

Opinion: Grand jury catches up with Combs

By Larry Weitzman

About six months ago I wrote a **column** about our former CAO, Larry Combs, getting he and all his Sutter cronies (including former DA Carl Adams) a 50 percent pension increase. Combs took his annual pension from about \$120K to about \$188K and Adams' from about \$105K to about \$145K. But what I didn't know is that it was done in violation of at least four Government Code statutes.

But all this was revealed in a Sutter County Grand Jury report issued May 18. First, even with opposition from the then county auditor, CPA Robert Stark, who was a pension analyst with California for 10 years prior to becoming Sutter County auditor, this pension increase was rammed through by Combs via the consent calendar, which violates proper procedure of an open hearing for such matters.



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During what little discussion there was, Combs said it would cost the county about \$11 million. Stark said it would be at least double. According to grand jury records, unfunded liabilities went from about \$11 million in 2003, the year before, to a 2014 level of \$111 million in 10 years. Combs looks to have told a whopper.

Before any pension increases are allowed, there are four specific Government Code sections that need to be complied with which are 7507, 23026, 31515.5 and 31516, the nuts and bolts of which provide that the county shall provide an actuarial statement on future costs (sec. 7507). That was not provided by an actuarial. Second, it must be provided and posted two weeks before a scheduled open public hearing for any change in pensions (7507).

The other sections also provide notice procedures by the Board of Supervisors and time requirements plus an analysis of the pension changes and explanation of the of the financial impact that the proposed benefit changes will have on the funding status of the county employees' retirement. There are more but absolutely none of the Government Code sections were complied with. Combs intentional violated the code sections

In fact, CAO Larry Combs pushed through the increase in retirement benefits of which the biggest benefactor was Larry Combs, with DA Carl Adams not far behind. The unfunded pension liability has increased by tenfold. There are serious financial problems for Sutter County caused by Combs' greed and it's all in a 2015-16 five-page Sutter County Grand Jury report.

Combs quits Sutter in 2009 and went to Merced County where he didn't last two years as he tried to take over as their CAO. It didn't happen, however. An example of which could be summarized by an exchange in 2010 reported by the Modesto Bee. Merced County 4th District Supervisor Deidre Kelsey at a board meeting asked for a performance review of Combs, saying with respect to Combs that his actions "brings into question who works for whom in Merced County." It was a stern four-minute lecture about "poor communications, a lack of budgetary information and the creation of new policies outside of negotiations with the county's union." Sound familiar?

Kelsey went on in the Bee, "What has happened to the board

setting such policy decisions as our health care plan? ... When did this board make a decision regarding superagencies? Apparently there is someone out there discussing combining departments into a super agencies and this Board has never had an agendized discussion regarding this matter," she continued. "Again, I ask, who is sailing this ship?"

Combs had signed a four-year contract at a salary of \$205K with a six-month buy-out clause. The BOS couldn't take him any more after about another year and bought him out. And this is only scratching the surface about Combs. He controlled Sutter with an iron fist until they threw him out. Merced saw the light quickly as what he did in Sutter.

So how did we end up with Combs with respect to his track record being all over the Internet? You can thank HR Director Pam Knorr, who highly recommended Combs to the board with individual meetings. A few months ago I asked 3rd District Supervisor Brian Veerkamp was there a proper and thorough background check done on Combs. He assured me there was. If there were a background, it was at best cursory. And that's how we ended up with Combs. Thank you Pam Knorr. If we had a real HR director, Combs would never had happened.

And what happened in Sutter County? Combs got his buddy the DA to file bogus charges against the auditor who protested his pension scheme. After Stark, the auditor, spent over \$400K of his own money the case was dismissed. Combs spent more in the prosecution, including misappropriation of about \$100K of anti-drug task force funds. Now he collects pensions totaling almost \$220K and skates free. He should be living in the graybar hotel. One other question. Why does Knorr still have a job in EDC.

