Reno Artown raising money to keep events free

By Forrest Hartman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Artown is launching a fund-raising campaign this week to develop additional revenue for its summer arts festival.

The program, Give $3 Keep Artown Free, encourages patrons to donate small sums of money for the organization that promotes hundreds of arts activities in Reno each July.

Beth Macmillan, Artown executive director, said more than 60 percent of the events at this year's festival are being offered at no charge.

"If you enjoy the events, you can make a small contribution to continue to keep Artown free," Macmillan said. "I know of two other festivals that have done a similar program, and it's been very successful."

Read the whole story

Opinion: Who owns California's water?

By Bob Williams, Record Searchlight

Most of us have always believed that water flows downhill. We were recently corrected by Len Richardson, editor of the California Farmer who said, "Water tends to flow toward wealth."

Richardson has good reason for this cynical view and it's time for all Californians to take notice. Wealth has moved to take more and more control of California's waters. The rise of water oligarchs is nothing new and was brought home to anyone who saw the movie "Chinatown."

The action has now shifted to the San Joaquin Valley and to maneuvers there for privatizing control of water in the massive State Water Project. These are not work-a-day farmers we are talking about. One or two may own a broad-brimmed hat but their offices are in Sunnyvale and Beverly Hills.

Read the whole story

Grand jury chastises South Lake's council, city manager

By Kathryn Reed

Dysfunctional is the overwhelming feeling the El Dorado County Grand Jury has of the city of South Lake Tahoe – primarily the council and city manager.

The seven pages devoted to South Lake Tahoe in the 2009-10 Grand Jury Report that came out this week are scathing.

"Council members and senior staff are unwilling or afraid to address and deal with the existing hostile work environment,"

the report says.

“Bickering”, “nitpicking”, “back biting”, “bush league” – those are some of the words and phrases in the report.

This civil grand jury made up of 19 county residents issues a report each June based on its investigations during the past year. This particular report touches on the Brown Act, council behavior, Councilman Bruce Grego’s repayment of an outside legal counsel bill, City Manager Dave Jinken’s behavior, how City Attorney Patrick Enright coached staff to talk to the grand jury, and the general climate of the city.

The panel interviewed at least three council members –Kathay Lovell, Bill Crawford and Hal Cole. Councilman Jerry Birdwell said no one from the grand jury contacted him nor did he contact them. Grego did not return calls to *Lake Tahoe News*.

Others interviewed by some of the grand jury members or the full panel include this reporter, appointed city staff (the city manager and city attorney are the only ones who fit that category), city employees, and a trainer of municipal officers and employees. It is not known if other media were questioned.

The document, which is a public record but is not currently on the county’s website, rips into how the council works together, or rather, doesn’t work together.

Cole concurred with this assessment, adding that he, too, believes personal agendas take precedence over policy. He hopes three candidates come forward for the November election who will change the makeup of the council so it functions better.

(Lovell is running, Crawford isn’t, Birdwell is weighing his options.)

Cole was also critical of this reporter who has written about actions from closed session. He said that was wrong. One item

reported was the vote on what to do with Officer Johnny Poland. Some council members believed that vote needed to be disclosed based on the Brown Act, others disagreed.

One of the recommendations of the grand jury is for the council to adopt a code of conduct and ethics and receive conflict resolution training.

“I do disagree with their thought that the City Council has not had appropriate ethical trainings,” Crawford said. “It’s mandated by law we have an ethics session every two years and we have done that. I think the grand jury is correct, if I read between the lines, that there is a question among the City Council about ethical behavior.”

The grand jury addressed Grego’s reimbursement of nearly $1,000 to have attorney Dennis Crabb handle a potential conflict of interest issue with the Fair Political Practices Commission.

The grand jury wrote, “California State Law clearly states that government contracts for payment may not be backdated. All unusual expenditures should be approved in open session.”

District Attorney Vern Pierson did not return a call asking him if his office would revisit the issue now that the grand jury has weighed in.

The report further states, “Testimony supports that City officers and employees at times operate using accepted historical practices that conflict with official written policy. This has resulted in misunderstandings, contentious City Council meetings, and a public impression that the City’s government operates outside the law. These misconceptions could expose the City to lawsuits.”

It accuses Enright of crossing the line when it came to coaching staff about what to tell the grand jury.

Enright said via email, "… I have barely had a chance to review the report and will need to review it carefully next week before responding."

