S. Tahoe cuts staff, gears up to make town more liveable

By Kathryn Reed

In a matter of seconds the South Lake Tahoe City Council voted to do away with a list of positions. This, after hearing about 2½ hours of testimony – from staff and a dozen others – on the 2011-12 budget.

“It seems so anticlimactic. With these votes we’ve affected so many people’s lives,” Mayor Hal Cole said as he adjourned the meeting.

As the room cleared out, sitting in the very back was Marty Scheuerman. Dressed in his uniform as a division chief with the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department, his body language did not exhibit that of the usually confident firefighter. Instead, he shook his head – not believing this day had finally come.



South Lake Tahoe Mayor Hal Cole on Oct. 18 delivers the state of the city address. Photo/Kathryn Reed

His was one of the 19 positions eliminated on Tuesday. In one month, he along with the 18 others (including all three division chiefs) will be without jobs. It's possible some of them will be hired for one of the six jobs being created by the city.

He is not ready to retire. He wants to keep working. He is not alone.

Ray Zachau is a division chief and the fire marshal. One of the new positions being created is fire marshal. If he applies and were to be picked for the job, he would get the pay of a captain.

But it's a job.

Even though the city made a convincing case for downsizing, what with 65 percent of the budget going toward personnel expenses and revenues declining – it still means the 16.5 percent unemployment rate in South Lake Tahoe is about to jut up.

While the room was filled Oct. 18 with current and former employees, their pleas to the council members to rethink their impending decisions were unsuccessful. The council on 5-0 votes ultimately chose to go forward with approving the $94.7 million budget (of which $28.6 million is the general fund budget) and subsequent cuts in staff.

Pulled from the agenda were items D and E under New Business – which both had to do with the General and Public Works contracts.

Steve Crouch, who represents this sector (which at about 60 employees is the largest employee group), was conspicuously absent from the budget hearing. His limited time as negotiator is not being well received by all employees.

Negotiations with other labor groups are ongoing. The

firefighter association contract was approved Tuesday. If and when other groups settle, appropriate addendums will be made to the 2011-12 budget (fiscal year started Oct. 1) to reflect any changes.

The city speaks

Another noticeable bit of silence was Councilman Bruce Grego. He said nothing about the budget, the people being let go, or the future of the city.

Councilman Tom Davis said how hard this has been and how frustrated he is, adding that as much as employees fight for their jobs, no one has come forward with another way to eliminate the $5.2 million deficit.

Councilwoman Claire Fortier said is it time to invest in the city so it is a viable place for residents, employees and tourists.

Cole said reliance on reserves, while they are being used this fiscal year and likely will be next year as well, must end and the public sector must wake up to the realities the private sector has been living with for years – the need to live within their means.

Councilwoman Angela Swanson made the most impassioned speech, echoing on speaker Mary Ann Klein's plea to not lose the sense of community when talking numbers and positions. But ultimately, Swanson said, "I was elected to serve 20,000 people, not just the 200 who work here."

The day started with Cole giving the state of the city address.

In many ways it was much like a recap of a year's worth of council decisions. Where the city has been, the decisions made to keep it afloat, and the vision for the future were neatly outlined in his 30-minute speech.

He was adamant in saying the vision is that of the council's, to which they direct City Manager Tony O'Rourke and the rest of the staff to carry out their policy decisions.

"We have to rebuild this community. That is our long-term future. We need to maintain the residential base and attract tourists," O'Rourke said. He is the first city manager to embrace and openly acknowledge South Lake Tahoe is a tourist-based economy and as such must work too attract tourists while maintaining a town people want to live in.

What others said

Noteworthy were the faces in the crowd not usually at a council meeting – representatives from Heavenly Mountain Resort, South Tahoe Public Utility District, El Dorado County Sheriff's Department, South Lake Tahoe police and fire, Barton Health, and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Pete Sonntag, general manager at Heavenly, explained the resort's $25 million investment in the gondola was contingent upon lift ticket sales not being taxed. He said if the city were to renege on that deal, it would likely make future developers question whether the city will stick by its contracts.

He pointed to the 1,500 employees the resort has in the winter with an annual payroll of $16 million as evidence the company is part of this community.

