Memories of Angora Fire fuel anxieties at Wildfire Summit

By Stephen Ward

TAHOE CITY-The frustration was palpable among the roughly 85 firefighters and homeowners who gathered for the Wildfire Summit at the Granlibakken Resort in Tahoe City on Friday. The crowd, who came to learn more about preventing wildfires, expressed their grievances about residents they considered inconsiderate and/or clueless about fire safety within their communities.



Representatives from Incline Village to South Lake Tahoe cited a lack of communication between local agencies and homeowner apprehension as reasons for why the region has had trouble getting residents to develop defensible space around the area.

In fact, the barrage of excuses homeowners deploy to evade reconditioning their property was the centerpiece of one speaker's presentation. Ed Smith, a natural resources specialist for the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, listed 15 reasons people don't prepare for wildfires, many echoing the sentiments said above, with a PowerPoint slide accompanying each point he made.

"Lack of action is a lack of means, motive and opportunity," Smith said while introducing his points.

But Smith's lecture wasn't spent ridiculing locals – he offered several tips on how to prepare for the worst. Smith advised residents to remove dead trees, create more separation among those that are living and to detach the lower branches of trees so fire can't climb to the top.

After Smith’s talk, attendees dispersed into groups based on their residence. In the South Lake Tahoe and Fallen Leaf Lake group, eight members of the community spent their time more as a think tank than a preventative measure session. Most members of the group worked with a fire prevention agency in the area.

Jess Mahnken, project coordinator for Nevada Fire Safe Council, addressed the difficulty of explaining defensible space to lake residents.

“Just like every property is different, every homeowner is different,” she said. “You need to hold every hand in a different way.”

Memories of the Angora fire fueled many of the anxieties overheard at the summit, with several attendees referring to the disaster during the breakout sessions. Jeff Michael, chief of Lake Valley’s Fire Protection District, touched on the lessons his group learned from the fire earlier in the day, including how to respond more quickly and effectively to wildfires.

Another point Mahnken highlighted at the summit was the incentives for residents to develop defensible space. For instance, the Fire Safe Council offers a 50 percent rebate, up to $1,000, for homeowners who renovate their property. Some communities even have grant programs that allow the $1,000 cap to be lifted.

The Fire Safe Council hosted the event in partnership with the University of California Cooperative Extension and University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, with funding from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and vendors at the conference.

Although the summit had a considerably large crowd, few attendees were actual homeowners; most of the people there were clothed in fire marshal outfits or were involved with an agency.

However, one of the few homeowners who did attend left feeling better about her knowledge of wildfire prevention.

“I thought the talks were exceptionally good,” Patricia Owens, who has been an Incline Village resident for 22 years, said. “I wish there were a way to contact more members of the community. People need to relate to the fact that fire is always an ongoing threat to the area.”

Despite the lack of community members, Susie Kocher, chair of the event’s planning committee, was pleased with the summit’s turnout.

“The point we’re trying to make is that this is a really broad, complicated problem,” she said, referring to ambivalence to wildfire prevention. “It’s going to take action from all of us. Everyone has to work together to reduce risk.”

Supervisor changes in Eldorado National Forest

Ramiro Villalvazo as of this week is no longer supervisor of the Eldorado National Forest. He is now regional dirctor of Public Services in Vallejo.

Tony Valdes, currently Eldorado National Forest resources staff officer, will be acting forest supervisor for the next four weeks until a longer term acting supervisor is appointed.

Summer lodging bookings look good for mountain regions

By Howard Pankratz, Denver Post

A tough economy that has Americans postponing extended and overseas vacations has been a blessing to western mountains resorts, according to Ralf Garrison, director of the Denver-based Mountain Travel Research Program.

According to Garrison, advanced reservations are up at most participating mountain resort destinations.

Advanced bookings in May were up 2.8 percent compared to last May with increases in June, July and August.

For the month of May, actual occupancy for mountain lodging was up 5.6 percent over a year ago, and the average daily rate being charged by the resorts is up 3.2 percent compared to May 2010.

Garrison said that with a slumping economy, “there is a disincentive to travel further and an incentive to stay at home.”

But where as Americans were recently taking “stay-cations” – or staying very,very close to home – they are now taking what Garrison described as “close-cations”. That means the western mountain resorts are seeing an influx of reservations from nearby metropolitan areas, he said.

Garrison said in Colorado, the resorts are seeing reservations from the Front Range, Utah resorts are seeing an uptick from the Salt Lake City area and Tahoe is seeing traffic from California cities.

Read the whole story

Summer deadline to enroll at UNR for fall a first; layoffs coming

By Susan Voyles, Reno Gazette-Journal

The first stab at reducing enrollment at the University of Nevada, Reno will come with the first-ever registration deadline for the fall semester.