At least we have Don Ashton to put it all back together. It's a heavy load.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

'Lost Recipes' tells story of bygone restaurants

By Beth J. Harpaz, Associated Press

A new cookbook called "The Book of Lost Recipes" remembers classic dishes from long-gone hotels, iconic restaurants and roadside eateries of yesteryear. But the book is more than a collection of recipes. It also chronicles the evolution of American food culture, telling stories of how and why certain dishes and restaurants became popular when they did.

"A good restaurant, a restaurant that becomes famous or that a community cares about – it has to do with food, but it has to do with so much more," said cookbook author Jaya Saxena, a writer for the *Daily Dot*. "The things people are driven to eat are influenced by the economy, politics, immigration trends and all kinds of other things."

A recurring theme in the book, out this month from Page Street Publishing, is how immigrant chefs took ethnic food mainstream. There are recipes from establishments like Paoli's Restaurant (Italian) in San Francisco, Ruby Chow's (Chinese) in Seattle, and iconic Jewish delis like Ashkenaz's in Chicago and Wolfie's Rascal House in Miami.

Celebrity culture gets its turn in the book, too, with recipes from Chasen's, a West Hollywood joint that hosted the likes of Liz Taylor and Ronald Reagan, and the Pump Room in Chicago, which Frank Sinatra referenced in a song. Other dishes in the book were beloved by regular folk, like chicken soup and mac-and-cheese from Horn & Hardart's, the famed automat.

Many recipes offer a window into travel trends and pop

culture. Saxena describes, for example, how tiki culture, a fake, kooky mashup of South Pacific motifs, reigned supreme at the Kahiki Supper Club in Columbus, Ohio. And how a dude ranch in Tucson, Ariz., opened an upscale restaurant called the Tack Room so that its guests – who came to Arizona to escape cold weather – could enjoy fancy meals like veal with chanterelle mushrooms after a long day of riding horses.

Saxena not only pored over old guidebooks to see what restaurants were recommended as worthwhile for diners to seek out on their travels, but she also tracked down descendants of chefs and restaurant owners to get their stories. Once she had an original recipe in hand, she scaled it down from restaurant-size portions to family-size. She has no formal training as a chef, but with help from her mom and others, each dish was tested in a home kitchen.

A few of the lost recipes sound archaic today or involve obscure ingredients, like one for roast venison with currant port sauce from New York's long-defunct Planters Hotel. But other dishes would be right at home in any hipster cafe in Brooklyn, like bratwurst and sweet-and-sour lentils, created by a German immigrant, Henry Thiele, a famous restaurateur in the Pacific Northwest who was admired by none other than a young James Beard. The sausage-and-lentils dish is one of Saxena's favorites.

"This recipe from 50 or 60 years ago tasted current, like the upscale comfort food that has become such a big thing," she said. "I could see people eating this for hundreds of years in Germany but it also appeals to a modern palate."

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Ashkenaz's Blintz Treat

(From "The Book of Lost Recipes" by Jaya Saxena, Page Street Publishing Co., 2016)

Start to finish: 20 minutes

Servings: 6

For the crepes:

1 C all-purpose flour

1 $\frac{1}{4}$ C water

Pinch salt

Vegetable oil (for cooking)

For the cheese mix:

1 pound dried farmers cheese or dried baker's cheese

1 egg

6 T sugar

For garnishing:

Sour cream, apple sauce and sugared blueberries

To make the crepes, heat an 8-inch pan over medium-low heat. Whisk together the flour, water and salt, and grease the pan lightly with vegetable oil or butter, using a towel to apply so all corners of the pan are covered. When the pan is hot, pour about half a ladle of batter into the pan, and turn the pan to spread it as thin as possible. When the crepe begins to curl (after about a minute), flip it onto a paper towel.

