Heavenly Ski and Snowboard swap

The Heavenly Ski and Snowboard Foundation’s 22nd annual Ski and Snowboard Swap at MontBleu in Stateline is Nov. 19 and 20.

Proceeds benefit the foundation, a nonprofit organization providing skiing and snowboarding programs for regional youth, local middle school students, and the S.O.S. program.

The swap opens with Moonlight Madness on Nov. 19 from 6 to 11pm in the MontBleu Convention Center. Admission for adults is $5, children 12 and under are free.

The deals continue Nov. 20 from 10am to 5pm. Admission is free.

For additional information, call (530) 541.7354.

Friedman to be temp leader of NCOT

Larry Friedman, who has long ties to Lake Tahoe, will become the interim director of the Nevada Commission on Tourism when Director Dann Lewis steps down Dec. 17.

Friedman is NCOT’s deputy director of Sales and Industry Partners.

Lewis was appointed to the agency in early 2009 and helped steer its operations through a period of adjusting to severe state budget constraints, during which NCOT’s operating budget

was reduced by 41 percent.



Larry
Friedman

Under Lewis' direction, the "Let Nevada Capture Your Heart" ad campaign for winter 2009 and summer 2010 was aimed specifically at lucrative markets with active adults likely to travel to Nevada. The $3.6 million campaign attracted visitors whose spending generated $110 million in tax revenue, a record $31 return for every $1 invested in the campaign, outside research by the company TNS Global showed.

"Having accomplished some outstanding achievements together with this great team, I feel the time is right for my departure and a move to other endeavors," Lewis said in a prepared statement.

Friedman currently oversees the rural programs and domestic and international sales, which include the work of NCOT's international offices in Mexico, Canada, the United Kingdom and continental Europe. During his more than 20 years with NCOT, Friedman has created the Rural Roundup conference, chaired the development of Nevada's Scenic Byways Program and produced the guidelines for the Projects Relating to Tourism Rural Infrastructure Grant Program.

S. Tahoe workers to be questioned about Lakeview Commons

By Kathryn Reed

Will any city employee be reprimanded for the botched Lakeview Commons project?

An answer may come today. The court decision favoring the firm not originally awarded the multi-million contract is on the South Lake Tahoe City Council's agenda. It will be discussed in closed session at the end of the meeting. (The meeting starts at 9am at Lake Tahoe Airport.)

The scathing decision singles out two city employees in particular – Jim Marino from the engineering department and City Attorney Patrick Enright. Both have been asked to address the council and explain any pressure that may have been put on them from current or former city employees and/or councilmembers.



Lakeview Commons in the middle of South Lake Tahoe is indefinitely

off-limits.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

Lake Tahoe News asked the five councilmembers who will be in charge of city matters starting next month whether they think anyone employed by the city should be reprimanded.

Current Councilman Hal Cole and Bruce Grego never responded to the email. They, along with Councilmembers Bill Crawford and Kathay Lovell, voted to award the bid despite flaws with it being brought up when it was approved this past summer.

Their decision not only caused the project to be stalled and the potential for it not to be completed next summer, but the city must pay for Clark & Sullivan's legal bills.

The company took issue with the bid process and successfully sued for the project to stop. The judge ruled the bid awarded to Reeve-Knight Construction is invalid.

As for the incoming councilmembers' views:

Councilwoman-elect Angela Swanson is out of town on a family emergency.

"Obviously, there were some serious problems. Just who should be reprimanded is something the current council should consider first," wrote Councilwoman-elect Claire Fortier.

Councilman-elect Tom Davis said Monday, "I have asked the city manager and city attorney for a full report. I just received this Friday – a five-page report from the city attorney. I will review it in the next few days. Any reprimand, if any at all, will have to come from the council."

To prevent such a boondoggle happening again, City Manager Tony O'Rourke is making sure the city's purchasing agent is involved in matters like this in the future.

He said he has never seen a project this size not go through the purchasing agent.

“It’s a critical role to ensure purchases of goods and services are done under state law,” O’Rourke said. He will make sure the person in the finance department is involved on the front end, not just the back.

Caltrans finishes Hwy. 49 project ahead of schedule

Caltrans this month completed the $5.4 million highway safety improvement project on Highway 49 in El Dorado County 100 days ahead of schedule.

