Howell: the business climate is what needs to be improved

Publisher's note: ***Lake Tahoe News is profiling candidates for South Lake Tahoe City Council and Douglas County Commission. The stories are being published in the order they were received.***

Name: Lawrence Howell

Age: 44

Hometown: Stateline

How long have you lived here?: I have lived in Douglas County for 19 years.

Job/profession: Executive director of Rite of Passage (Schools and Mentor Programs for At-Risk Youth)



Lawrence Howell

What would you build or tear down on the South Shore to make it great, as in what Whistler is like?:

The South Shore of Lake Tahoe needs to be redeveloped in order for any economic revitalization plan to work. All other successful vacation destinations have redeveloped their town "focus" and not relied on what worked in the past. Access to

the area, accommodations in the area, and a climate of invitation are all items that need to be addressed.

What form of recreation do you participate in? What improvements to recreation would you strive to make throughout Douglas County?:

I run, hike, bike, ski, and enjoy water sports. Recreation in Douglas County is fantastic and does not need improvement. The business climate is what needs to be improved.

Recreation tourism is expected to be the driving force of the South Shore economy in the coming years, what do you specifically plan to do to improve bike paths and roads?:

The South Shore needs an agreement between Douglas and El Dorado County on what the master plan is for bike paths and roads. Once the plan is agreed upon it needs commitment and follow through. Visitors do not understand why bike paths currently start and stop without connecting continuously throughout the community (as they do in other vacation destinations).

How do you plan to boost revenue in Douglas County?:

Douglas County needs follow through. In the past 10 years there have been 10 strategic plans that have been "shelved." Douglas County cannot afford "business as usual" because business in on the decline.

What stands out for you in the 2010-11 budget?:

The 2010-11 budget appears to have been developed behind closed doors. At the meeting to discuss and possibly adopt the budget the commissioners discussed one proposal and unanimously approved it. Each commissioner has a responsibility to bring proposals, look at all proposals, and develop alternative plans incase "Plan A" does not work.

What needs to be done to allow businesses to thrive in Douglas

County?:

Douglas County has a reputation of not being business friendly. The County Commissioners need to work together in building the reputation that Douglas is business friendly. Currently the commission is divided and some have put their own agenda before the needs of the county. Also, county ordinances that do or appear to restrict business need to be eliminated or modified. One example is the current sign ordinance is unenforceable and outdated. Businesses need to apply for a variance in order to install a sign which meets modern day business needs.

What are the three major issues facing Douglas County and how to expect in four years to make it so they are not major issues when your tenure is through?:

1. State budget. Douglas needs to be prepared for the state to push down unfunded mandates and raid county funds. If Douglas is not united at the County Commission level things will be worse in four years.

2. County budget. Douglas needs a plan B and C. The residents need to know what the status of the budget is at all times. The residents need to what the county is doing to adjust with the changing times. The county needs to make prudent business decisions just as private business operators must.

3. Use of county resources (water, land, mountains, Lake Tahoe). We need a balanced approach. Whenever a direction is "No" (growth, building, business, more…) the community loses.

What have you done to help Douglas County be a better community?:

First and foremost I run programs for at-risk youth. My goal is to help youth become productive prosocial members of our community. I have also been active as community volunteer in many areas of our community:

1. Douglas County Planning Commission – current chairperson.

2. Douglas County Search and Rescue – member.

3. Barton Hospital Foundation Board – member.

4. Keep Improving Douglas Schools – vice chair.

5. Douglas County Parks and Recreation Commission – chair and vice chair.

6. China Springs Youth Camp Advisory Board – member.

7. Nevada Interscholastic Activities Association – AAA League President.

8. Leadership Lake Tahoe – chosen by fellow members as spokesperson.

9. Pop Warner Football and AAU Basketball – Coach

What boards, commissions, or other experience do you have?:

See Nos. 1,3,4,5,6,7 in previous answer.

Why should voters vote for you over someone else?:

My professional work and volunteer work experience has proven my knowledge, skills, and abilities to lead when faced with major challenges. My skills developed as a trained mediator will serve the county will during a time of conflict and challenge. My home is at the lake and my business is in the Carson Valley. This allows me to bring a unique perspective to the District 4 Seat.