UNR President Marc Johnson said he hasn't set a date yet for the deadline this summer.

School records show that students who register at the last moment are not organized to graduate, he said. Until now, students could enroll up to the first day of school.

"We have lost millions and millions in higher education. It means we can handle fewer students," he said.

A record 17,679 students enrolled at UNR last fall.

Dan Klaich, chancellor for the Nevada System of Higher Education, told the Board of Regents last week that he wants all seven campuses to set a cut-off date for applications.

"I flirted with mandating a systemwide cutoff of July 15," he said. "But the presidents will know best what works for them."

"We cannot and indeed, should not, think we can help or serve everyone," Klaich said. No longer, he said, can young people operate under the impression, "Well, I can always go to college here in Nevada."

Read the whole story

Broc’s Puppies case progessing slowly

Former Broc’s Puppies owner Dennis Franks‘ pubic defender is challenging the charges being brought against the defendant.

Franks was in court Thursday regarding the nearly 100 charges he faces stemming from operating the South Lake Tahoe store that sold puppies.

The court gave Franks’ attorney until July 14 to file their paperwork, with the district attorney’s office having until Aug. 14 to respond. They are all scheduled to be back in court Sept. 1.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Bare shelves have Christmas Cheer turning people away

By Kathryn Reed

Christmas Cheer – the year-round-food bank in South Lake Tahoe – could not open its doors Wednesday because it didn’t have enough food to give to the growing number of people seeking its help.



“A lot of people think these people are on welfare and just taking advantage, but so many come in crying and are so embarrassed to be there,” director Virginia Buffington said.

Christmas Cheer is assisting about 700 households or 1,700 people a month. While the numbers are about the same as last year, they are well above the historical average for the nonprofit.

What is causing the problem is donations – financial and food – are considerably less than years past.

People in need can get one bag or box of food a month. They have different items depending on how many people need to be fed.

For the homeless, Christmas Cheer tries to provide them with canned goods with pull tops because they don’t have can openers.

Mostly it’s non-perishable food people get. Macaroni and cheese – things that are a meal in a box – are good donations, Buffington said.

Peanut butter and beans help provide protein.

Cash is the best donation because Christmas Cheer can purchase items from the food bank at 18 cents a pound. This way the money goes farther than when they have to shop at local grocery stores.

However, with donations to the food banks down, Christmas Cheer has been shopping at local stores.

Grocery Outlet is having a food drive for Christmas Cheer all of July. The charity is going to put its familiar barrels that are usually just seen at the holidays out at more locations

this summer as a way to remind people the need is not just seasonal.

Christmas Cheer, which is run entirely by volunteers, gives out food Sundays from 2-4pm, and Monday and Wednesday from 11am-2pm. Donations may be dropped off then or call Buffington at (530) 208.8359 to arrange a specific time. Checks may be sent to P.O. Box 14489, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96151.

‘Dixie Swim Club’ at Boathouse Theatre

As part of the Valhalla Arts, Music, and Theatre Festival, the Tahoe Tallac Association and 5th Age productions present the comedy “The Dixie Swim Club” by Jessie Jones, Nicholas Hope and Jamie Wooten at the Boathouse Theatre, July 7-9, July 14-16 at 8pm and July 10 and July 17 at 2pm.

Five Southern women, whose friendships began many years ago on their college swim team, set aside a long weekend every August to recharge those relationships. Free from husbands, kids and jobs, they meet at the same beach cottage on North Carolina’s Outer Banks to catch up, laugh and meddle in each others lives.



As their lives unfold and the years pass, these women increasingly rely on one another, through advice and raucous repartee, to get through the challenges (men, sex, marriage, parenting, divorce, aging) that life flings at them. And when fate throws a wrench into one of their lives in the second act, these friends, proving the enduring power of “teamwork,” rally

around their own with the strength and love that takes this comedy in a poignant and surprising direction. “The Dixie Swim Club” is a hilarious and touching comedy about friendships that last forever.

The cast includes: Diana Arrington Evans, Ginger Nicolay Davis, Ann Swallow, Teri Levy and Amy Sando.

The production is directed by Dave Hamilton, with Dave Anderson doing set design and technical direction.

Tickets at $18 general, $15 seniors over 65 and children under 18. They are available online or at the door. Due to adult situations, the production is not recommended for children under 13.

The Boathouse Theatre is located at the Tallac Historic Site, 2 miles past the intersection of highways 50 and 89, just past Camp Richardson, on the lake side of Highway 89.

For more information, call (530) 541.4975.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

• Here is current information on El Dorado County’s redistricting plans and time line for adoption.

• Three Reno pool teams are headed to Las Vegas for the American Poolplayer Association’s national team championships Aug. 18-27. The 9-Ball team is Too Sober to Play, and the 8-Ball teams are The Murphs and Morelli’s Marauders.

