Opinion: Barton Health offers a helping hand

By Dick Derby

Barton Health, along with its affiliated healthcare facilities, treated more than 165,000 patients in 2010. With a population of 21,403 in the city of South Lake Tahoe and 181,058 residents in El Dorado County, Barton continues to serve the community and visitors alike. While, businesses in and around the lake accommodate “locals” by providing free services and discounts, Barton has done the same for years with free or low cost prevention screenings, wellness seminars and through our financial assistance program called Helping Hands.

Helping Hands was designed to assist South Lake Tahoe area residents. In the past few years, many families and individuals have suffered from the ongoing recession, endured lay-offs, both big and small business owners have closed their doors, lost insurance, have high insurance deductibles or work two jobs to provide for their families. At Barton, we are attempting to relieve some of the financial burden of medical bills with our Helping Hands Program.



Dick Derby

The Helping Hands Program provides financial assistance to local area residents who do not qualify for programs such as Access for Infants and Mothers, County Medical Services

Program, Medi-Cal, Medicare, Nevada Medicaid, Douglas County Social Services or the Victim of Crime Program.

A major misconception is that financial help is only for those in the lower income brackets, but most of Tahoe's middle class is eligible for some level of discount. The program works on a sliding scale of annual income and family unit size. Even patients with insurance may be eligible for a lower rate. For more information on Barton's Helping Hands Program policy, go online to find a copy our financial assistance policy.

Examples of those who may eligible for a discount:

Number of people in household	**Annual household income**	**Eligible discount**
Family of 4	$89,400	25%
Retired Couple	$51,485	50%
Single mother with 2 children	$55,590	75%
Family of 4 w/ high insurance deductible	$55,875	100%

In addition to the Helping Hands program, Barton offers primary care and specialty physician services at the Barton Community Clinic using a similar sliding scale based on annual income and family unit size. This allows Barton to continue the tradition of offering preventative care, family planning and services for the ill or elderly at little or no cost to qualifying patients.

Barton Health is a nonprofit healthcare system, and as a part of our mission, we strive to deliver safe, high quality healthcare to our community through accessible health programs, including wellness lab draws, health fairs, lectures and discounts on our services for those who qualify. We provided more than $4.2 million in charity care in 2010, which

was as a result of providing low-cost options through our Helping Hands Program. Barton Memorial Hospital is here for our community and staffed 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week, for emergency care.

As the largest employer in the city of South Lake Tahoe, we are proud to employ more than 900 employees. At Barton we work together to provide consistently exceptional care to our employees, visitors and the community at large. As a nonprofit hospital, Barton provides emergency medical services to our visitors and community members without regard of their ability to pay, in addition to offering the Helping Hands Program mentioned above. Our physicians, nurses and staff specialize in pediatrics, women and men's health, emergency care, rehabilitation, orthopedics, general and specialty surgery, and serve the youngest patients in our Family Birthing Center to the oldest patients in our Skilled Nursing Facility. Prevention and education programs are developed and maintained to benefit the public and we provide leading-edge technology, necessary medical equipment, recruitment of the best and brightest physicians in the nation, and cover general operational costs such as food service, housekeeping, facility maintenance and improvement.

Barton Memorial Hospital's healthcare fees are less than a majority of California hospitals. As a rural facility, with the only emergency department and birthing center in the area – amongst many other critical medical services, we are here to serve our community. As businesses and government programs continue to struggle through these tough economic times, my hope is that individuals and families alike take advantage of our Helping Hands Program. We are here to continue to provide the best medical services and fulfill patients' needs right in their own backyard.

To find out more about Barton's Helping Hands Program, go online, call (530) 543.5908 or email patientaccts@bartonhealth.org.

Dick Derby is vice president of finance at Barton Health. He is also the past president of the South Lake Tahoe Rotary Club, a board member of California Hospital Insurance and is a member of the Health Care Financial Management Association.

Local kids celebrate National Boys & Girls Club Day

Members of the Boys & Girls Club joined thousands of club members across the country in celebration of the National Boys & Girls Club Day for Kids on Sept. 16.