What would you do to make the lake and valley more unified?:

United we are strong … divided we lose. With the looming budget issues Douglas County needs to be as united as possible. My skills as a mediator will prove helpful in bringing groups together for a common cause … maintaining the

community we have decided to live and raise our families in.

BlueGo, the public transit, is mired in lawsuits and bankruptcy. Do we need public transit on the South Shore? If so, how do you propose to make it functional?:

The South Shore is in need of a public transit authority. One system is better for the economy, visitors, and the environment. The entire structure of the current system needs to be redeveloped. The current system was not designed to be self sufficient, was not appropriately governed, or effectively managed.

What is your stance on the 100-room rule for gaming growth in the county?:

The recent passage of the 100-room rule for gaming growth in Douglas County is an example of economic protectionism. This ordinance restricts business. In order to have 16 gaming machines (instead of 15) a business must build 100 rooms. Why? The current occupancy rate for rooms in Douglas County is 41 percent. If a business must “invest in our local economy” it should be in an area identified as a need such as roads, schools, senior services, social services, law enforcement, etc.

Consolidation of water agencies is stalled, yet ratepayers are faced with higher bills. What are your thoughts on this issue?:

The county picked one direction (Plan A) and paid an out of the area consultant a lot of money to develop a plan to consolidate the expenses of operating and maintaining separate systems. There should have been alternative plans developed in case the citizens did not agree with Plan A. Plan A was a bust and the county was left with no alternative but to dramatically raise rates.

1. The USDA Rural Economic Development has grant funding

available for exactly what Douglas County water users are facing. The county has not applied for the funding.

2. Actually consolidating the water systems (not just the ratepayers) will reduce operational expenses.

3. Whenever there is an issue that can financially impact residents alternative plans need to be developed.

On the November ballot is an ordinance regarding the Minden airport. What is your position on it and why?:

The proposed airport ordinance is the result of the county, the organized opposition, and those organized in support of the airport operations getting together and working out a compromise that all have agreed to. Furthermore, the local airport is vital to Douglas County being viewed as business friendly. Without airport access businesses like GE and Starbucks would not have moved to our county. For those reasons I agree with the proposed airport ordinance.

Is there any individual, group or organization you would not take campaign money from? Why?:

I would not accept campaign money or support from any group that expects me to make decisions based on the level of their contribution. I am not accepting money or support from any group that alienates others or is not willing to listen to both sides of an issue.

Tell us something about yourself that voters don’t already know:

I was born in a military hospital and, before attending University of California at Davis, I lived in Germany, Japan, Maryland, Arizona, Ohio, Kentucky, and California.

Sierra – Follow the locals to find powder stashes

Publisher's note: ***Lake Tahoe News is providing a glimpse into what skiers and boarders can expect at Lake Tahoe area resorts for the 2010-11 season.***

Sierra-at-Tahoe: Friendly vibes and fun rides provide the smiles

• Projected opening date: TBA

• Daily adult lift ticket: TBA; last season's was $69



Pillows of powder on Castle at Sierra. Photo/Provided

• What's new?: Sierra-at-Tahoe throws out the red carpet again with two new conveyor lifts for beginning skiers and boarders going to the top of Broadway on a 700-foot-long rug over expanded beginner terrain.

It's easy to make sense of playing on the slopes as Sierra adds to its long list of deals – with computer alerts going out announcing the latest including private lessons, T-shirts,

food, preferred parking and demo equipment up for grabs.

• What’s special about Sierra?: This ski resort is long known for its homespun guest service. During the storms, the best kept secret is finding wind protection at West Bowl and some of the finest tree skiing in the West. Stashes can still be found hours after the virgin powder falls and sometimes the next day.

Terrain includes high-speed cruisers and split groomed and ungroomed runs on powder days, allowing all riders access to the conditions of their choice. For behind the gates and freestyle snowboarding challenges, Huckleberry Canyon and nationally known snowboard parks including the South Shore’s only superpipe spawn the likes of Olympic boarders such as Hannah Teter.

• Last year’s snow total: 550 inches

• Lift hours of operation: 9am to 4pm weekdays; 8:30am to 4pm weekends and holidays

• Skiable terrain: 2,000 acres

• Number of lifts: 12

• Vertical feet: 2,200

• Directions: Head west on Highway 50 to Twin Bridges and turn left on Sierra-at-Tahoe Road to the resort.

