Message from South Tahoe real estate president

By Theresa Souers

Members of the South Tahoe Association of Realtors leadership team attended the October business meetings for the California Association of Realtors in Anaheim. In attendance were Amanda Adams and Ken Daley from Re/Max Realty Today, Jill Teakell from Century 21 At Tahoe Paradise, Deb Howard of Deb Howard & Co, myself representing Pinnacle Real Estate Group of Lake Tahoe and Sharon Kerrigan, EVP for STAR.

Among the many topics of discussion was the projected market forecast for the state of California in 2011. A few key points showed that while a weaker-than expected economic recovery will most likely result in a decline of California home sales for 2010, throughout the state, economists say that we should be seeing small increases in both home sales and median prices in 2011.

After two consecutive years of record-setting price declines, the median home price in California is expected to climb 11.5 percent in 2010 to $306,500 and increase another 2 percent in 2011 to $312,500, according to the forecast. It was also pointed out that distressed properties will figure prominently in the market again next year, but we can also expect to see discretionary sellers play a larger role. At the same time, the economic team pointed out that the unknown factors that could impact the market are the strength of the economic recovery, federal housing policies and the actions of underwater homeowners.

These meetings held three times a year provide local leadership the opportunity to learn firsthand about anticipated real estate trends, news, advances and changes in

contractual documents, and allows them to voice their opinions on legislative bills related to property homeowners rights.

When asked what they felt were highlights of the week's activities, Daley commented, "I continue to be fascinated by the process and inner workings of the California Association of Realtors. Especially the political aspect."

Teakell went on to add, "As we reviewed new California laws for 2011, one particular bill (SB 931) stood out. Starting January 1st, a seller's first trust deed lender cannot obtain a deficiency judgment against the seller after a short sale. Providing written consent to a short sale shall obligate the first trust deed lender to accept the sales proceeds as full payment and discharge of the remaining amount owed on the loan. Unfortunately, Governor Schwarzenegger vetoed SB1178, which would have extended California's anti-deficiency protection to refinance loans."

Our everyday lives are dramatically affected by a dedicated team working behind the scenes to achieve common goals, all in the best interest of the organization they represent.

Adams added, "Now is the time when we can make a real difference that can affect many people. We were told that when times are rough, (like they are now) the best of us stand up to make things happen and to help out. Professional education provides us access to ways to assist our clients through their hardships, such as losing a home to foreclosure, and guide our buyers through the time consuming short sale and REO purchase procedure."

The most recent statistics provided by the South Tahoe Association of Realtors Multiple Listing Service is showing some encouraging news. Following the method used by both the National Association of Realtros and the California Association of Realtros, STAR provides a median home price based upon the average of the previous twelve months, or a

rolling average. That number is compared to the previous year at the same time.

Based on these numbers, as of Oct. 31, the median home price was posted at $326,500 for single-family residences.

While still much lower than the peak of 2006 ($489,000), the good news is that it is slightly up by approximately 2 percent from October 2009, and represents a steady pattern (with the exception of a slight drop in August) of gentle increases during the past nine months. Another positive note is that as between Nov. 1, 2009, and Oct. 31, 2010, there were 520 closed escrows. This was quite an improvement over the 407 for the same period the previous year.

Of course there are a variety of factors that are playing a role in this increased activity, but we will take them all. This data is available for the public to reviewed at www.STAOR.org, under statistics.

Theresa Souers is president of South Tahoe Association of Realtors.

Calif. childcare cuts put Tahoe parents, providers on brink

By Jessie Marchesseau

It’s a snow day in South Lake Tahoe, and children busily put on jackets and hats as instructors at Under the Magic Pine Tree wrestle to pull snowpants onto the less cooperative little ones.

Eight-year-old Corey Johnson sits on the floor cramming the bottoms of his gray snowpants into his boots. He explains that he doesn’t want to rip the bottoms by walking on them.

Corey is one of more than 100 children in El Dorado County who has access to daycare thanks to the CalWORKs Stage 3 childcare assistance program. But not for long.



