Opinion: Time to swing for the fences in Nevada

By Jon Ralston, Las Vegas Sun

Watching the predictable, partisan reaction to the national unemployment rate and the jobs report last week made me wonder if people in Nevada know just how bad we have it.

We can only dream of 9.1 percent unemployment here. The last time we were that low? George W. Bush was languishing as a lame duck, then-Gov. Jim Gibbons was preparing to call a special session to deal with a budget shortfall and Dina Titus was basking in her victory over Rep. Jon Porter.

A political lifetime ago.

Unemployment in Nevada is now at 12.4 percent, actually down from nearly 15 percent late last year. Why? I have no patience for the pointless partisan blame game, especially here where neither Republicans nor Democrats have provided the leadership to help cushion Nevada’s economy when national recessions hit or chart a reasonable path forward.

But have no fear. Unlike that dysfunctional Congress with unprecedented unpopularity, in Nevada the parties united to revamp the economic development structure so businesses will flock here. Or not.

So as the state’s seminal industry looks to China, two Nevada cities (North Las Vegas and Reno) edge toward a financial precipice and the mining industry prepares to celebrate its tax-free, $1,600-an-ounce golden year at Lake Tahoe, it’s hard to see how far we’ve come in 25 years, much less since unemployment was at 9 percent in those halcyon, late days of 2008.

Don't misunderstand: Gov. Brian Sandoval taking the lead on economic development through the celebrated Assembly Bill 449 and bringing in some fine minds, especially entrepreneur Steve Hill, may make some sense. But all that bill does is change the structure (sorry, Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki) and try to consolidate the disparate economic diversification elements.

Read the whole story

Workshop focuses on various aspects of greening a business

As part of its Chamber EDucation program, the North Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the Sierra Economic Development Corporation is hosting a "Grow the Green by Going Green" workshop Aug. 18 from noon to 1:30pm at the Mark Twain Cultural Center, 760 Mays Blvd., Ste. 10 in Incline Village.

Deadline to register is Aug. 15.

Attendees will learn about what it means to be green and how to grow your business by being green. They'll also explore green marketing techniques, including sustainability efforts and cost-effective social media to target new and existing customers.

The cost is $55/person (payable in advance by mail or credit card), and participants need to bring their own lunch.

To register, call the Sierra Economic Development Corporation at (530) 823-4703 or email info@sedcorp.biz.

This class will also be repeated Sept. 7 at the Tahoe City Public Utility District in Tahoe City and Oct. 20 at Mourelatos Lakeshore Resort in Tahoe Vista.

Port-of-Subs owner molds Sparks sandwich shop into 150 franchises

By Bill O'Driscoll, Reno Gazette-Journal

John Larsen's 36-year voyage as a purveyor of submarine sandwiches has been anything but calm.

He's faced some of the harshest seas a businessman can imagine – and took them, in character with his upbringing, head-on.

"You do whatever you got to do. I never took 'no' for an answer," said Larsen, co-founder and CEO of Port of Subs, which he helped build from a small Sparks shop nearly four decades ago into 150 franchise and company-owned restaurants in Nevada and seven other states across the West.

At age 62, Larsen has passed much of the day-to-day duties of his company on to colleagues while he oversees the broader mission of growing Port of Subs, launched with his former wife, Pat, in 1975 when they acquired the Sub Shop in Sparks.

But Larsen stays close to the wheel. On any given day, he's in his company office off Mae Anne Avenue in northwest Reno abiding by a lifelong belief in hard work and a tenacity never to give up.

"I'm still CEO," he said of his presence.

When the risk of sinking comes along, as it has several times over the years and most recently in the recession, Larsen has found ways to keep the ship afloat.

“I love the game,” he said of business. “The word ‘failure’ just drives me. It scares me so bad. I just dig down deep and work harder.”

Read the whole story

Tahoe-Douglas fire chief calling it quits after 33 years

By Kathryn Reed

“Dramatic changes” is how Guy LeFever describes what he has experienced in the 33 years he has worked for the Tahoe-Douglas Fire Protection District.

The fire chief’s last day is Sept. 2.

His career started in 1975 on a hand crew for Los Angeles County – a crew much like the ones his department uses today for fuel reduction projects.

Guy LeFever

In 1979 he moved to Lake Tahoe, starting at Tahoe-Douglas as a firefighter. Shortly thereafter Nevada mandated ambulances be staffed with paramedics, so he and five others became certified. He worked as a paramedic for a few years before starting up the promotional ladder.

