Lake Valley fire hires chief from within the department

By Kathryn Reed

Gareth Harris has been selected at the next fire chief of Lake Valley Fire Protection District.

He takes the helm from Jeff Michael who will retire June 24.



Gareth Harris

When Harris was hired in 2005 from the Half Moon Bay Fire District as battalion chief and fire marshal for Lake Valley he was the first hire at that level outside of the department.

“There is such a family culture here that once I proved I was worthy of being one of the family members, I was readily accepted,” Harris told *Lake Tahoe News*. “My goal as the new leader is to continue that culture, that tradition.”

Harris, 49, has no plans of making sweeping changes. He expects to evaluate things and continue moving forward in the direction the department has been going.

As battalion chief he is incident commander at most scenes – whether it’s a structure fire, rope rescue or hazardous materials incident. As fire chief, he will be responsible for the entire department.

In the coming weeks more changes are expected at Lake Valley.

“Nothing is cast in stone yet, but the idea is we have very qualified individuals in our department that we will be promoting,” Harris said.

LTBMU firewood permits to go on sale

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit will begin the sale of fuelwood permits on June 1. Permits cost $20 per cord with a 2-cord minimum purchase. There is a 10-cord per household limit.

Permits have specific conditions and full information is provided when the permit is issued. Maps to designated cutting areas are also provided and must be in your possession along with the valid permit. The permit is for collection of “down-dead” wood up to a 30-inch maximum diameter in designated fuelwood areas within the Lake Tahoe Basin. “Down-dead” means the tree is down on the ground and dead, rather than dead and standing.

Cutting any standing tree, whether dead or green, is not allowed.

Permit holders must keep vehicles on National Forest System roads. No off-road travel is allowed and permit holders must comply with all permit conditions. Be aware that some designated fuelwood areas are only open during specified dates and all areas are subject to closure at anytime. Due to remaining late-season snow, higher elevation areas will open when conditions permit. Also, be aware that a number of forest areas are off limits to fuelwood collection.

Permit holders are asked to stay off private property and demonstrate courtesy regarding noise or collection activity on National Forest System lands near homes or neighborhoods.

Permits will be available through Oct. 28 at the LTBMU Supervisor's Office at 35 College Drive in South Lake Tahoe, Monday through Friday, 8am to 4:30pm. For more information, call office at (530) 543.2694.

History: From snowstorms, to city incorporation, to original casinos

Publisher's note: ***This is reprinted from the July 1975 Lake Tahoe Historical Society Newsletter.***

Among the best loved couples in South Lake Tahoe are Don and Ethel Clarke. We missed Ethel at our June 26th meeting, but Don was there to share his recollection of the South Shore over 25 years. Don has probably more "firsts" to his credit than anyone else in the community. He was elected to the first Unified School Board, to the first board of directors for South Tahoe Public Utility District, to the first City Council, and was the first City representative on the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board. In addition, Ethel opened the first insurance agency to be established here in 1951.

Don spoke of all the change that had occurred since he and Ethel first arrived here in May 1, 1950 in a blizzard. At that time, the trip took six hours, at the very least, from San Francisco, and many times involved an overnight stop in Placerville. The Clarkes first took over Lawson's Coffee Shop at the "Y", generally in the location where the Chevron station is now located at 1053 Emerald Bay Road. He also worked for Harvey West at the Placerville Lumber sawmill as a chain operator and tallier. In 1950, there were somewhere between 500 and 1000 residents and everyone knew each other. The three markets were Fenn Barkley's Tahoe Valley Store located on a portion of what is now the South Y Center, Young's Bijou, and, the only one presently existing, Cecil's Market at Park Avenue.

In 1951 Ethel Clarke became a reporter for the weekly Auburn Journal, her biggest scoop having been an interview with Rita Hayworth who was staying at Glenbrook awaiting her divorce from Ali Khan. She also enjoyed interviews over the years with Lena Horne, Gildersleeve, and the Ink Spots.