For the filling, stir together the cheese and eggs, sprinkling sugar on top of the mixture as you turn it in. The mixture should still be firm. Lay about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the mixture on the blintz in a 4-inch row. Fold the sides of the crepe over, and roll the blintz back to front. Heat a half-inch of vegetable oil in a pan. Once the oil is hot, fry blintzes (being sure not to crowd the pan) for 2-3 minutes per side, until they're

lightly golden and crispy. Remove blintzes to a paper towel to drain, and place on a heated serving platter.

Serve with sour cream or apple sauce, and sugared blueberries.

Nutrition information per serving: 234 calories; 72 calories from fat; 8 g fat (4 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 60 mg cholesterol; 110 mg sodium; 29 g carbohydrate; 1 g fiber; 9 g sugar; 19 g protein.

Warren Buffett's dicey power play

By Mark Chediak and Noah Buhayar, Bloomberg Businessweek

When Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway bought Nevada's main utility, NV Energy, three years ago, it inherited a lucrative customer base: the neon-lit, air-conditioned casino-hotels on the Las Vegas Strip. Now they're in the midst of a costly split. Lured by the prospect of cheaper, cleaner energy elsewhere, two of the Strip's biggest power users, MGM Resorts International and Wynn Resorts, told regulators in May they're willing to pay millions in fees to ditch NV Energy's services.

It's not uncommon for big power consumers to wrangle with utilities. But the situation is unique in Nevada, where a handful of casino-resorts exercises significant leverage. MGM and Wynn together account for more than 5 percent of NV Energy's sales in its southern territory. While losing existing casino customers is tough enough, even worse for NV Energy may be the precedent their departure sets.

“It’s probably going to diminish the likelihood that you could have a new casino go up and guarantee that it’ll be a full-service customer of the utility,” says Timothy Hay, an attorney who served on the Nevada Public Utilities Commission and as the state’s consumer advocate.

Read the whole story

Virtual reality may threaten Nev. brothel industry

By Daniel Rothberg, Las Vegas Sun

Electronics have treated Sheri’s Ranch well. The cathouse in Pahrump, which claims to be the “unofficial brothel of CES,” reports a 70 percent increase in business when tech employees roll into Las Vegas for the massive trade show each January.

But that cozy relationship might not last. Some in the brothel industry – Sheri’s included – have expressed concerns that virtual-reality porn, which offers an immersive 3D experience, could pose a threat to business. On its blog in December, Sheri’s Ranch wrote that the VR devices displayed at CES “may be one of the biggest challenges to the future of the legal prostitution industry.”

“How might this technology affect Nevada’s brothel industry in the next five to 10 years?” spokesman Jeremy Lemur asked. “Since virtual prostitution wouldn’t be illegal or unsafe because the participants aren’t really having sex, will a Nevada brothel’s secure, legal setting and reputation for an STD-free environment become irrelevant in the future world of VR technology?”

Read the whole story

Tahoe Donner hosting 2 days of tribute bands

Tahoe Donner's annual Summer Concert on the Green returns July 2-3 featuring a selection of 1970s tribute bands.

Four all-star tribute bands will take the stage and transport guests back in time. On July 2, concert-goers will experience The Eagles tribute band, Desperado, and an Elton John tribute band, Kenny Metcalf as Elton & The Early Years Band. On July 3, attendees will experience the Journey tribute band, Evolution, and the U2 tribute band, Hollywood U2.

Summer Concert on the Green is an all-ages event and will take place under the stars at the Tahoe Donner Driving Range, located adjacent to Trout Creek Recreation Center at 12790 Northwoods Blvd. in Truckee. It is a tree-lined driving range with a gentle slope, surrounded by forest and greenery. Food and beverages will be available for purchase on site, but attendees may also bring picnics, including low back chairs.

Doors open at 5pm each day.