"Our company may be based in Colorado, but we're locals," Sonntag said of the employees.

Recreation was a common theme Tuesday.

Teri Jamin, who worked for the city from 1984-2009, talked snowplow drivers and parks and rec. She believes the personal touch at the rec center will be compromised with the elimination of staff.

“The litmus test is in the end result; is it in the best interest of the city of South Lake Tahoe?” Jamin said.

Setting the record straight

• People still don’t understand the city can’t do anything about the hole – aka would be convention center. It’s in bankruptcy.

• It was noted the current operators of the ice rink are paying utilities, are responsible for maintenance and operations costs, and must set aside money for future capital improvements.

• In the past, 16 full-time employees and three or four seasonal workers were used for snowplowing. This winter, 10 full-time workers will do the job with the assistance of 11 seasonal workers.

• Bijou Golf Course will not be operated by a private entity because the return on invest is not there.

• Talks are under way to have El Dorado County operate the senior center and Lake Tahoe Boys & Girls Club to have a greater role in youth recreation.

“The service will be seamless,” O’Rourke said. And services will not be diminished.

• The City Council’s budget was slated to go up 4 percent or $7,800 to pay for any classes or travel the five may want to partake in. However, they voted that out of the budget.

• It will be in early 2012 the council will be asked to formally approve going forward with the certificate of participation to pay for infrastructure. There would be $4 million for roads, with $1 million divvied up between Harrison Avenue and Linear Park. Linear Park is slated to get about a quarter of that $1 million, with another $20,000 in city coffers for Linear Park donated from Core 24 Charities.

• Even if the Tahoe Valley Community Plan were adopted, it could not be implemented until the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency adopts its Regional Plan.

North Lake Tahoe plans week of prescribed burns

The North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District is planning to conduct a prescribed burn from Oct. 19-26, depending on proper weather conditions and fuel moisture content.

The projected areas are in the Second Creek drainage and Mill Creek subdivision.

Smoke resulting from the prescribed burns will affect the surrounding area for approximately 24 to 36 hours. People who are smoke sensitive are advised to stay inside and close their windows and doors as much as possible until the smoke dissipates.

For further information, call (775) 831.0351, ext. 0.

Heavenly Foundation increasing its freestyle

programs

The Heavenly Ski and Snowboard Foundation has two new programs for the 2011–12 winter season under the freestyle umbrella.

The foundation will offer two freeride program options, the One-Day Program and the Full-Time Competitive Program. These programs are open to intermediate to advanced level skiers ages 10 to 18 who have a passion for slopestyle, skiercross and halfpipe training.

“The Foundation recognized the need to create the Freeride program as we continue to stand by our commitment to provide training for regional Olympic hopefuls,” foundation President Jim Plake said in a statement. “With the addition of skiing halfpipe and slopestyle to the 2014 Sochi Olympics, we felt it necessary to provide coaching for those athletes who strive to compete in these events.”

The One-Day Freeride program offers skiers 10-18 18 training days, primarily Sundays, December through March. A Heavenly restricted pass, equipment and gear are required. Freeride registrants can choose to participate in the U.S.A.S.A. South Shore Series or USSA events for an additional fee.

The Full-Time Freeride program requires additional commitments from parents and athletes. With a longer season, December through as late as mid-May, this program offers more time on the mountain with professional coaches and more participation in competitions. Dry land and gymnastics training, Sunday Fundays, night training, video analysis, pro clinics and more advanced competition training are some of the bonuses of this program, depending upon what is right for your young athlete.

As with all programs, the emphasis is placed on skiing preparation and equipment care, as well as focusing on physical and mental competition techniques, physical fitness through healthy activity and good eating habits while

promoting the values of teamwork and good sportsmanship.

Brad Scott is the head coach. He was a member of the Heavenly Freestyle Team for many years and was a multi-discipline competitor in skiercross, slopestyle, halfpipe and big air. Scott is a former professional skier and an alumni member of the British Ski Team for slopestyle and big air. Assistant coach is local Yamato Kashima. He trained with the Heavenly Foundation freestyle team for more than 10 years and competed in USSA events for many of those.