• Here are the junior livestock results from the El Dorado County Fair, as well as the livestock top sales.

• The Great American Campout is June 25.

• Jennifer Ehmann, doctor with Barton Pediatrics, will be talking about children's health on Aug. 23 from 6:30-7:30pm at Kahle Community Center in Stateline. For more information, call (530) 543.5656.

Opinion: Measure R is right for recreation

By John Upton

The original Measure S was approved by the voters on Sept. 19, 2000. It sunsets in 2030.

Measure S was very specific in limiting the allowed uses and naming exact locations where its funds could be spent.



John Upton

Based on a community survey done in 1999, Measure S contained the following:

1. The annual cost per single family home was limited to $18,

the two-thirds voter approval level.

2. A $5.8 million bond was issued to construct the following facilities:

• The ice arena on Rufus Allen Boulevard, which was finished in 2002.

• Three new fields, plus a warm-up field, located adjacent to Lake Tahoe Community College. A change in TRPA regulations and higher than expected costs reduced this to one synthetic turf field for soccer, plus the warm-up field. Baseball and softball did not receive expected capacity improvements from Measure S.

• Maintenance improvements to Tahoe Paradise Park, and its opening to the public.

3. Measure S also provided the following maintenance funding, available each July:

• $50,000 per year for the new athletic field located adjacent to the community college.

• $50,000 per year for Tahoe Paradise Park.

• $5,000 per year, per mile for up to 25 new miles of bicycle trails, to a maximum of $125,000.

The maintenance funding was limited to new bicycle trails in order to attract state funds for their construction. The Measure S financial plan expected 25 new miles would be built by 2008. As a result, special tax revenue now annually provides $125,000 in maintenance funding which can be used only on new bicycle trails – those constructed after Sept. 19, 2000.

The current situation can be summarized as follows:

• Due to state budget problems, only 8 miles of bike trails,

requiring $40,000/year, have been built. The other $85,000 (of the annual $125,000) has been accumulating. It is unspendable because under Measure S there is no other allowable use for this money without voter approval of the change.

• To address the fields not built for baseball, the JPA proposed Measure B in 2009. Measure B failed when bicycle advocates sought funds for pre-Measure S trails. In their opposition, the Bicycle Coalition specifically indicated willingness to seek a compromise measure.

Measure R is the JPA's effort at a compromise measure.

• It will equally split an estimated $470,000 available in summer 2012 among pre-Measure S bicycle trails and ball fields.

• In order to promptly finish field improvements, fields will receive the next funds available, up to a limit of $500,000.

• After fields receive the $500,000, all available funds will go to pre-Measure S bicycle trails. We estimate that those trails will receive a minimum of $500,000, and potentially much more, by 2020. Pre-Measure S trails will continue to receive available funds until all 25 new miles have been built. As new bicycle trails are completed, they will have priority use of annual bicycle trail maintenance funds. This will correspondingly reduce the funds available to maintain and rehabilitate pre-Measure S bicycle trails.

• If Measure R is successful, advisory committees for bicycle trails and fields projects will be formed by the JPA in December 2011 to determine priorities for use of available funds.

Measure R unlocks the uses of currently unspendable funds, and makes funding available to improve the quality and safety of trails for users of older bicycle trails, and of fields for the nearly 3,000 local kids who participate in field sports –

while we wait for new bicycle trails to be built.

In closing, the JPA wants to stress the following:

• Measure R will not affect maintenance funding for new bicycle trails that have or will be built, nor will it affect funding for the field at Lake Tahoe Community College, or for Tahoe Paradise Park.

• Without voter approval, unused bicycle trail maintenance funds remain unspendable, and nothing can be done with the accumulated funds.

• Measure R will accomplish bicycle trail and fields improvements with no increase in taxes.

The South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority will meet and conduct a hearing on June 30 to consider whether to place Measure R on the Nov. 8 ballot. The hearing and meeting will take place at the El Dorado County Library meeting room beginning at 9:30am.

John Upton is the lone staff member of the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities JPA.

Burn permits to be suspended in July

CalFire is suspending burn permits in Amador County and on the western slope of El Dorado County beginning July 1 at 8am.

This does not apply to the Lake Tahoe Basin. Call (530) 543.2600 for burning regulations in the basin.

Reminders for safe burning:

– Keep all piles no larger than 4 feet by 4 feet

– Have a charged hose and shovel within arms reach

– Maintain a 10-foot barrier of bare dirt around each pile

– Keep a telephone (cell phone, etc.) nearby

– Only burn vegetation from your property; household trash of any kind is illegal to burn

– Do not use a burn barrel, they are also illegal

– Never leave your pile unattended.

For more information regarding proper burning techniques and other life-saving information, go online.