The project was financed entirely by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

The project realigned a rural section of Highway 49 between Dolomite Drive and China Hill Road in El Dorado County, smoothing out curves on the roadway to make it safer for motorists. New paved highway shoulders were also built further improving safety.

“State Route 49 is a convenient connector between U.S. Highway 50 and Amador County. This project improves safety for everyone traveling on this important Gold Country highway,” Caltrans Director Cindy McKim said in a press release.

Veerkamp General Engineering Inc. of Placerville was the project’s contractor.

North Shore creating lodging component of tourism agency

The North Lake Tahoe Resort Association is accepting applicants for its new Lodging Committee.

The Lodging Committee will be made up of properties from all segments of the lodging community, and will work directly with the NLTRA board of directors. The duties of the Lodging Committee will include the consolidation of lodging community needs, the development of specific action plans targeted at the various lodging segments and the review of marketing efforts and related input to the NLTRA Marketing Committee and board of directors.

The Lodging Committee will consist of a Large Lodging Board Member, Small Lodging Board Member, Large Lodging Representative, Small Lodging Representative – Lakeshore, Small Lodging Representative – Non-Lakeshore, two Vacation Home Property Management Representatives, Bed & Breakfast Representative, NLTRA Tourism Director and NLTRA Conference Sales Director.

The deadline to apply for the Lodging Committee is Nov. 23 by 5pm. Letters of interest and a short resume should be emailed to NLTRA Tourism Director Andy Chapman at andy@puretahoenorth.com.

Applicants will be reviewed at the Dec. 1 NLTRA board meeting, with the Lodging Committee's first meeting taking place in January 2011.

The North Lake Tahoe Resort Association is the umbrella organization for the North Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce and

the Tahoe North Convention and Visitors Bureau, which is a partner with the Incline Village Crystal Bay Visitors Bureau in the North Lake Tahoe Marketing Cooperative. The NLTRA also serves as a partner with Placer County and other public agencies in the development and funding of infrastructure, transit and community mobility projects designed to enhance tourism and community quality of life for the benefit of all in the North Lake Tahoe region.

USFS closes seasonal Tahoe recreation sites

Seasonal closures at recreation sites and forest roads in the Lake Tahoe Basin have begun.

Forest Service gates have been closed and locked, and motorized access is prohibited for the winter.

Although motorized access is prohibited during seasonal closures, the public will continue to have non-motorized access, as well as access to snowmobiles where permitted and in accordance with regulations.

Seasonal closures also apply to many recreation sites including beaches, picnic areas and campgrounds.

For a complete list of closure dates and locations visit this webpage.

Convoluted accounting bogs down South Tahoe budget

Publisher's note: ***This is the first in a three-part series about the South Lake Tahoe city budget.***

By Kathryn Reed

Based on review of documents provided by South Lake Tahoe officials, including the current 2010-11 fiscal year budget, the city is deficit spending even though by state law it must have a balanced budget each year.



Deficit spending is when a government spends more money than it generates in a particular period of time.

Even the 2010-11 budget doesn't balance. Revenues are projected to be $101,013,904, while expenses are expected to be $101,838,705.

The deficit spending is occurring because the city for several years has been moving money around without actually operating within its means. Some of this money is being taken out of the multiple reserve accounts to make ends meet. But those reserves are a limited resource and one day could be drained if this practice were to continue.

It is a practice that will eventually backfire because it does not address the issue of expenses outpacing revenues – or living within one's means.

“The city does have sound operating reserves. It’s in excess of 25 percent,” City Manager Tony O’Rourke said. “But at some point you can’t continue to utilize that cushion. That’s why the business model has to be overhauled.”

O’Rourke inherited the budget structure from his predecessor who was well known for his micromanaging. He also is stuck with the 2010-11 budget because former City Manager Dave Jinkens fast-tracked the budget through the council during his last week on the job in August.

An example of the robbing Peter to pay Paul practice is in the 2009-10 budget when $100,000 was taken out of the Redevelopment Agency budget and put into the budget for the City Attorney’s Office. This was done because when Patrick Enright was hired in June 2009 he was touted as a redevelopment specialist. The City Attorney’s Office’s budget for that fiscal year didn’t have the funds to cover doubling the number of city attorneys. The money had to come from somewhere – that somewhere being redevelopment’s pockets.