Tickets are on sale. If the event does not sell out, tickets will be available on the same day as the concert for \$5 more per person. Guests may purchase a single-day ticket or both days by calling 530.587.9400, ext. 0. Adult tickets are \$35; children ages 7-12 are \$15; and children 6 and under are free.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- Fireworks are prohibited from all U.S. Forest Service lands and campgrounds – every day.
- Truckee in partnership with the Sierra Business Council is introducing a program that will provide affordable and flexible financing and technical assistance workshops to eligible residents and businesses of Truckee. For more info, contact Jessica Carr at 530.582.5022 or jcarr@sierrabusiness.org.
- Base Camp Festival IV, the music event, will be at Hard Rock in Stateline on Aug. 3-4.
- Discounted early bird tickets are available for the Sierra Nevada Alliance 22nd annual conference on Aug. 25-27 in Nevada City. Prices go up July 1. [Click here to register.](#)
- Here are the El Dorado-Tahoe and Sierra roadwork schedules for this week.

South Shore soccer club looking for players

Tryouts for the South Tahoe Futbol Club are June 21-23 at South Tahoe Middle School.

The soccer club is for boys and girls ages 5 to 18.

Tryouts for girls are from 4:30-6:30pm, boys from 6:30-8:30pm. Bring cleats, shin guards and water.

The nonprofit club will have teams competing in leagues, tournaments and showcases.

For more information, contact Nick Arbelaez at 702.334.2492 or nrarbelaez@ltcc.edu.

Intrigue besets management of Tahoe sewer district

By Evan Maxwell, Reno Gazette Journal

A sewer district on the shore of Lake Tahoe is either a secretive organization controlled by powerful corporate interests or a completely transparent public service agency that has efficiently toiled for six decades to keep the lake pristine and crystal clear.

Or something in between.

Douglas County Sewer Improvement District 1 collects and treats commercial and residential sewage from casinos, hotels, resorts and 600 residences on the Nevada side of the lake.

After years of exceedingly quiet but apparently efficient operation, DCSID became embroiled last month in a dispute with Douglas County government that has now mushroomed.

The dispute involves the proper disposal of millions of gallons of sewage every day, all of which must be exported outside the Tahoe Basin.

However, the dispute now also involves a certain amount of political intrigue, “rogue citizens,” ethics complaints, anonymous legal clients represented by prominent attorneys, some of the biggest corporate names in Northern Nevada, and three state agencies.

Read the whole story

Lack of houses for sale drives up listing prices

The lack of inventory is helping drive housing prices higher in the greater Lake Tahoe region.

The median sales price for all homes sold in El Dorado, Placer and Sacramento counties in May was \$345,000, according to Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage. This is an increase of 7.5 percent from a year ago.

El Dorado County had the highest median at \$430,000, then Placer at \$422,00, and Sacramento at \$310,000.

Combined, there were 4,474 listings in the three counties in May. This reflects a decrease of 27 percent from 2015, according to Coldwell.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Resurfaced courts for Tahoe Tennis Classic

Participants in the 33rd annual Tahoe Tennis Classic will be playing on newly resurfaced courts this summer.

The six hard courts at Zephyr Cove Tennis club are like brand new. Painted a lighter and darker shade of green, they are already being broken in by locals.

With the tournament's growth in popularity, it is now a four-day event – July 28-31. To accommodate everyone, some matches will be played at nearby courts. The all doubles adult tournament brought out a record number of participants last year from nine states. Tournament officials are expecting an equal or great number of players this year.

This is the third year the nonprofit Zephyr Cove Tennis Club Foundation has been overseeing the tournament. The Saturday night dinner is now a much sought-after ticket because of the camaraderie – even among those who were foes on the courts – and the party atmosphere on the eve of the finals. This night is now a major fundraiser for the club with a raffle and silent auction. Proceeds from this year's event will be allocated to pay off the resurfacing debt. (No need to participate in the tournament to attend the dinner at Harveys in Stateline; anyone is welcome to attend for \$30.)

Entry fee for the various divisions is \$80, with the second event \$30. Every player is guaranteed at least two matches and some swag. The deadline to signup is July 24. More information, as well as the registration form, is available on ZCTC's **website**.

While Douglas County owns the courts, it the ZCTCF that maintains them and the entire tennis facility.