For more information about the Heavenly Foundation or any of its programs go online or call (530)541.7354.

Names of Tahoe City fire victims released

By Reno Gazette-Journal

A structure fire in the early morning hours on Tuesday resulted in the deaths of two Tahoe City residents and their dog.

Peter Maktenieks, 50, and Amy Pass, 39, both died in what appears to be an accidental fire, said Capt. Jeffrey Ausnow, North Tahoe station commander for the Placer County Sheriff’s Office.



Two people and a dog died Oct. 18 in a Tahoe City house fire. Photo/Placer County Sheriff's Office

Firefighters were called to the residence at 1776 Spruce Drive in Tahoe City near Sunnyside about 1:30am, and found the front of the home fully engulfed in flames stretching 50 to 100 feet in the air, said Dave Zaski, spokesman for North Tahoe Fire.

“The first-in fire engine had heavy fire in the front porch area in the front side of the home,” Zaski said.

Read the whole story

Eclipse of sun could be a ray of light for Nevada tourism

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

Well I hear you went up to Saratoga and your horse naturally won,

Then you flew your Lear jet up to Nova Scotia,

To see the total eclipse of the sun.

– Carly Simon, from “You’re So Vain”

It could be an extraordinary tourism event for rural Nevada and it’s been on the calendar for a millennium.

A total solar eclipse.

They don’t happen very often and when they do, they’re usually over the ocean or in the Southern Hemisphere or someplace far away from home.

But on May 20, the eclipse path will cut through the center of rural Nevada.

“It really should be a good one, just as long as it isn’t a cloudy day,” said Dale Etheridge, the planetarium director at the College of Southern Nevada’s Cheyenne campus.

A solar eclipse occurs when the moon passes between the sun and the Earth and casts a shadow on our planet. As the moon and the Earth move during the day, the shadow moves thousands of miles along a very predictable path.

Eclipse chasers notoriously travel thousands of miles to get a look at the rare phenomenon, which only lasts for a few minutes.

Etheridge said the May 20 event would be an annular eclipse, which means the moon is farther away from the Earth in its oval orbit. The effect on Earth is that when the eclipse is at its best, observers will still be able to see a ring of light from the sun around the moon. At no time will the sun be completely blocked by the moon.

The other oddity of the event is that Nevada is on the tail end of it. That means the sun will be setting as the moon

creeps in front of it. Etheridge says the sun would set before the eclipse ends, which could produce some unique sunset photos that evening – especially considering some of the incredible vistas in the places where the eclipse will be visible.

The center point of the eclipse path will run from the northwest part of the state to the southeast. For Nevada, the center point will enter the state just north or Reno along the southern shore of Pyramid Lake. It runs just north of Fernley and Fallon, Tonopah, the Extraterrerstrial Highway and Caliente.

Read the whole story

Court issues mixed ruling on use of Tasers

By Denny Walsh and Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

To tase or not to tase? That was the question.

But there is no good answer, at least under the law, according to an opinion issued Monday by a 10-judge panel of the highest court in the Western states.

Case law is so muddled, a majority ruled, that even though the use of Tasers by police in two cases before the panel was unconstitutional, the officers have immunity from suit because they could not have been expected to know that.

The bottom line is that, until the law governing the use of these so-called “stun guns” is further clarified on a national scale, police are free to utilize them as they see fit. As of

Monday, this is the law in the nine Western states, including California, and two territories over which the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has jurisdiction.

Jayzel Mattos and Malaika Brooks were tased on Aug. 23, 2006, and Nov. 23, 2004, respectively. A Seattle policeman stopped Brooks speeding while driving her son to school and, according to officers, she gave them a lot of trouble. Mattos was embroiled in a domestic dispute and was deemed by Maui officers to be deliberately in the way when they were attempting to arrest her husband.

Given the circumstances, the women's Fourth Amendment rights to be free of excessive force were violated, a majority of the judges declared. But, they decided, "not every reasonable officer at the time of the respective incidents would have known – beyond debate – that such conduct violates the Fourth Amendment."

Read the whole story

Business groups meet in Minden

Carl Ribaudo, who runs Strategic Marketing Group in South Lake Tahoe and is executive director of Ski Lake Tahoe, will be one of two speakers at a Minden business gathering.