In 1951, in May, the M.S. Dixie came into being having been brought in piece by piece and reconstructed at the Lake. The stage a Sahadi's, now Harrah's was a teepee. Harvey's Wagon Wheel was a one story structure with the cowskull and wagon wheel insignia woven into the red carpet.

One of the Clarke insurance agency's first customers was Clyde Beecher, owner of the Nevada Club where the "real" gambling took place. Clyde, after advising the many thousands he had "in the drawer and I don't know how much in the safe" had no trouble getting the bond he requested. The Clarke agency enjoyed a tidy business inasmuch as outside insurance agencies seemed to have the opinion the local casinos were operated by those who were only a half-step from outlaws and were patronized only by killers carrying guns. We did have Indians.

Hank Pete, last of the Washo chiefs, and his wife Judy picked up extra change by posing for tourist pictures at Helen Perry's Trading Post across from the Crescent V until the Nevada Welfare Agency forced them to stop or lose their welfare subsistence. Flip Brandi, published Lake Tahoe News, leased Vikingsholm in July 1951 these plans went awry when the estate was transferred by Park System. Don recalled playing Santa Claus at Vikingsholm that year of the "Big Snow". They left the car at Camp Richardson and boated over to Emerald Bay. On the return trip, he found only the very tip end of the car aerial poking above the snow – and no shovels! Emerald Bay was frozen solid eighteen to twenty inches deep, and 152 house collapsed from the snow that winter. Skiing over the rooftops was not unusual.

The following year, 1952, the Lake Tahoe Unified School District was voted in. The high school classes were held at the American Legion Hall, with basketball being played on stage. The team had only basket for practice but the South Tahoe team was well known throughout the area. Don recalled the Clarke adventures in driving the first school bus back from the factory in Lima, Ohio, the first day at 35 mph, the second at 40 mph, then the governor held at 45 mph all the way across the country. This was the old Bus No. 1 which, after many years faithful service, was sold recently and is on it ways to South America.

Don's other recollection over the years included his serving as MC at home talent shows held in the amphitheater when the El Dorado Campground was opened the summer of 1953. In 1954 the South Tahoe Public Utility District was formed. Around 1958 the Lake Valley Planning Organization was formed among business men and residents, later developing into the Community Forums with active citizen participation in the early days after incorporation of the city. In 1960 came first discussions of a freeway question. August 1965 saw formation of the Recreation Advisory Board which preceded the Joint

City-School Recreation Commission.

In November 1965 the city incorporation was voted in by a 2011-614 vote. In 1968 the ill-fated Tahoe College was formed, later closing it doors after the death of its founder Jim Wilson. In June 1968 the Olympic High Altitude Training site was established at Echo Summit to train track stars for the games in Mexico City. The Tartan Track at the Intermediate School was moved from the Echo Summit. In 1970 came the Bi-State Compact establishing Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

After serving as Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce Don “retired” to travel and enjoy life but neither Don nor Ethel have ceased their active participation in community affairs.

Meet LTBMU head honchos

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit invites the community to an open house at the Forest Supervisor’s Office from 3-5pm June 7.

Meet new Forest Supervisor Nancy Gibson and Deputy Forest Supervisor Jeff Marsolais.

Light refreshments provided by the Tahoe Heritage Foundation.

The Forest Supervisor’s Office is located at 35 College Drive in South Lake Tahoe.

Gold miners want to see what's left in Virginia City area

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

In a place defined by its mining history, ambitious plans to pull new riches of gold and silver from the ground stand to shape the future of the Comstock.

Representatives of Comstock Mining Inc., plan to "revitalize the Comstock" through mining during the next 30 years, a long-term project they say will not only make them big bucks but provide a needed boost to the economy of the Virginia City area.

Organized opponents are afraid of what they don't know, worrying that plans to mine the Comstock with open pits could destroy a quiet rural lifestyle and forever alter one of the West's most historic places.