“Working on the ambulance, I think that was probably the most satisfying time in my career … helping people. Every day was new, every call was different,” LeFever said. “At the time I was pretty young, an impressionable young man.”

Now, at 55, he is the third chief in a six-week span to leave the Lake Tahoe Basin — a basin with seven chiefs. The others who left are Jeff Michael at Lake Valley and Lorenzo Gigliotti at South Lake Tahoe.

LeFever said it’s probably unheard of for three chiefs to depart at the same time. He and Michael are retiring. LeFever didn’t even want to broach the issue of South Lake Tahoe’s departmental struggles and issues.

One thing that has impressed LeFever are the changes regarding fuel reduction in the past handful of years.

“We’ve been fortunate we’ve been able to get defensible space. To get these halos around the community so we don’t get a second Angora,” LeFever told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The amount of work being done in fuel reduction really is going to have long-term impacts I believe on reducing the fire hazard in the basin.”

But he can see the awareness and priority level drop as Angora fades from people’s memories.

His constituents after the devastating 2007 Angora Fire voted in a tax just for defensible space/fuel reduction work by his department. Despite the fire being across the state line and no homes in Tahoe-Douglas threatened that June, residents know about fire.

LeFever was a battalion chief when the 2002 Gondola Fire erupted in his jurisdiction. He credits Mother Nature for changing wind direction on the second day so it was blowing down Edgewood Canyon. Otherwise, he’s not sure how many houses in the Kingsbury Grade area might have been lost.

About two weeks before Angora his guys were back in Edgewood Canyon because of an electrical fire.

“It just started getting into the trees about 11am,” LeFever said. “If you put that same fire at 2, 3 in the afternoon, Angora probably doesn’t happen because everyone would have been on their toes because we would have lost Edgewood Canyon.”

During Angora, he was chief of the department. But he was out of town – receiving updates every couple hours.

“We sent our entire department over there – five engines, a water tender. We emptied our entire department over there,” LeFever said.

The evolution of mutual aid between agencies in the basin and those in the Carson Valley is something LeFever is proud he’s been part of.

With Tahoe-Douglas being responsible for the Stateline casino corridor, it has proven to be interesting at times.

In 1980 during the bombing at Harveys, LeFever was a firefighter and emergency medical technician on an ambulance.

“It was an eye-opener to see military here and operating with the FBI. And our bomb squad was an integral part of that,” he said.

As he rose through the ranks, his responsibilities have changed.

LeFever is credited with being good with numbers, saving jobs whenever possible, being frugal, but keeping the level of service people want and need.

“Probably his real strength is he has a talent when it comes to finances,” Mark Novak, Tahoe-Douglas fire marshal, said. “He’s more proactive than reactive.”

In his time as chief, LeFever was instrumental in helping create the fire academy at Lake Tahoe Community College.

“He is a true gentleman. He’s always been there when we needed him. I couldn’t ask for a better community partner,” Virginia Boyar, who helps runs the program at the college, said of LeFever.

LeFever only has good things to say about the academy and the collaborative effort to make it work — including having several of his guys be instructors.

Another accomplishment of LeFever’s is creating the business inspection program at the lake. It gives firefighters an opportunity to see inside a structure before they might be fighting a fire there, and it thwarted Douglas County’s attempts to tax businesses at the lake.

LeFever said it’s time to go — to let those behind him take over.

“I’m comfortable where the management team is and where the organization is going is positive. If I didn’t think so, I would probably stick around longer,” LeFever said.

Who will take over for LeFever remains to be determined by the fire district’s board. That decision is likely to be announced in October.

California TRPA board members must comply with FPPC rules

Transparency is supposedly coming to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. At least that's the goal of legislation signed Wednesday by Gov. Jerry Brown.

The legislation was sponsored by state Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Roseville, who represents the California side of Lake Tahoe.

SB593 requires each California member of the TRPA to comply with the requirements of the Political Reform Act and to file with the Fair Political Practices Commission a statement of economic interests.

"I was surprised to learn that there was no existing state law mandating these disclosure requirements. This opened the potential for California members of the TRPA to make decisions in which they had a conflict of interest and left the public with no way of knowing," Gaines said in a statement. "Because of SB593, these members will now have to file the same conflict disclosure form required of every other elected and appointed official in the state. They will be held to the same high standards when it comes to disclosure and maintaining the public's utmost trust."

