South Tahoe firefighters vote no confidence against chief

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe firefighters have taken a vote of no confidence against Fire Chief Lorenzo Gigliotti.

The lack of credibility, communication and leadership are the issues firefighters have with the chief.

Gigliotti, who will have been at the helm for six years as of January, did not know about the vote until contacted by *Lake Tahoe News*.



Lorenzo Gigliotti

Asked if the news came as a surprise, he said, “Absolutely.” He considers his relationship with the rank and file members as “pretty good.”

The members, who belong to International Firefighter Association Local 4427 and the South Lake Tahoe Firefighters Association, have been disgruntled for a number of years with Gigliotti’s leadership.

It wasn’t until this fall that the vote of no confidence was taken to ensure it wasn’t just the lousy economic situation that was influencing perceptions of how things are in the department, as well as three years of on again, off again

contract negotiations.

Union President Dan Sullivan deferred comment to Kim Gillingham of Goyette and Associates, the union's labor representative based in Gold River near Rancho Cordova.

"We distributed the executive evaluation form to all of our members. We did meet with the city manager about four weeks ago. We told him the vote of no confidence was done," Gillingham said.

City Manager Tony O'Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News*, "I haven't gotten anything official. I heard grumblings, but I haven't heard anything official. I would expect a letter or some communiqué."

Gillingham said another meeting had been set up two weeks ago with O'Rourke and Human Resources Director Janet Emmett, but O'Rourke had to cancel. It was rescheduled for a day when a storm hit. Another meeting has not been set.

"The goal is not to create more acrimony or compromise the community, but to share concerns so we can improve the department," Gillingham said. "This was not a traditional vote of no confidence. The vote of no confidence was to ensure the concern raised was a universal perception, and now what to do and how to start to create transparency."

But in paramilitary organizations like a police or fire department, a vote of no confidence is sending an unmistakable message that officers are demanding changes – whether it is personnel or behavior.

O'Rourke said he wants to talk to the union and the chief to resolve the issues. He believes critical critiques can be "a road map for improvement."

"It gives me concern, but it also gives me the opportunity to help him and the help the department to improve in those

areas," O'Rourke said.

He is conducting a survey next week of all city staff – which he has wanted to do since being hired in August. He is interested to see if what the firefighters say on that survey is similar to what the union is presenting.

Issues the firefighters have are working in a culture of fear – some were even afraid to participate in the vote of no confidence, Gillingham said. Fear of being black listed or not being promoted are concerns.

"The fear runs pretty rampant," Gillingham said.

She said the union wants all parties to work together, but that hasn't happened for years.

A memorandum of understanding the union has with management is there will be regular meetings between the two. Gigliotti has essentially eliminated those.

Gillingham says this exacerbates the distrust employees have with the chief.

Firefighters aren't thrilled with some of the expenditures the chief has authorized either.

The duty chief response vehicle was replaced in the 2009-10 budget for about $52,000. But fire personnel who spoke to *Lake Tahoe News* off the record, which gets back to the fear factor, said this vehicle is not needed because all the chief officers have a vehicle and one of them is retiring at the first of the year.

What bothers the men and women in the department is what they call reckless spending for an unneeded vehicle when it wasn't until March that a 1982 fire engine was taken out of service. It no longer met state emissions standards.

"It is not the practice of the fire department to require fire

department employees to sign any form of waiver or ‘liability form’ to drive,” Gigliotti said.

But that isn’t what more than one firefighter told *Lake Tahoe News*. They said management asked for the form to be signed before this particular vehicle was driven.

Gigliotti said this engine has not been replaced because there has not been the funding to do so. It costs about $70,000 to replace. So, management got a vehicle, but the firefighters have one less to use.

Funds for fire vehicles come from Proposition 172, the state safety sales tax, Gigliotti said.

“Proposed within the 2010-11 budget was the pursuit of grant funds to replace an engine, however, the 10 percent match created an impact which compromised a balanced budget so it was determined to pursue grant opportunities and should a grant be funded, to bring the grant back to the council for consideration and possible budget amendment. The result is this activity does not appear in the current budget document,” Gigliotti said.

It is the City Council that ultimately decides which vehicles to buy – so they chose the manager vehicle with all of its bells and whistles instead of an apparatus to fight fires.

What’s your idea for an affordable gift?

Shop – it’s a four letter word in a super negative way for so many people this time of year.

With the economy being what it is, household incomes such as they are and the pressure to buy, buy, buy this time of year, let’s help each other out.

Twenty dollars. What if that were the maximum amount you could spend on a gift? What would you buy? What would you make? What would you sell someone?



Send your suggestions to **info@LakeTahoeNews.net**. Put “holiday” in the subject line. Suggest ideas to other readers about what $20 or less can buy, who it might be good for if that’s not obvious, where to buy it, how to make it. Make the ideas as Lake Tahoe or Sierra Nevada oriented as possible. If you have a picture of the item, the store, yourself, then send it along as a jpeg. Include your name and contact information in case we have questions. If you are OK with your name being credited with the suggestion, indicate it’s fine to publish it. Your phone number and/or email address will not be published.