• Website

— Compiled by Susan Wood

Events at South Lake Tahoe library

Join the Friends of the Library for the first meeting of the monthly book club on Oct. 20 at 3pm. This month members will be reading selected works from poet

laureates.

Picket Pin of the High Sierra – Book Reading is Oct. 16 at 2pm. Local author Carol Timmerman will be reading and discussing delightful new children's book "Picket Pin of the High Sierra".

Thomas the Tank Engine Party is Oct. 23 at 2pm. Celebrate Thomas with stories, games, crafts and lots of fun.

The South Lake Tahoe branch of El Dorado County Library is on Rufus Allen Boulevard.

Opinion: Consequences for not treating sick planet

By Scott McKain

When it comes to the health of the planet, I think of myself as a happy pessimist. After all, nobody gets out of here alive. There is no need to get cranky about it. But a recent scientific article in *Nature* magazine really shook me.

It also took me back to my days in the 1970s as a technician at Moss Landing Marine Labs on Monterey Bay.

My job was to take sea water samples around the bay and then analyze them for, among other things, phytoplankton.

These are the single-celled plants that are the basis of the ocean's food chain and the source of half the world's oxygen.

One voyage on the bay was special because our research vessel was to rendezvous with a small aircraft from NASA. Its representatives were working on instruments that could measure phytoplankton from overhead instead of directly from the water samples.

Read the whole story

Scott McKain is a member of the Douglas County (Ore.) Global Warming Coalition. He is retired from the Douglas County (Ore.) Health and the Building Facilities departments. He has a degree in oceanography.

El Dorado supes' budget shakeup impacts Tahoe office

By Kathryn Reed

An effort for El Dorado County Board of Supervisors to be on equal financial footing isn't working out that way, according to some supervisors. The Tahoe office was hit the hardest.

When the preliminary 2010-11 budget was passed in June each supervisorial district was allocated about $225,000. In September, that was reduced to $193,500.

It was Supervisor Jack Sweeney's idea last month for each of the five districts to have a pot of money instead of it being one pot for the whole board. From those individual pots the salaries of the supervisor (about $75,000) and of the assistant (it varies), health benefits, retirement, phone, car, mileage, and other expenses are paid.

Norma Santiago, who represents the South Shore, is being hit the hardest. She is no longer being reimbursed for mileage or cell phone expenses. Her assistant, Judi McCallum, will work 36 hours a week.

Santiago drives to Placerville nearly every day from her home in South Lake Tahoe, thus incurring more gas bills than some of her colleagues. Tahoe also has a separate office, while the other four only work out of the county seat.

"I am not going to change my work schedule. I am very dedicated to this job," Santiago said, even though she will have less cash in her pocket.

Supervisor Ray Nutting has the largest swath of land to represent, so he, too, regularly fills his gas tank.

Supervisor John Knight and Santiago's assistants are at the top of the pay scale because of the length of time they've been with the county – a hit to their bottom line.

Another discrepancy in costs is which health plan a supervisor is on and how many dependents he/she has as well as what plan their assistant is on. For those in Placerville, Kaiser is an option. The Tahoe plan is more expensive.

With the change in allocations, Santiago and Nutting are hit the hardest, Knight is close to breaking even, and Supervisor Ron Briggs has offered his surplus to help Santiago and Nutting. Sweeney's excess of more than $30,000 is in his account for now.

Sweeney and Briggs could not be reached for comment.

“I made the motion to cut our salaries,” Nutting said.

That proposal will likely be before the board later this fall. It takes a change to the county charter to make that happen. Nutting would have preferred that to occur before the current financial structuring took place to keep things even.

Even if three votes could be obtained for a salary cut, in the case of Sweeney, he would still have a surplus. One reason he has fewer expenses is he’s on Medicare and has no dependent children.

While Santiago supports the pay cut over the current scenario, she doesn’t think the votes are there for it to pass.

Knight won’t be the third vote.

“I think it’s grandstanding,” Knight said of Nutting’s proposal. “I don’t think he thought it out. I think it’s political.”