Reconciling 2009-10 budget

In the Nov. 16 council agenda packet is the monthly financial statement for September 2010, the last month of the 2009-10 fiscal year – so it has nothing to do with the current fiscal year. The current fiscal year started Oct. 1. The council is not publicly being provided current financials, just 6-week-old information for a fiscal period that is already closed.

Like a personal checkbook, city financial information should be readily accessible and easy to disseminate. Presumably, elected officials depend on this information to make timely, informed decisions. Information given to the council should be from the most current month, not weeks behind.

(They and anyone in the public has a right to this information and may request it – all are public documents.)

In the documents provided in the council packet (click on Consent 2) it shows the actual revenue in the general fund for fiscal year 2009-10 was $27,103, 362; expenses were $29,168,991. This means the general fund generated a deficit of $2,065,629.

The general fund is essentially the discretionary part of the budget.

Adding all the reported fund numbers together in the 2009-10 report the total deficit comes to $4,249,819, twice the amount for the general fund.

The staff report signed by O'Rourke and Finance Director Christine Vuletich says $2.1 million will come from "one-time un-assigned funds" to balance the budget. This is another way of saying reserves.

But in this paperwork it does not specifically say how the remaining gap will be filled. An annotation says the Capital Improvement Project fund revenues are expected to increase. Yes, after the close of the fiscal year.

O'Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News* he is trying to make changes to how the budget information is disseminated.

"We need to do more work on it," he said of the monthly report. "We need to simplify it."

CIP budget issues

However, to confuse matters more and not make it easy for the public to figure out what is going on, the last graphic on the report to the council is dated Nov. 2, 2010, saying about $2.4 million has been added to the CIP fund.

But it never says which fiscal year these dollars will be applied to.

The CIP fund never seems to be in balance based on looking at

stacks of paperwork. It’s not reported concisely. It is hard to determine when and how the matching of expenses to income is occurring.

Interpreting the comments and answers received from the city it appears the accounting of CIP is done on a cash basis, while the other accounts are on an accrual basis. This distorts what is happening in the overall budget. Most businesses use one accounting method, not multiple, in order to make for clean accounting practices and a sense of transparency.

The CIP reported in the 2010-11 budget forecasts $34,524,280 in revenues and $30,805,295 in expenses. This would appear to mean there would be a surplus of more than $3.7 million in this account.

Not true, says the city.

Lake Tahoe News on Oct. 9 published responses by Vuletich to a series of questions *LTN* had asked.

Regarding the CIP, she wrote, “79% to 83% of all CIP projects that the City has authorized are grant funded which causes a discrepancy between budgeted amount of revenue and budgeted amount of expense. Grant funded projects require that the funds be expended first, and then reimbursement be requested by the City. Also, retention of 5% is held by the granting agencies as an assurance that the project will be completed. The City bills the granting agencies quarterly, so anytime during the busy building season [May to October] there can be a large difference between revenue and expense budget due to receivables due from the granting agencies.”

That answer points to using the cash basis accounting formula.

But this doesn’t make sense when the city’s three major revenue sources – transient occupancy tax, sales tax and property tax – don’t come in one lump sum either. In the

budget, the dollar amounts are recognized before the money is in hand.

Proper accounting would have the city claiming the CIP dollars – whether they are from the feds, state or other grantor – in the ledger when it's known the grant has been awarded, and as funds are disbursed for expenses in order to accurately match income and expenses. Instead, the current practice appears to recognize revenues when the check arrives.

Abuse is difficult to walk away from

By Liliana E. Sanchez

Yesterday's article discussed some of the reasons why people abuse their partners. Today we are going to look at why victims of domestic violence stay in an abusive relationship.

If you ask a person who has lived or is living in an abusive relationship, "why do you stay?" you will hear many reasons such as love, fear, children, money, security, hope, and religious and cultural reasons. It is difficult for someone who has never been in an abusive relationship to understand why someone would stay, but we hope that when you read this piece you will gain a little more understanding.

Relationships start out with courtship, romance and kindness that may lead to a loving, respectful and healthy relationship full of hope and dreams for the future. But for some, this loving, respectful and healthy relationship takes a turn that

no one saw coming. The relationship gets violent, the respect disappears and it is no longer what it was in the beginning. The victim in this type of relationship hopes their partner changes their ways, trusting that someday it will happen. The victim is then confused because what was once perfect is suddenly chaos, so they wait for the situation to get better and easily slip into the cycle of violence as they hold on to the promises and the illusion of being loved and cared for by someone they love.