Each year clubs designate a day in September for their members and families to celebrate. With support from the South Lake Tahoe Police and the Community Service departments, members participated in a parade, games, food and lots of fun.

Created as a day to foster relationships between adults and children, the mission of the Boys & Girls Club Day for Kids is to establish a day to celebrate and honor children through the gift of meaningful time. Research shows that when adults spend meaningful time with kids it helps them develop a positive self-image and a sense of belonging, usefulness and purpose.

Pretty flower stimulating

bike tire repair business

By Jackie Green, Reno Gazette-Journal

The little yellow flowers that sprouted after our wet spring have few, if any, fans in Northern Nevada.

Bicyclist Bruce Ruana wants to send them to Iraq.

“It’s a minefield” riding through them, he said.



Goathead flowers have a thorn that is flattening tires in the Sierra.

Walt Dorman, manager at Great Basin Bicycles in Reno, said they have caused a 200 percent increase in tire flats at his shop during the past few weeks.

“That beautiful little flower turns into that nasty goathead,” said Bill Carlos, horticulturist for Washoe County.

Anyone who has biked or hiked in Northern Nevada or California has run into the goatheads, also called puncturevine, and found the thorns stuck in their dog’s fur or in a flat bicycle tire.

“Why are there goatheads? What do they do?” Ruana, an avid cyclist and baseball/alpine ski manager at Scheels in Sparks,

said in frustration.

Puncturevine is a summer annual with yellow flowers.

Each flower produces a spiky seed, so in each seed, there are five seedlets, “each of which seems to be capable of puncturing tires, getting through flip-flops, etc.” said Sue Donaldson of the University of Nevada, Reno Cooperative Extension.

From the time it starts growing, puncturevine will flower within a few weeks and keep flowering, producing seeds the entire time it is growing.

Read the whole story

TRPA defends using same auditor city of Bell employed

By Kathryn Reed

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency is using the same auditing firm the financially ruined Southern California city of Bell used.

While the bi-state regulatory agency entered the agreement in May 2010 – six weeks before the mayor of Bell resigned – the agency chose to stick with the controversial firm when the news about that city spread like wildfire.

The auditor contract says TRPA could terminate the agreement with 30-days notice.

The three-year $173,350 contract also covers audits for Tahoe Transportation District and the now bankrupt South Tahoe Area Transit Authority.

And while Kristi Boosman and Jeff Cowen – spokespeople for TRPA – vehemently maintained the one audit Mayer Hoffman McCann has done to date was thorough, they also said that it wasn't the same group of auditors working on the TRPA that did the Bell audit.

However, on Page 7 of the 24-page document it shows that TRPA was working with the Irvine office of Mayer Hoffman McCann – the same office Bell used. This doesn't mean it's the same people doing the audit, but the firm does have offices in Northern California.

Several cities stopped using the international accounting firm after California's controller issued a scathing indictment of the firm.

State Controller John Chiang on Dec. 21, 2010, said in a press release, "MHM appears to have been a rubberstamp rather than a responsible auditor committed to providing the public with the transparency and accountability that could have prevented the mismanagement of the City's finances by Bell officials. Had MHM fully complied with the 17 applicable fieldwork standards, it would have led them to identify some – if not all – of the problems my office has uncovered since August."

MHM President Bill Hancock that same day in a press release said, "Clearly the events in Bell are tragic and outrageous. Mayer Hoffman adheres to the highest standards, and we have forged a reputation for integrity and quality throughout our 50-year track record of service. But in those 50 years we have never seen anything like the pervasive collusion of so many individuals acting in concert to deceive auditors, as happened at Bell."

Why does this matter?

There are several reasons an audit is important, with one of the main ones being it is a document for elected officials – appointed in the case of the TRPA Governing Board – to know if their staff is running a financially sound operation.

The auditor should work directly for the City Council, Board of Supervisors or Governing Board.