Knight said he has never taken a dime of reimbursement pay from the county for things like medical insurance, phone or mileage.

Nutting said it costs him about $600 month in expenses to be a supervisor. No longer is he being reimbursed for his cell phone, though he says 99 percent of what he uses it for is county business.

“There is a lot of stuff going on that I don’t care for,” Nutting said in regards to the supervisors’ budgets. He agrees things need to be cut, but he doesn’t like the way it is happening.

With the added expenses, Santiago said it would be more like a 30 percent pay cut for her. She agrees the board needs to make cuts just like it is imposing on employees, but she believes

it could be more fair.

“In the past there was one budget for the board. My proposal would be to look at the resources that are needed for each district, which would be a far more equitable way of doing this,” Santiago said.

The Board of Supervisors is having its annual Tahoe meeting this morning at 9 at Lake Tahoe Airport.

‘Secretariat’ a must-see with Lane in lead role



Secretariat

Rated PG

4 bagels out of 5

By Howie Nave

I don’t know why, but there’s just something about a biopic that I really look forward to seeing. That and because I grew up at the time this story was unfolding (in high school) and because my younger sister had a horse at the time. Whatever the reason, I was already anticipating a cool flick even

before screening it.

OK, that, and the fact that Diane Lane was starring as one of the principle players. From the outset I knew this was going to be a good flick because I recognized a few of the fillies that were extras in “Seabiscuit” that came out a few years ago. And much like that movie that was uplifting during the time of the Great Depression, “Secretariat” also came out at a time when the country was embroiled over the Watergate scandal, the Vietnam War and those long lines at the gas pump.



Diane Lane makes "Secretariat" worth seeing.

Heck, the way things are going now we could sure use another happy horse story now that’ll be turned into a movie say 30 years from now?

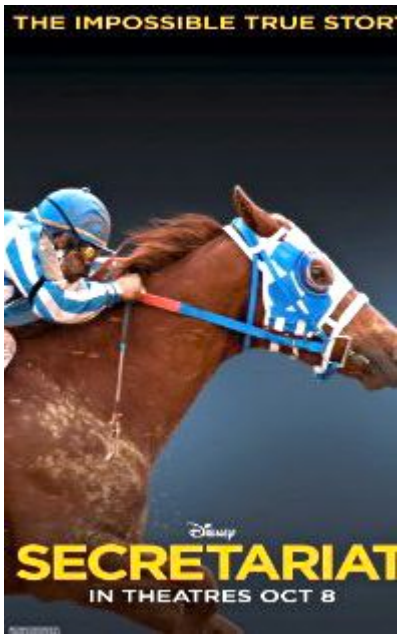
Before I get started I promise not to incorporate lame horse racing terms to sound cute and witty. So many critics have done that this past week that they all sound like literary hacks and that’s being kind, trust me. Some have been so bad it was like reading the equivalent of “Last Comic Standing” from someone who came in last place and decided to take up reviewing movies as a way to get noticed for their other, horrible deficiency of writing something.

Even though the title would suggest the horse as the main focal point it’s really the people surrounding the star that makes the movie so worth seeing. As I mentioned, Diana Lane is

so good as Penny Chenery Tweedy, Secretariat's owner that you know not only did she do her research well, but literally hung out with the still living Ms. Tweedy to get every nuance nailed to perfection. To say that this role was tailor made for Lane would be an understatement and even though it's still a little too early to predict I could see an Oscar nomination here in the Best Actress category.

Her character overcomes all odds and is driven to success never taking no for an answer even at the risk of losing the farm (literally) when her mother passes away and her dad (played marvelously by Scott Glenn) is incapacitated. Lane's character becomes the driving force that makes everyone else's character fall into place.

One of the standout roles goes to John Melodic as the Secretariat's trainer, Lucien Lauren. Given the kind of roles Malkovich has had before I thought he was going to drug the horse, but then realized they were all on the same team (whew).