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Bank CEOs seek to assure investors this is not a repeat of ’08

By Nathaniel Popper and E. Scott Reckard, Los Angeles Times

Wall Street retreated back into panic mode amid growing worries about the economy, prompting leaders of major U.S. banks to take the rare step of assuring jittery investors that a repeat of the 2008 financial crisis was not about to happen.

The chief executives of the nation’s three biggest banks – JPMorgan Chase & Co., Bank of America Corp. and Citigroup Inc. – are fighting speculation that they are in trouble and leading the nation back into recession.

Banking stocks have recently slumped to levels not seen since Wall Street’s meltdown three years ago, when the industry received a massive government bailout to avert collapse. They also led the market’s huge dive Wednesday, when the Dow Jones industrial average plunged 520 points.

During the stock market’s rout, a leading index of bank stocks dropped 7.1% – far outpacing the Dow’s 4.6% slide. Over the last month, banks performed worse than any other sector in the broad Standard & Poor’s 500 index, dropping 22%.

“With the stock prices down so much and the memories of 2008 so fresh, there are probably a lot of people who could use some reassurance that we aren’t going to repeat that situation,” said Jim Sinegal, a bank analyst with Morningstar. “With the stock prices down, everyone is trying to address it all at once.”

Banking executives have scrambled in the last 24 hours to broadcast the message that their balance sheets are sound.

JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon made a television appearance in California on Wednesday to talk about the health of his bank just hours before BofA CEO Brian Moynihan submitted to a telephone grilling from skeptical investors. And Citigroup's Vikram Pandit earlier this week sent a voicemail to the bank's employees asking them to tell customers the company was in good shape.

Read the whole story

MontBleu's parent company reports $2.7 mil. quarterly loss

By Steve Green, Las Vegas Sun

Casino operator Tropicana Entertainment Inc. of Las Vegas reported a second quarter loss Tuesday as business deteriorated at its properties in Atlantic City and Nevada.

The company, controlled by investor Carl Icahn, said it lost $2.7 million vs. a loss of $1.6 million in the year-ago quarter.

Net revenue of $145 million was down from $164 million.

Tropicana has two hotel-casinos in Laughlin in Southern Nevada and one, the River Palms, has seen business decline due to road construction on the main casino strip there.

Tropicana said that citywide, Laughlin casino revenue fell 7.3 percent in the quarter vs. 2010's second quarter because of the construction, "continuing poor economic conditions and reduced consumer discretionary spending.’’

The company’s property in Stateline, the MontBleu Casino Resort & Spa, has similarly been hurt by the slow economy.

Overall, the Nevada properties generated net revenue of $29.3 million, down 6.6 percent.

Read the whole story

Measure R to be on Nov. 8 ballot

The board that oversees recreation Measure S on Wednesday voted on all the necessary motions to go back to the voters.

Measure R would revise the 11-year-old Measure S to allow for more bike trails to be given funding for maintenance and more money for ball fields.

The boundaries for the people paying the $18 a year fee are those who live within the Lake Tahoe Unified School District.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Eldorado National Forest taps

woman who knows area as supervisor

A woman who knows the Eldorado National Forest well has been tapped to be the forest supervisor for that region.

Kathy Hardy replaces Ramiro Villalvazo who left in June for a position in the Forest Service's Regional Office in Vallejo.

Hardy's start date has not been determined.

Kathy Hardy

She was Placerville District Ranger in Camino from 1999 to 2006.

Hardy brings a broad natural and cultural resource leadership background to the Forest Supervisor position. Hardy has been the Central California District Manager with the Bureau of Land Management since April 2009, providing oversight to offices in Bakersfield, Bishop, El Dorado Hills, Hollister and Ukiah. Previously, she was the deputy forest supervisor on the Stanislaus National Forest from October 2006 through April 2009.

Hardy and her husband Bruce Ungari live in El Dorado Hills. They enjoy outdoor activities including camping, skiing, rafting and fishing.

Book signing in South Lake Tahoe

Author Janet Kaidantzis will sign her book “Fallen Leaf, A Lake and its People: at the Lake Tahoe Museum on Aug. 19 form 3-6pm.

The cover says, “From the Washoe to the pioneering families of Nathan Gilmore, Lucky Baldwin and William Price to the artists, academics and craftsmen of the early community, Fallen Leaf Lake drew people to its natural beauty who left a legacy in stories, legends and land.” Kaidantzis and Bill Craven will answer questions about the past at Fallen Leaf Lake.

The museum is at 3058 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.