This was not the case with the firm hired by the TRPA. The decision to hire Mayer Hoffman McCann was done through a request for proposal, but the Governing Board never voted on it, according to Cowen. This is because, according to Cowen, the board only needs to vote on items not in the budget or that are more than $100,000 a year.

Governing Board Chairman and El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago did not know MHM was the same firm Bell used until *Lake Tahoe News* called her. She said the administrative team at TRPA handles the audit, with the operations committee having a say.

John Breternitz, who is chair of the operations committee and on the Governing Board as Washoe County's representative, said, "We picked the same firm we used last time."

It's true this year's audit will be done by the same firm because of the three-year contract, but this is the first time MHM has had a contract with TPRA.

When Breternitz was asked if he knew about MHM's work in Bell, he said, "I think that was mentioned." When pressed further, he said, "I guess I don't know all the details about the Southern California city."

Boosman, the TRPA flack, wanted the former CFO instead of someone on staff to speak for the agency in terms of what happened once it came to light about the firm and Bell.

Executive Director Joanne Marchetta had a phone interview set

up with this reporter for Sept. 20 that she canceled that morning and her assistant has not responded to an email to reschedule it.

Other things

C.G. Uhlenberg LLP was the firm TRPA used prior to MHM.

“I found TRPA’s prior auditors to be unorganized and they did not communicate well with one another. That led to them wasting public resources (my staff’s time). They also were not on top of the professional standards the way I thought they should be,” Rhonda McFarlane, TRPA’s former chief financial officer, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “As a CFO, I have always used the auditors as my professional resource for questions and information I may need on generally accepted accounting principles or best business practices. Unfortunately, I was more knowledgeable than the prior auditors, and thus they were unable to provide me the support I needed to be effective in my job.”

In a Nov. 1, 2010, *LTN* story, El Dorado County Auditor-Controller Joe Harn said of the much overdue STATA audit, “This is the worst (audit) I’ve ever seen for an organization this size. The weaknesses in internal control are the worst I’ve ever seen.” But that had to do with the information STATA gave to the auditor, not about the auditor.

McFarlane says through the RFP process and her experience with MHM at a prior organization she was confident in their abilities.

She told Jim Brockett, her boss at the time who also is no longer at the agency, about MHM’s connection to Bell.

There is no evidence, though, the Governing Board was ever told.

Hallye Jordan, deputy controller with the state, said her

agency couldn’t recommend a private company be used or not used. Nor could the state office say if the situation with MHM in Bell might be an anomaly.

“We can’t say whether that means there are problems like that elsewhere,” Jordan told *LTN* in analyzing the situation in Bell.

The officials who took over for the disgraced Bell leaders called in the Controllers Office to do an audit. The audit the office is doing on the city of Montebello that was announced Thursday was triggered by consistently late reports regarding gas tax money and its redevelopment agency, Jordan said.

How a city, county or special district uses state and federal money could also trigger an audit by the state controller, Jordan said.

Kokanee Salmon Festival

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit invites residents and visitors to attend the Kokanee Salmon Festival, which celebrates the annual fall migration of kokanee salmon at the Taylor Creek Visitor Center.

The event is Oct. 1-2 from 10am-4pm. The visitor center is located three miles north of South Lake Tahoe on Highway 89.

Participants can learn about the natural wonders of Taylor Creek and take part in many activities, including a salmon barbecue, kokanee trail runs, children’s activities, educational and streamside programs, and much more.

On Sunday at 2pm, Wild Thing, Inc. will present a live wildlife program at the Lake of the Sky Amphitheater. This

free program features live animals, which may include a bald eagle, barn owl, turkey vulture, a beaver, and snakes. Because of the live animals on stage, attendees should leave pets at home.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service will bring a 40-foot inflatable fish for children to explore, and the festival's two new mascots, Sandy and Rocky Salmon, will make appearances each day. There will even be a special appearance by Smokey Bear.