Keep what you write to 150 words or so.

Keep the ideas family friendly and legal.

Lake Tahoe News reserves the right not to print all of the suggestions and to edit them.

Bring out the Barrel wine tickets on sale

Bring out the Barrel tickets are on sale.

The Jan. 29-30 event in El Dorado County allows people to enter winemakers' cellars and be among the first to taste what they're calling "an extraordinary vintage" – straight from the barrel.

Light food pairings and special sales of limited quantity wines are part of the weekend event.

A Weekend Pass good both days is $20; Sunday only $15; designated drivers $10; Friends 4-Pak is four for the price of three.

Advance sales online only.

Prices increase $5 after Jan. 23.

MontBleu Holiday Extravaganza

The 16th annual MontBleu Holiday Extravaganza is Dec. 9 and 10 at the MontBleu Theater in Stateline.

Doors open at 6pm and the show begins at 7pm.

Admission is $8 for adults and $5 for students and seniors (under 5 is free).

The South Lake Tahoe Children's Choral Society will present an evening of holiday music, featuring the Tahoe Elementary Honor Choir, the Tahoe Intermediate Honor Choir, the Tahoe Belles and the Blue Ribbon Choir, with special appearance by the South Tahoe High School Choir, the Faculty/Parent Choir and the Marcia Sarosik Shining Stars.

Tahoe Arts Project will be conducting a raffle to help raise money for its performing arts in the schools programs.

For more information, call (530) 542.3632.

Goldman to give lecture at UNR

By Reno Gazette-Journal

The world water crisis is exemplified by the changes at Lake Tahoe over the past three decades, and is directly linked to climatic change, world-renowned limnologist Charles Goldman said.

Goldman will present a lecture on the topic, “Lake Tahoe: Five Decades of Change and the World Water Crisis,” on Thursday as part of the College of Science’s Discover Science Lecture Series.



Charles Goldman

Goldman, recently welcomed as an adjunct professor at the University of Nevada, Reno, has been the leading researcher at Lake Tahoe since 1958 as a distinguished professor at the University of California, Davis and the inaugural president of the World Water and Climate Network established in Kyoto, Japan in 2003.

Read the whole story

Santa Paws in South Lake Tahoe

The 24th annual Santa Paws Benefit in South Lake Tahoe is Dec. 4 from 11am to 4pm

All pets must be on a leash or in carrier.

The event is at Lakeview Plaza (3300 Lake Tahoe Blvd. – where Freshies is).

Pets and family pose alone or together. You receive a CD for color prints or holiday cards. Bows and antlers provided.

Cost is $20. Cash or checks accepted. All proceeds benefit local animals.

For more information, call (530) 542.2857.

Senate passes major U.S. food safety legislation

By Andrew Zajac, Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON – After languishing for more than a year, a food-safety bill that has enjoyed strong bipartisan support passed the Senate on Tuesday, raising prospects for tougher and more

extensive federal inspections and other safeguards.

The bill, which President Obama supports, still needs to be reconciled with differing provisions in legislation passed by the House in July 2009.

But the Senate action was cheered by advocates as a sign that the long delay could be nearing an end and that the nation's food-safety laws will receive their first major overhaul in decades.

Read the whole story

Sara Zimmerman artist reception

Truckee artist and designer Sara Zimmerman will be celebrating her newest artworks at the opening of her "Fall to Winter" exhibit on Dec. 16 from 4:30 to 6pm at Dragonfly Restaurant in downtown Truckee.

The public is welcome to join in the festivities, where appetizers will be served and a free drawing will take place for a Sara Zimmerman print.

These unique landscapes will be on display now through March 2011.

Zimmerman's newest works in her "Fall to Winter" exhibit depict the late seasonal change in the Sierra from a unique perspective.

For more information, call (530) 587.7492 or email sara@sarazimmerman.net.

Ski report: Bundle up

It’s another one of those days to dress warm for the slopes.



Here is today’s ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

Tradition of Christmas trees goes back 500 years

By Debbie Arrington, Sacramento Bee

With brisk temperatures and vistas of a snowcapped Sierra, it’s beginning to feel a lot like Christmas at Apple Hill – great news for the area’s Christmas tree farmers.



“This weekend is our big one,” said Jody Franklin, director of tourism for the El Dorado County Visitors Authority. “Every other car will have a Christmas tree on it.”

In the Apple Hill area near Placerville, about 40 farms raise Christmas trees – almost as many operations as the hill’s

famed apple farms. While wintry weather often keeps visitors away during apple season, it’s perfect for tree hunters.

“(Apple) growers have had a pretty slow season,” Franklin said. “It was booming in the beginning with perfect weather (in late September). But then we had rain, and people decide to wait and put off their trip.

“But with Christmas trees, the time is now. (Visitors) love it if it’s snowing. They bundle up. There’s a bite in the air and warm cider at the farms. They have that ‘white Christmas’ experience and something to talk about. It’s a tradition.”

Read the whole story