It's incredible thinking back that this horse would be a Triple Crown winner because I can still remember when the pundits doubted her winning one of the most grueling thoroughbred races. In an era of everything being 3-D in the animated and horror genres it really is refreshing to see a movie that shuns any special effects, but is compelling enough just on its story that one hopes more filmmakers will start focusing on all ages that want to see a movie that truly lifts the spirit. Kudos for director Randall Wallace and writer Mike Rich (based on the book "Secretariat: The Making of a Champion" by William Nack) for making this project come to fruition. I know this is going to sound a little too sentimental to some, but I've always believes

sports are a great metaphor for life, but when a horse can drive you to tears if you know the back-story and not just crossing the finish line, then you know you've just experienced a really good movie.

"Secretariat" is rated PG for brief mild language with a running time of two hours.

Howie Nave is host/emcee/manager of The Improv at Harveys. You can hear him Monday-Friday 6 to 10am on KRLT FM-93.9.

South Shore holiday choral performances

Lake Tahoe Community College as the combined Tahoe Choir and LTCC chorus, has its Christmas concerts with more than 50 singers Dec. 3 and Dec. 5 under the direction of Linda Mitchell, with Sallie Parker at the piano.

The notable Reno quartet, The String Beings, will accompany the choir as they present Antonio Vivaldi's "Gloria". In addition to this classical piece, the choir will sing "All Through the Night", "Silver Bells", "Sleigh Ride" and other well-known favorites.

The winter concerts have been an anticipated local event for many years. Tickets will be available from choir members and at the door. On Friday night the group will perform at the LTCC Duke Theater at 7:30pm. The Sunday matinee performance will be at 3pm at St. Theresa Catholic Church.

Ticket prices are $10 for general admission, $8 for students and seniors. Children under age 5 are admitted without charge.

Ex-New Mexico governor to speak in South Lake

Gary Johnson, former governor of New Mexico and honorary chairman of the OUR America Initiative, will speak at a special town hall meeting in South Lake Tahoe on Oct. 20.

Johnson will focus on key issues such as: lowering taxes, cutting deficits, his opposition to continued nation-building in Afghanistan, the failure of the war on drugs and a return to common-sense governing. Since the launch of OUR America last year, Johnson has traveled to 28 states, where he has met with various student and political groups that are concerned with the increase in government spending and the future of the American economy.

The meeting is hosted by Steve Kubby, who is also a candidate for South Lake Tahoe City Council.

The meeting will be at the Inn by the Lake, 3300 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe from 8:15-9:30pm.

For more information about the event, contact Steve Kubby at Steve@kubby.com.

A forum for City Council candidates will earlier from 6-8pm.

SNC presents Global & Local Music Experiences

See what Saturday Mornings at SNC (formerly Senior Saturdays), the award-winning joint offering of Sierra Nevada College and Incline Village Parks & Recreation Senior Programs, are all about. Share your morning coffee with SNC's faculty and other knowledgeable locals as they present bite-size offerings of intellectually stimulating material. An optional continental breakfast will be provided for $3.

Date: Oct. 16th – Global & Local Music Experiences

Professional musician and professor of Music Studies at Sierra Nevada College, Donna Axton will share some of the musical experiences she has had during the 14 years she spent touring the world as a pianist in Hoyt Axton's Country Western, Boogie Woogie, Gospel, Rock and Roll Band. A 30-year native of Lake Tahoe, Axton sometimes feels like music is her first language, and English is her second. Having rubbed elbows with the likes of Johnny Cash, Chuck Berry, and Ringo Star, Axton's discussion will present a broad range of her experiences in the music world.

Axton has directed the Sierra Nevada College Concert Choir, which consists of SNC students and faculty as well as vocally talented members of the community, for the past five years and accompanied it for the previous 20 years. She teaches classes in music theory, music history, conducting, composition, and piano. Donna received her B.A. from Allegheny College in Meadville, PA; and her M.A. in Music from UNR.

Time: 10am–noon

Where: Prim Library, Sierra Nevada College, 999 Tahoe Blvd., Incline Village

Fee: $3 Optional Continental Breakfast

For details on course offerings, please visit www.Inclineseniors.com or call (775) 832.1310.

Thunder Valley offering helicopter service for casino patrons

By Sacramento Business Journal

Thunder Valley Casino Resort has started helicopter service from the Lincoln Airport to the Hayward and San Jose airports.

Lincoln Airport is 8 miles north of the casino.

The casino is considering using the casino resort’s rooftop helicopter pad.

Read the whole story