaned up land on Clear View Circle remains for their son to rebuild there.

"He grew up there," John explained.

"It was an experience. You always see on TV people having to go through fires and hurricanes, and it's always somewhere else. This just reinforces the belief it can happen to you," he said.



Kathay Lovell as mayor of South Lake Tahoe was a visible leader during the fire. Photo/Kevin Chandler

Then South Lake Tahoe Mayor Kathay Lovell: Taking the reins of emergency response

"It can't be 10 years," Lovell said upon the initial interview.

The mayor turned her office into overdrive during the Angora Fire.

"My phone was ringing off the hook. I felt the city needed to step in," she said, even though the fire was on El Dorado County land, not city property.

Nonetheless, the Emergency Operations Center was in full swing at the city airport, especially with aircraft flying in and out to fight the fire.

"We all knew a fire like this would happen someday," she said.

What the former mayor didn't know is it would happen when her husband, then county sheriff's Lt. Les Lovell would be out of state and in the wilderness – unable to be reached at a fishing lodge in Alaska.

The lodge owner fired up the generator each night to check the Internet after a long day out.

"He asked Les: 'Aren't you from Lake Tahoe? The town's on fire'," she recalled Les telling her.

When he could call by phone, he got the update from county Undersheriff Fred Kohler. Unbeknownst to the sheriff's veteran, his wife had taken charge of much of the emergency response protocols and coordination.

"Every day and night, we worked that EOC," Lovell said. "I'm proud of how all the public safety personnel stepped up."

She was grateful the California governor's office was so forthcoming. When asked what the state could do to help, Lovell declared the region was open for business since the news footage at the time portrayed an entire region untouchable because of fire. After all, it was the Fourth of July holiday two days after the fire was fully contained.

Word went out that businesses were open. Visitation was a little better than expected.

Lovell also mentioned being proud of the resilience of the community, despite a few raw moments at community meetings such as one in particular at the South Tahoe Middle School. People were sad, angry and confused – some taking it out on environmental watchdog agencies like the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

"This was a turning point for environmental agencies in respect to fire. That's the good that came out of a bad situation," Lovell said. "Hopefully, we've come a long way in

forest health. It's not perfect, but better."

For example, TRPA once outlawed the cutting of trees less than 6 inches in diameter without special approval. Now that measurement has increased to 14 inches.

The fire spurred an entire multi-agency fuels reduction program.



Helicopters from outside the area fight the Angora Fire.
Photo/LVFPD

Then El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago: The work had only begun

A newly elected Santiago knew something was wrong when she attended a barbecue and saw the huge plume of smoke in the Angora region.

"I gotta go," she recalled saying.

She went home and rifled through her papers to find telephone numbers of emergency response personnel, but most of the information was in her office in Placerville.

A major fire was always in the back of officials' and stakeholders' minds. For Santiago, it was as recent as a photo op that morning at a home on Angora Creek. Earlier that month, it was a defensible space talk on Boulder Mountain. Two weeks before the fire broke out, she was handing out leaflets on "Living with Fire" in the Angora neighborhood.

What Santiago didn't realize is the amount of work awaiting her when it came to cleaning up from the devastating blaze.

"There wasn't time to feel overwhelmed by it. A lot of people were needing help," she said.

Besides a monumental cleanup effort that removed more than 50 tons of debris, there were insurance plights, construction scams and trespassers to deal with.

At times, it was not a pretty scene in many ways.

But from tragedy there can be triumph. The Angora Fire spawned a model program called the Angora Protocol that more than anything accelerated the cleanup efforts.

Residents wanting to rebuild had 1½ years to take out a construction permit and the costs would be deferred. Almost two-thirds of the residents took advantage of this.

Overall, 191 permits to rebuild in the last decade have been applied for from El Dorado County out of the 254 homes that burned down.

As a comparison, Lake County reports only 399 permits applied for of the 1,281 homes lost in 2015 from the devastating Valley Fire. Lake County CAO Carol Huchingson attributes much

of that to long delays associated with the cleanup and recovery, toxic land problems and major insurance issues. “Twenty-eight percent weren’t insured,” she said.



The forest has forever been changed by the Angora Fire. Photo/LVFPD

El Dorado County Supervisor and former LTUSD board member Sue Novasel: There’s simple math and reasoning behind the stats

Novasel attributes much of the difference between major fires in Lake versus El Dorado counties to a desirability equation.