Honeymoon, tension and explosion are the phases victims go through cyclically, and fear is a main driving force for victims to stay put. Fear the abuser will hurt the children, hurt family members, and/or destroy their belongings. They fear they will not be able to provide for their children without the other person's support and they fear retaliation if they report the abuse and eventually, they convince themselves that they will be safer if they stay.

Slowly, victims become isolated. Their abusive partner gradually controls whom they can or cannot talk to – slowly removing them from their support system until they no longer have one. They learn to be passive because they live under the control of someone who has kept them dependent, consequently they feel like they are unable to survive on their own. They have been emotionally, psychologically and physically trampled into conformity that they no longer have the ability or confidence to survive independently, which lowers their self-esteem. Their self-esteem becomes so minute that they believe that they will never be able to get a job on their own, get a bank account, live independently or even go out in public. They begin to believe they don't deserve to be loved, that everything is their fault so they deserve to be beaten and mistreated and that their spouse or partner is the best they can do.

Sometimes, cultural beliefs can keep a victim in an abusive relationship. Some cultures still operate as a patriarchy,

where men are regarded as the authority within the family and society thus women and girls are expected to comply, cultures where defiance is punished with abuse. Although this country has come a long way in gender equality, the belief that women are second class citizens is still out there which also causes domestic violence.

As you can see, the reasons why victims of violence don't leave are very complex and sometimes dangerous. Perpetrators have complete power and control over their victims, not only psychological but emotionally and physically and according to studies victims who leave an abusive relationship are at a higher risk for stalking and physical retaliation once he/she leaves the abusive relationship. Victims know better than anyone when is the right time to leave and as a friend, a family member, a co-worker or an acquaintance we need to be supportive and try to understand that this is one of the most difficult decisions they will ever make and be there to help them when they are ready to leave. Know that there are agencies whose mission is to help victims of domestic violence and have expert staff that are dedicated to the cause and understand the dynamics of abusive relationships. Know that there is hope.

If you know someone involved in an abusive relationship the South Lake Tahoe Women's Center is that agency dedicated to helping victims of domestic violence, call us at (530) 544.2118. The Women's Center Business office was financed through a low-cost loan from the Rural Community Assistance Corporation.

Liliana E. Sanchez is outreach coordinator at the South Lake Tahoe Women's Center.

Election numbers change; KGID race undecided

Publisher's note: Updated Nov. 16, 2010, 1:03pm.

El Dorado County elections officials issued a revised count of ballots on Nov. 15 at 4:30pm for the Nov. 2 election.

The numbers for the South Lake Tahoe City Council race:

• Claire Fortier, 1,848 votes, 16.95 percent

• Tom Davis, 1,607 votes, 14.74 percent

• Angela Swanson, 1,374 votes, 12.60 percent

• Alice Jones, 1,238 votes, 11.36 percent

• Joy Curry, 1,229 votes, 11.27 percent

• Elizabeth Hallen, 1,141 votes, 10.47 percent

• Steve Cubby, 1,135 votes, 10.41 percent

• Adrian Gooch, 650 votes, 5.96 percent

• Georg May, 282 votes, 2.59 percent

• Doug Cichowicz, 150 votes, 1.38 percent.

Measure E, the city initiative to change the business license fee, was defeated by 66 votes.

Three positions were also up on the Kingsbury General Improvement District board. Darya Vogt and Dan Norman won their seats without question. After all the votes were counted, Natalie Yanish and Robert McDowell were tied with 373 votes. The tie will be broken Nov. 19 with the county clerk.

– Kathryn Reed

Markleeville shaking with seismic activity

By Channel 4 News

In less than eight hours, 15 small earthquakes rumbled the ground near the mountain town of Markleeville Monday morning, according to the United States Geological Survey.

The temblors struck between 12:41 and 8:21am., and were between 1.5 and 3.5 in magnitude, according to the USGS.

They were all eight to 11 miles east of the town, which is south of Lake Tahoe, and about 72 miles from Reno.

Earthquakes are not uncommon for the area, according to University of Nevada, Reno Seismology Professor Glenn Biasi, but he said, this small swarm is something scientists are keeping their eyes on.

Read the whole story