The Kokanee Salmon Festival and Oktoberfest at Historic Camp Richardson Resort, occur the same weekend, so the parking lot at the visitor center fills quickly. Visitors are encouraged to ride a bike or walk along the bike path between Camp Richardson and the visitor center, or take public transportation from South Lake Tahoe. BlueGo and the Nifty Fifty trolley will provide special service for these events. Contact them at (530) 541.7149.

All proceeds from T-shirt sales, festival pin sales, and the trail runs benefit the U.S. Forest Service environmental education programs in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

For more information and a complete schedule of activities, call (530) 543.2674.

Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day

Nevada State Parks in cooperation with the Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park Backcounrty Patrol, the Reno Wheelmen, and the Tahoe Area Mountain Biking Association will host young riders,

ages 6 to 16, for a youth mountain biking event. The ride is part of a nationwide celebration known as Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day, supported by the International Mountain Bicycling Association.

The event is Oct. 1 beginning at 9:30am at the Spooner Lake entrance of Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park. Participants must bring a bike and helmet and a parent or guardian to sign the participation form. Parents and friends are welcome and encouraged to ride, too. There is no fee for the event, however there is an entrance fee to access the state park.

There will be safe riding information, bike safety checks, riding tips, and informal skill clinics. Groups of kids with similar skills will then be taken on the beginner trail around Spooner Lake by experienced bike patrol members. Goodie bags will be given to the first 50 kids to show up.

IMBA’s International Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day celebrates the life of Jack Doub, an avid teenage mountain biker from North Carolina who had a true passion for the sport from an early age to the time when he passed away in 2002.

For additional information, email info@tahoebikepatrol.org

Bike event is all about kids

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Sierra Cup Mountain Bike Racing Series

The Sierra Cup Mountain Bike Racing Series wraps up the 2011 season on Oct. 2 with the Sawtooth Ridge Challenge at Northstar-at-Tahoe.

The Sierra Cup is a seven race point series to determine the USA Cycling cross-country mountain bike champions for the Northern California/Nevada region.

The Sawtooth Ridge Challenge, like the other Sierra Cup events, is donating event proceeds to bicycle related causes.

Benefiting from this race will be the Truckee Trails Foundation and the Northstar/Giant development team. The series events have also partnered with Waste Not in Incline Village to meet or exceed zero-waste standards.

Racers will ride a 7-mile course that was developed by Northstar Resort for last year's Collegiate National Championships. Racers will complete multiple laps of the course depending on their ability category. The course will have a mix of trails that include small features like jumps, berms and technical descents. The climbs are spread out to allow time for riders to recover.

There are age and ability categories for all levels of riders. Custom recycled medals are awarded to the top finishers in each category as well as series points. After the race awards, there will be a podium ceremony for the overall series winners. Besides the regional championship medals from USA Cycling, there is also a $1,500 series purse for top riders.

Online registration is available.

Miss Chinese competition comes to Tahoe and Reno

Nevada will host 18 contestants from all over the world who are competing in the Miss Chinese Cosmos Semi-Finals.

The Sept. 23-30 event will take place in Lake Tahoe and Reno.

The contest moves around the world each year, last year taking place in Australia. This is the first time the pageant has been in the United States.

The eight-day tour and competition will include a visit to the Street Vibrations event in Reno, a tour of the National Automobile Museum, tours of the state Capitol and the Nevada State Museum, a cruise aboard the M.S. Dixie II, a Wild West shoot-out in Virginia City, and photo shoot under the iconic Reno Arch.

Flu shots available on South Shore

Flu shots and pneumonia vaccinations for the public are $20 for per flu shot and $35 per pneumonia vaccination. Flu vaccine is free for ages 3-18.

No appointment necessary.

Flu and pneumonia vaccinations will be available to the public at Barton Family Medicine at 1090 3rd St., South Lake Tahoe on:

Oct. 8, 9am-1pm

Oct. 22, 1-5pm

Nov. 5, from 9am-1pm

Nov. 19, 1-5pm.

Flu and pneumonia vaccinations will be available at South Tahoe Middle School multipurpose room on Oct. 12 from 3-7pm; and at the Stateline Medical Center on Oct. 21 from 3-7pm.