“It could be the area itself. Even though homes were destroyed, in general, you’re still up in Lake Tahoe where people want to live,” she said.

The supervisor also noted that for some communities it takes years to rebuild, whether residents are fighting with

government agencies, insurance companies or simply just trying to decide as a household.

Like others, Novasel has witnessed the pain among people she knows. At the time of the fire, she knew at least 10 school district personnel who lost their homes.

A longtime Christmas Valley resident, she recalled hopping on her bicycle and heading to Washoe Meadows. She heard propane tanks exploding when she evacuated her 80-year-old mother, grabbed the cat hiding under the bed by the scruff of the neck and left.

"I knew we needed to get out of there," she said.

She later watched the fire from the Lira's market parking lot with a big Meyers crowd as it raged toward South Tahoe High School.

"But I knew we had a firefighter who graduated from there who said: 'We are going to save this school'," she said.

And they did.

Opinion: Why are EDC seniors being singled out?

By Larry Weitzman

El Dorado County has one of the highest per capita percentage of seniors in California. So, it is understandable that the county has had a longstanding senior legal program and a very successful one at that; handling a multitude of problems and protecting seniors from being preyed upon, seeing 2,000

clients a year.

It costs the county about \$250,000 a year, which is supplemented by about \$95,000 in private donations and a \$50,000 federal grant. It's a miniscule portion of the county General Fund budget of about \$280 million.



Larry Weitzman

Senior legal is about to come crashing down. The new county budget is canceling the program and laying off a staff of 3.5 employees, including a part-time lawyer, a full-time lawyer, plus a paralegal and a secretary. Out of 1,861 county employees, the only layoffs are to senior legal. Why is there a war on seniors? My supervisor, Mike Ranalli, would not give me a straight answer about protecting senior legal. Is Ranalli AWOL in this war?

Senior legal was informed of the pending layoffs on about May 18, a few days before the senior member of the staff was going out of the country for three weeks. More appalling is the plight of the new full-time senior legal attorney who left her career at a law firm to become the new full-time attorney at senior legal who started on May 1, just 18 days prior. According to the proposed budget, she will be getting a pink slip no later than Aug. 4. Effectively this new attorney was fired before she was hired as staff had to know prior to May 1 that senior legal was being cut from the budget as county budgets, ours included, take months to prepare. Shameful and cruel.

As to losing senior, the proposed budget at page 281 said:

"The CAO office believes that there are alternatives to providing legal aid to vulnerable populations, and these alternatives should be explored and promoted." What are the alternatives and what do seniors do while the CAO is off exploring. Try Timbuktu.

EL Dorado County is claiming it is due to budget cuts. They say departments are taking large cuts, but the reality is the only people who work for the county who are losing their jobs are the 3.5 people at senior legal. No other current county employee is being laid off, which means that 1,858 people will remain on the county payroll.

Something else is going on here and it is sinister. The newly hired public information officer, Carla Hass, has attempted to obfuscate the truth in a press release last week which actually confirmed the sinister nature of this hatchet job taking place against these four dedicated senior legal employees. Worse yet, against the seniors of El Dorado County. Why has the CAO moved heaven and earth so no other county employees will be laid off other than senior legal? Remember, the CAO works at the direction of the board.

Former mayor of Placerville and current chair of Friends of Seniors, Kathi Lishman, which helps with senior legal donations, among other things said, "The Board of Supervisors cannot make these cuts in a vacuum." Well Lishman, they just did, at least in the proposed budget. There are no real cuts in spending on employees except for senior legal.

Lishman went on to say, "I am shocked to hear about senior legal, as it seems to have come out of nowhere, and is quite alarming. The services they provide to EDC seniors are extremely important. Senior legal has received about \$95,000 in donations from the community in the past 12 months, and meets with about 2,000 clients a year. Some of the elderly are home bound or institutionalized.

"They also provide legal resources for adult protective services. The programs that provide direct service to clients are the first ones to have their budgets reduced or cut, while overhead costs to these programs continually go up, often due to increased administrative costs."