The grand jury essentially said the council abdicated its responsibility at crucial times.

"The City Council, when facing controversial issues or after threat of litigation, routinely drops issues, even if addressing the issue would improve the function of government or service to the public," the report says.

Another issue brought up in the report is all of the couples who work for the city. South Tahoe does not have a nepotism policy. The report shows how staff is afraid to say something about one person for fear of retaliation for being critical of a family member. The report says the city needs to address this issue to create a better work environment.

Jinkens took the brunt of the heat from the grand jury.

"The City Manager, fearing loss of supervisory control of the Finance Director, advised the City Council that the Finance Director would probably file an official complaint against the City Attorney and the City charging them with harassment if the move took place. This statement was viewed by some employees as a threat by the City Manager," the report says.

One of the confusing things about the report that will make it hard for the public to understand is that just titles are used and not names. With there having been two city attorneys for much of the time of the investigation and different mayors part of the time, it takes knowing a bit of the city's history to know who is who.

Based on stories written by *Lake Tahoe News*, the above reference is to when Jacqueline Mittelstadt was city attorney. Mittelstadt did not respond to a request to comment on the report.

When the report takes issue with the mayor not putting something on the agenda, it is Lovell they are talking about.

Other references to Jinkens in the report include, “During a contentious June 30, 2009 City Council meeting it was suggested that the City Manager should resign. Testimony received indicated the City Manger later threatened to file a Workers Compensation claim, hire outside counsel and sue the City.”

It further says, “The City Manager used intimidation to retain control over parts of government.”

Jinkens sent an email to the council, Enright and City Clerk Suzie Alessi on Thursday afternoon that he shared with *Lake Tahoe News* the next day. It says, “While I do not agree with all of their conclusions and their understanding of the facts in all cases, I understand their right of the Grand Jury to examine the operation of local government and report their findings. My hope is that the very unpleasant experiences of the last year that we have endured will be lessons that will help us all to build a more positive and productive future for the people we serve.”

Jinkens, whose last day is Aug. 7, did not want to talk further about the report. He said he and Enright will create a draft response for the City Council in the next two weeks. The council has 90 days to respond to the report.

BlueGo routes to change; MV

files multiple lawsuits



By Kathryn Reed

Bus routes through the South Shore are expected to change July 14, the day after the South Lake Tahoe City Council votes on the proposal. What happens if the council votes no is not known.

The major changes would be eliminating the Meyers route and the Stateline-Zephyr Cove route, as well as making service along Highway 50 available every 30 minutes.

People without a bus stop would be able to pay the $4 fee for on-demand service to take them to the nearest transit center. They would be given a free transfer to be able to continue to their final destination.

The one-way fee for a trip on BlueGo is $2, so this change will cost people more money.

The difference with this route reconfiguration compared to ones brought forward by the former transit operator is these are designed to save money, according to STATA member Kathay Lovell.

Gordon Shaw of LSC Transportation Consultants was at the June 4 STATA meeting to present a plan of action to the board. Besides a few tweaks, much of what was said at that meeting was reiterated June 25. The board chose not to look beyond September. It intends to revisit routes and monetary issues on a monthly basis.

In a long, somewhat disjointed meeting Friday, the South Tahoe Area Transportation Authority board approved these route changes, a $4.6 million budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1, and to table where the interim operator will work.

The 10am meeting started in the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency office with Lovell questioning paying $2,200 a month to lease a building on Elks Point Road. She favors having everyone at the bus garage in the city.

Banter went back and forth about how much space TRC, the consultant/operator needs, plus how secure the bus garage is for STATA's accountant. It will be brought back at a future meeting.

STATA has been paying TRPA $80,000/year to use office space and for staff time. The reason to move is to save money.

TRC would write that $2,200 check to the landlord, but the money comes via STATA as a pass through. That figure is part of the total fee STATA pays TRC. The contract between STATA and TRC is for the latter to receive $460,000 a year, according to STATA spokeswoman Stacy Dingman.

"When we get to a long term, three- to five-year contract, the cost structure will be completely different," Dingman said after the meeting.

Forty minutes into the meeting the board went into closed session for about 2.5 hours. There they discussed litigation, the budget and the operating plan.

MV Transportation, the company that had been operating BlueGo and other components of the transit system since last summer, ceased doing so as of June 20. MV has filed a lawsuit in El Dorado County Superior Court against STATA and all member agencies in an attempt to be paid nearly $2 million for services rendered.