Nicole Johnson pushes her daughter Timber, 12, on the tire swing. Photos/Jessie Marchesseau

“I’m just really worried about the children that are on this,” said Candi Bailey, owner of Under the Magic Pine Tree preschool and daycare center. “Not only here, but across the state.”

More than 55,000 children in California have had their access to child care programs in limbo since Oct. 8 when Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger slashed the Stage 3 program from the budget, electing to send the money to the state’s rainy day fund instead.

The CalWORKs childcare program was established as part of Welfare-to-Work in 1998. It provides childcare assistance to eligible working families who have moved off of welfare cash assistance and have had steady employment for more than two

years.

“This is the one thing I do get so that I can succeed and make an example for my kids,” Nicole Johnson, Corey’s mom, said.

Just a few days earlier, Corey and his older sister, Timber, were laughing with joy as their mother spun them around on a green tire swing at a local park. She says it’s their favorite thing there; they always go straight to the tire.

Johnson, 29, is a single mother of three. She started the CalWORKs Welfare-To-Work plan as a young mother needing cash assistance, but has worked at Lake Tahoe Pediatrics for the past three and a half years. Johnson says she is proud of her place in the community and has become a fixture at Lake Tahoe Pediatrics, where clients often ask for her by name.

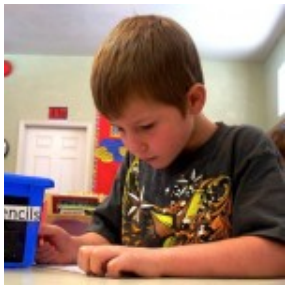
Despite her success at work, Johnson still needs a little help to make ends meet. And it was working, until last month when she was one of 30,000 families in California told they had two weeks to find other child care options. Johnson said her first reaction was that she was going to have to quit her job. Then she was angry.

“I worked hard to get here,” she said. “All of us in my situation worked hard to get where we’re at and don’t want to go back to the beginning.”

But some people are afraid that might be exactly what will happen.

Since the announcement, Tina Barna, director of Choices for Children, an organization providing childcare resources and referrals for CalWORKs families in El Dorado County, said a number of parents have expressed they may have to quit their jobs because they cannot afford childcare. Even though a subsequent lawsuit has required the state to continue providing assistance through the end of the year, what will happen in 2011 is still up in the air.

Barna said parents basically have three options: be placed on a waiting list with more than 200,000 other families, find a way to pay for childcare on their own or quit their jobs.



Corey Johnson, 8, works on a coloring project at Under the Magic Pine Tree.

Bailey at Under the Magic Pine Tree concurs.

“Some of the families dropped by Stage 3 will have to consider returning to welfare and starting again,” she said. “The wages in this area are not healthy enough to support housing, food, clothing and childcare, especially as a single parent.”

But the effects of slashing Stage 3 do not stop at the parents or their children.

Childcare providers will also feel the hit. Many are already struggling because of high unemployment rates. If parents are not working, they do not need childcare services. If more parents are forced to pull their children from the childcare system, businesses will be forced to downsize or even close.

Bailey said she has been trying hard not to add to the unemployment in the basin. But if the Stage 3 funds are not reinstated, she may have to reduce her staff.

Sheila Kennedy, also a childcare provider, knows what it is like to be in both positions. Kennedy provides day care services to a family with four children. The family receives Stage 3 assistance.

But just four years ago, she was receiving Stage 3 assistance.

“That program helped me to be able to be self-sufficient,” she said. “They need that little bit of help to get over that final hill.”

She works another job part-time, but if Stage 3 is cut, her childcare salary will go away. If this happens, she will likely be forced to go back on food stamps.

Kennedy predicts the cuts will result in a domino effect with parents being forced to quit jobs and claim unemployment, welfare and other government aid. Childcare workers will likely follow, then other working families who can no longer find childcare for their children.

“Eliminating this program would be one of their biggest mistakes ever,” she said. “I don’t see how eliminating day care is a responsible or viable choice.”

Meanwhile, Johnson says she feels like she’s on a teeter-totter. One minute they say they’re taking her assistance, then she gets one more week, then two. She says she is tired and stressed, but for the well being of herself and her children, she just has to accept it and hope for the best.