Bill Eadington, professor of economics and director of the Institute for the Study of Gambling and Commercial Gaming at the UNR, will be the other speaker at the Northern Nevada Development Authority, Business Council of Douglas County, and Carson Valley Chamber & Visitors Authority joint membership

breakfast meeting.

The Nov. 8 event is from 7-9am at the Carson Valley Inn, 1627 Highway 395, Minden.

Cost is $35 at the door, $25 in advance. To register, go online.

Economically-depressed Nevada will be key in 2012 election

By Andy Sullivan, Reuters

LAS VEGAS – A Republican debate will play out in one of this city's glittering casinos, but the real battleground for next year's U.S. presidential election lies in the foreclosure-racked neighborhoods that sprawl beyond the Las Vegas Strip's bright lights.

Few U.S. cities have been hit harder by the recession than Las Vegas, which is likely to be one of the most hotly contested prizes in an election dominated by economic concerns.

Las Vegas leads the nation in foreclosures and the unemployment rate is also among the highest.

One out of six people in the region have wondered over the past month where they will find their next meal, according to Three Square, a food bank serving the area.

"I know so many people who are desperate," said Linda Overby, a painter who has been out of work since April.

Though the economy may not pick up any time soon, Overby and

other Las Vegas residents will get plenty of attention from presidential candidates over the coming months.

Nevada, which has backed the winning candidate in every election stretching back to 1976, is one of a handful of battleground states that could decide next year's election.

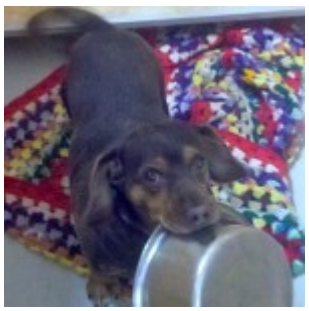
This time, the state's early caucus, tentatively set for Jan. 14, will also give it an outsize influence in the Republican primary race, although some candidates are threatening to boycott the vote here due to a fight over which states should hold primaries first.

The caucus will be the first in the West, a region that features high numbers of independent and Hispanic voters and relatively few of the Christian conservatives who play a large role in other early contests.

Read the whole story

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe

Lovey is a sweet Dachshund who is very affectionate and playful. She loves to go for walks, and likes her treats, though she could stand to have more walks and fewer treats.



Lovey would make a great pet for just about any family.

Lovey is spayed, microchipped, and vaccinated. She is at the El Dorado County Animal Services shelter in Meyers, along with many other dogs and cats who are waiting for their new homes.

Also, the cat and kitten adoption special has been extended through October – the adoption fee is half price, just $40.

Call (530) 573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information on adopting a pet.

For spay-neuter assistance for South Tahoe residents, go online.

– Karen Kuentz

Want free tickets to the Festival of Trees and Lights?

Beginning the week of Nov. 7, *Lake Tahoe News* in collaboration with the Barton Foundation will be giving away four packages of tickets to the annual Family Night during the Festival of Trees and Lights.

The Dec. 2 family night package includes tickets for six people to the festival and a group picture with Santa.

The Festival of Trees and Lights is a family oriented three-day extravaganza (Dec. 2-4) that brings the magic of the holidays to life for all ages, while at the same time raising money for the Barton Clinic.

Details about the contest will be forthcoming next week.

The contest is open to everyone who is part of *Lake Tahoe*

News’ special NEWS subscriber list. All you have to do is send $40 to *LTN*, then you are added to the list, you will be sent a T-shirt as our thanks, and you qualify for this and other great promotions.



Creativity shines at the Festival of Trees and Lights.
Photo/LTN file

Send checks to Lake Tahoe News, P.O. Box 13406, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96151 or pay via credit card through PayPal on the website at the bottom right of the home page.

Please include your email address so we can ensure you are subscribed to receive the daily digest. To receive the daily email, which lists what has been posted in the last 24 hours, enter your email address at the bottom right of the home page.

Please don’t forget to include your mailing address and shirt size – S, M, L, XL or 2X.

(Older shirts are for sale for $15, but sizes are limited.)