Former El Dorado County Community Services/Human Services Director for 25 years (1982-2007), John Litwinovich, had the following to say of the proposed senior services cuts: "At this point, I think adding administrative positions is a mistake. The costly creation of agency level administrative positions is the principal reason senior services are in jeopardy. Now is not the time to be dismantling the needed senior continuum of care prior boards developed over decades. Rather, it's time to reconsider administrative layers and positions that have been added in recent years, positions that have drawn resources away from services ...

"Priority should be given to those county employees who directly serve the public, be they sheriff's deputies, road maintenance workers, front desk clerks, kitchen staff who prepare meals for homebound seniors, or Senior Legal attorneys, on whom so many vulnerable elders depend. These and other direct service positions, rather than an ample administrative structure, constitute county."

Now to the details. Recently, the newly hired county PIO, Hass, aka Doctor Spin, who costs the county 60 percent of the current entire county senior legal budget, wrote a press release to counteract a column that was published on this subject. My column said, "there are no position cuts to county administration."

Doctor Spin, employed by the county with your tax dollars, said the following with full CAO approval: "Correction: The recommended budget includes a net county cost reduction of approximately 8.2 percent within the general government functional group, which is primarily county administration. In

addition, many high level administrative positions in the Community Development Agency, including the CDA director, assistant director of finance and administration, administrative secretary, administrative services officer and senior department analyst, have been cut from the budget, with all of the work being absorbed by other staff. The Chief Administrative Office is absorbing most of this work without any increases to net county cost."

Here are how spin doctors, this one included, mislead. Budgeted cuts are not spending cuts. It's like keeping two sets of books. The facts, which are straight from the county's proposed budget, while it sounds like there will be other layoffs, no actual currently employed county employees are losing their jobs and/or paychecks and pensions as are the staff in senior legal.

So as to the rest of 1,858 full time equivalent positions (FTEs), not one layoff or other termination other than the 3.5 county employees who work at senior legal. Not one, zero, zip, nada. Well, how could that be, when they brag about an 8.2 percent cut intimating that there will be layoffs in the CDA and/or administration?

Here's how. The county budgets for unfilled positions (vacancies) and filled positions whether they are paying a salary for that position or not. The county in the past has carried about 8 percent vacant positions. EDC in the past has always effectively overbudgeted by including vacancies. That's the budget set of books. When departments don't spend their budgeted amount, it looks like they are saving money, which looks good to the public. It's easy to do when you overbudget. It's like having two sets of books. As the IRS knows, only dishonest people have and keep two sets of books.

How the CAO cut the budget is by eliminating unfilled (vacant) positions. While those are technically budget cuts, they are not spending cuts. In fact, spending is going up by several

percentage points. The only actual cut in the budget with respect to the county's entire staff is senior legal. A reminder to the readers, the county (we taxpayers) pay about \$150,000 a year to be effectively lied to. Carla Hass didn't tell you the real truth, but covered it up with bureaucratic budgeting government obfuscation. This is a perfect example of the Mark Twain adage, "Figures don't lie, but liars figure."

And if there were an 8.2 percent real spending cut in administration, then we could understand an 8.2 percent cut in senior legal, but the reality is there is no spending cut in administration and a 100 percent spending cut to Senior Legal.

I don't know yet who is behind this evil Machiavellian machination, but these firings are not about saving the taxpayer money. There is something else going on and I intend to get to the bottom of it.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

USTA sectionals at three Tahoe area venues



Derrick Crescencio of the Pinole Park 8.0 team winds up for a forehand on the way to winning his match June 9 at Incline Village. Photo/ Kathryn Reed

Fifty-six teams are in the greater Lake Tahoe area for the three-day USTA mixed doubles sectionals for the 40 and over league.

Rain on June 9 delayed the start and stopped play before it was completed. Weather and the altitude dominated many conversations at Incline Village. (Action was also taking place at Northstar and Tahoe Donner.)

The players – more than 650 at the start – will continue playing Saturday and Sunday. The levels are a combined rating of 6.0, 7.0, 8.0 and 9.0.

Most teams are from the Bay Area. Playing at this elevation took some getting used to for many players. With thinner air, some people were easily winded. For others, they noted the ball seemed to bounce differently, even playing with high altitude balls.

Many players were in long sleeves and pants. Spectators had

down jackets on and blankets wrapped around them.

Winners in each division will advance to the national championships.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*