It must be working, because as Corey plays in the snow with his friends and laughs at the snowballs forming on his gloves, he shows no signs of the stress his mother described.

“I think our future is in our kids,” Bailey said, “and I think we had better take care of them.”

CHP beefs up enforcement during holiday weekend

In keeping with its mission of saving lives, the California Highway Patrol is reminding motorists the Thanksgiving holiday is also a Maximum Enforcement Period (MEP).

The CHP's holiday enforcement effort begins Nov. 24 at 6pm and continues through 11:59pm Nov. 28.

Throughout the MEP all available officers will be looking for motorists who are a danger to themselves or others on our state's roadways.

Last year during CHP's Thanksgiving holiday enforcement effort, 37 people were killed in collisions statewide; this represents a 12 percent increase from the previous year. Among the 19 vehicle occupants who were killed in CHP jurisdiction, 26 percent were not wearing seat belts.

The Thanksgiving MEP coincides with the statewide "Click It or Ticket" campaign which runs through Nov. 29 and includes more than 150 law enforcement agencies in California.

In addition to motorists who fail to buckle up or drive at a safe speed, officers will be seeking to remove impaired drivers from the roadways. Last year during the Thanksgiving MEP, CHP officers made 1,461 arrests for driving under the influence.

With the Christmas and New Year's holiday right around the corner, the CHP is planning for similar maximum enforcement efforts next month.

Report: Nation's schools improve, but have long way to go

By Nick Anderson, Washington Post

The nation's high school seniors are performing slightly better in math and reading than they did in the middle of the last decade, new test results show, but a large majority continue to fall short of the federal standard for proficiency.

Results from the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress, made public Thursday morning, documented a modest rise in achievement for 12th-graders since 2005. Reading scores rose two points on a 500-point scale, and math scores rose three points on a 300-point scale.

But analysts said the federal test results offer plenty of reason for concern. The scores mean that 38 percent of seniors demonstrated proficiency in reading and 26 percent reached that level in math. In addition, reading scores remain lower than they were in 1992. And the report found essentially no progress in closing achievement gaps that separate white students from black and Hispanic peers.

Those results suggest that public schools must make quantum leaps to approach President Obama's goal of college and career readiness for all graduates. The District of Columbia and dozens of states (including Maryland but not Virginia) have adopted this year new national standards for what students should learn in math and English language arts from kindergarten onward. Those standards, generally accepted to be

tougher than the array of benchmarks states had previously held, also point toward the president’s goal.

Read the whole story

New Years’s Eve in South Lake Tahoe

An inaugural family-friendly New Year’s Eve celebration in the Heavenly Village will ring in the New Year starting at 2pm with a rail jam near the gondola, followed by a slate of activities from 6–9pm. Events include a snowboard simulator; ice sled motion simulator; adventure films; Reno funk band Jelly Bread; ice skating; and roaming performers.

The evening climaxes at 9pm (midnight East Coast time) when an illuminated gondola car is “dropped” from the top of Heavenly’s East Peak, and a fireworks show will end the night as the grand finale.

South Lake Tahoe is offering a $5 flat fee to park in the Heavenly Village garage from 3-10:30pm Dec. 31.

Brunch, fashion show part of Festival of Trees and Lights

Champagne brunch and fashion show on Dec. 5 at 11am is part of annual Festival of Trees and Lights put on by the Barton

Foundation.

The event is at MontBleu in Stateline. Proceeds from the $35 tickets benefit the Barton Community Clinic.

For more information, go to www.festivaloftreeslaketahoe.org or call (530) 543.5909.

Lodge to Lodge Kayak Adventure

Lodge to Lodge Kayak Adventure from June 9-12.

The expedition starts on the West Shore of Lake Tahoe and is professionally guided, using stable, closed deck, double sea kayaks designed for kayak touring. In addition to thorough instruction, guides will inform you about natural and human history topics such as: wildlife, geology, ecology, and native peoples.

Kayaking is at a leisurely pace, allowing time to see the sites and enjoy the crystal clear water. Each day’s paddle starts after breakfast, finishes in the afternoon, and is suitable for beginners.