Since 2003, Comstock Mining, formerly Goldspring Inc., has acquired property and mining claims in what company officials call an "unprecedented consolidation" of Comstock resources encompassing some 6,100 acres. The area stretches from the south end of Virginia City, through Gold Hill and Silver City to U.S. 50 East.

Test drilling has identified deposits of gold and silver, many of them highly pure and at relatively shallow depths, worth more than $2 billion and there's more out there, said Corrado De Gasperis, Comstock's president and chief executive officer. The value of gold this spring reached a record of roughly $1,500 per ounce. Silver prices are at a 30-year high.

Read the whole story

Dave Mason in Lake Tahoe

Dave Mason plays Harrah’s South Shore Room on Oct. 8 at 7:30pm.

Tickets are $30 – 800.786.8208.

Average White Band at Harrah’s

Average White Band at Harrah’s South Shore Room on Sept. 24 at 7:30pm.

Tickets are $30 – 800.786.8208.

Keb Mo in Stateline

Keb Mo at Harrah’s South Shore Room in Stateline on Aug. 13 at 7:30pm.

Tickets are $38.50. Call 800.786.8208.

Echo Summit open without controls for long weekend

While all the work is not complete on Echo Summit, Highway 50 will be open in both directions without controls to bring people into and out of the South Shore for Memorial Day weekend.

The construction company doing the work on the wall replaced the heavy lifting ahead of schedule, which allowed the full closure to be lifted last weekend.



Work on the wall is still taking place. Photos/Kathryn Reed

The road is open today and throughout the long weekend without controls. The one-lane closure will resume May 31 at 7am.

During the week this route that links the South Shore and areas to the west are subject to delays of 20 minutes during non-holiday weekdays.

Johnson Pass Road is not accessible.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

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Opinion: Why Chief Michael is LTCC's distinguished alumni

By Melonie Guttry

On behalf of the Lake Tahoe Community College Foundation I am happy to announce that the third LTCC Distinguished Alumni is Fire Chief Jeff Michael.

This nomination was submitted by Virginia Boyar, so a huge thank you to Virginia for taking the time to make this nomination possible. In addition, I would like to thank all LTCC employees who submitted nominations. The Alumni Association committee had excellent nominations this year, which made the decision very difficult.



Jeff Michael

Michael obtained a fire science certificate of achievement from LTCC in 1981. He has served as the fire chief of Lake Valley Fire District since 2005 and has been with the district since 1979. Previously, he had positions of battalion chief, captain, engineer and firefighter. Chief Michael was recently awarded:

o Chief of the Year, Lake Tahoe Basin Regional Chiefs Association

o Certified Chief Officer with the California State Fire Marshal

o Appointed by California and Nevada Governors to the California Nevada Tahoe Basin Fire Commission

o Recognition award for the Angora Fire, El Dorado County Board of Supervisors

o Recognition award for the Angora Fire, California Interagency Incident Management Team

o Special recognition after the Angora Fire from California State Fire Marshal Kate Dargan, for “An outstanding job of leading his troops through a battle and his community through a recovery.”

Michael has been instrumental in the development of Lake Tahoe Basin Fire Academy and continues to be actively involved. He has provided staffing, facilities, equipment and supplies that are critical to the academy’s success. Whenever the college requires assistance to administer this complex and highly-regulated vocation program, Chief Michael will “drop everything” to come to our immediate assistance. Beyond lending his expertise to the college, Chief Michael serves as a formal mentor to LTCC’s academy cadets and graduates. He strives to know each student on a personal level and then supplements their formal education with practical hands-on advice to help them perform as firefighters in our unique environment.

What an honor to have Chief Michael sharing his knowledge and his passion for fire science with current LTCC students. Chief Michael will be recognized at our graduation ceremony on June 24, the same day of his official retirement from Lake Valley Fire Protection District.

Melonie Guttry is director of the Lake Tahoe Community College Foundation.