Evenings are enjoyed with meals at local restaurants.

Pricing starts at $520. Call (530) 913.9212 for more details. Distance is 7-10 miles a day.

Snowshoe under the stars

Astronomy Snowshoe Adventures with Tony Berendsen are Nov. 27, Dec. 22, Dec. 29, Jan. 22 and Feb. 26.

Astronomy Trips include guided snowshoe tour followed by a program by professional astronomer Tony Berendsen, complete with high powered telescopes and iPad for close-up viewing.

Astronomy tours start in either Tahoe Vista or Truckee. Tours are between 2 and 4 miles and appropriate for all ages and abilities. Call for exact start time and location.

Day tours are throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin and Truckee areas. Several snowshoeing adventures are available through the Tahoe Adventure Company.

For more information is online or call 866.830.6125 or (530) 913.9212.

Ski report: Wind may be a problem, roads are nasty

It’s one of those days in the Lake Tahoe area where if you don’t have to go out, don’t go out.



Blowing snow is more of a problem than the amount of snow on the road. One commuter said Highway 50 through South Lake Tahoe was so bad about 7:30am that she was sure no plow had been on the road. Ruts and an uneven surface made the drive nasty. Of course across the state line things were smoother in Nevada –

but not as good as usual. Visibility on Spooner Summit is sketchy.

Heavenly is starting the day on wind hold. Check with your ski resort of choice before making the trek to the mountain today to make sure lifts are running. Here is the ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

A winter storm warning remains in effect until 4pm Tuesday. The National Weather Service in Reno is calling for the brunt of the storm to hit late morning.

Roads are a mess, as already mentioned. Closures are always possible. Chain controls are a definite. The state icons on the home page of *Lake Tahoe News* will get you the road information you need.

This storm is a cold one, too. Single digits and below zero temps overnight Tuesday.

Wednesday, Thursday and Friday are expected to have sun in the forecast. More snow on tap for Saturday.

– Kathryn Reed

Squaw Valley sold to Colorado-based company

By Kathryn Reed

Squaw Valley ski resort and the village have been bought by KSL Capital Partners LLC.

This is the second Colorado company to buy a Lake Tahoe area

ski resort in less than a month. Vail Resorts purchased Northstar-at-Tahoe from Booth Creek in October.

Details of the sale of Squaw have not been disclosed, but it does include the village. The resort bought the village in January from financially troubled Intrawest.



Colorado company buys Squaw Valley. Photo/Kathryn Reed

KSL plans to put $50 million into capital improvements at the North Shore ski resort in the next five years.

KSL is not a new comer to the ski industry or resort areas. The company also owns Vail Mountain Lodge, Hotel del Coronado in San Diego, The Homestead in Hot Springs, Va., and Barton Creek Resort and Spa in Austin.

Eric Resnick and Michael Shannon, founding partners of KSL, serve as board members for the U.S. Ski & Snowboard Team Foundation. Resnick is also on the Organizing Committee of the 2015 World Alpine Ski Championships. Shannon was president of Vail Associates, what Vail Resorts used to be called, from 1985-92.

Squaw Valley put itself on the map when owner Alex Cushing successfully bid on the 1960 Winter Olympics. Squaw wasn’t much of a resort at the time, but still pulled it off and brought international recognition to the slopes of Tahoe. When

Cushing died a couple years ago his widow, Nancy, took over control of the entire operations, though she had been president since 1994.

“Alex’s dream was to create a world-class, four-season destination resort in one of the most beautiful places in the world,” Cushing said in a prepared statement. “This transaction will result in the culmination of that dream by providing the necessary resources to ensure Squaw Valley’s continued improvement and success for generations to come.”

In August, Cushing made what many in the ski industry considered a dramatic move for Squaw and stepped down as CEO and president. Speculation at the time was Squaw might not remain in the Cushing family for much longer. Andy Wirth took over as CEO at that time.

KSL bought a majority, controlling stake in Squaw. The breakdown of the ownership has not been released. Wirth will continue as CEO.