MV has also filed a suit in Solano County Superior Court, where it's based, against TRC for intentionally interfering in its contract with STATA.

MV has also filed a writ in Douglas County District Court to freeze STATA's assets. The agency's main bank account is tied to this action. For now, the Douglas County Sheriff's Office has control of it.

Dingman said bills are getting paid and that the action is not hampering operations.

Garrido lawyer wants client to see Dugard before trial

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

As the Jaycee Lee Dugard kidnapping case drags on, Nancy Garrido's lawyer suggested today that Dugard and her two children should be allowed to visit Garrido before the trial begins.

Attorney Stephen Tapson said after a five-minute court hearing today that he believes it would be better for Dugard to see Nancy Garrido in a private setting before she sees her stand trial in Dugard's kidnapping.

"She loves those kids, she loves Jaycee," Tapson said. "This is a relationship born in evil, but she loves them and misses them."

Read the whole story

Guatemala lake tapping into how Tahoe has been preserved

By Science Daily

A team of scientists from the University of Nevada, Reno, DRI, Arizona State University and University of California, Davis has returned from a two-week expedition to Guatemala's tropical high-mountain Lake Atitlan, where they are working to find solutions to the algae blooms that have assailed the ecosystem and the drinking water source for local residents.

The lake's water is contaminated with watershed runoff and waste water, which contributes to increased algae growth and suitable conditions for bacteria and pathogens such as, Escherichia coli and Giardia that can proliferate and enter untreated drinking water.

In 2009, the Global Nature Fund designated Guatemala's Lake Atitlan as its "Threatened Lake of the Year."

Read the whole story

Squaw Valley art-wine festival

Squaw Valley is hosting the 9th Annual Art, Wine & Music Festival where artwork, fine wine and internationally acclaimed music are celebrated.

The festival is July 17-18 from 11am to 5pm.

From 2-5pm, wine lovers can sample offerings from 15 wineries, including Robert Stemmler Winery, which offers vintages made exclusively with estate-grown grapes from The Donum Estate known for its exquisite Pinot Noirs and Ferguson Block in Carneros and the Nugent Vineyard in California's Russian River Valley. Other featured wineries include Gold Note, Lone Buffalo Vineyards, Perry Creek Winery, Moniz, Holly's Hill Vineyards, Crocker & Starr Wines, Bridesmaid Winery, Three Families, Dogwood Cellars, Adobe Road Winery, Expression Wine, Mount Aukum, Oliver Hill Wines, and Bechard Vineyards.

While tasting the wine, visitors can admire the fine art exhibition featuring more than 30 artists as well as enter a raffle.

To add to the festive atmosphere, Oscar Reynolds will entertain festival goers on both days from 1-5pm.

North Lake Tahoe's Groove Foundry also will perform from 2-5pm both days.

The event caters to kids as well with an 18-hole miniature golf course, sky jump bungee, plus swimming, roller skating and hiking at High Camp.

Entrance to the festival is free.

Wine tasting is $25 and includes a commemorative festival wine glass. All proceeds benefit Disabled Sports USA Far West.

For more information, visit www.TheVillageatSquaw.com or call (530) 584.6266.

SLT Rec Center offers youth summer passes

South Lake Tahoe Parks and Recreation Department offers savings for teens at the ice arena and swimming pool for grades 5-10. LTUSD ID required.

The recreation center pass for the summer is $25, ice arena pass is $35 and the combo pass is $50.

Visit www.recreationintahoe.com or call (530) 542.6056 for details and times.

Workshop on Sierra Nevada geotourism project

The public is invited to learn about the Sierra Nevada Geotourism Project and get an insider’s view on how to submit a nomination, navigate the website, and learn how geotoursim benefits the community.

The workshop will be at the Emergency Operation Center, 1694 County Road, Minden at 5:30pm June 28.

A variety of project partners and residents of the Sierra Nevada are working together to create a National Geographic map that features geotouristic assets and attracts as well as encourages sustainable tourism. The Geotourism Project seeks to celebrate the Sierra Nevada as a world-class destination, while contributing to its economic health and promoting long-term stewardship of the region.

Geotouristic assets are authentic and distinctive to the region and sustain or enhance the geographic character of the Sierra Nevada. Examples include local restaurants and shops, historic hotels, museums, local artists, hiking trails, festivals and events, volunteer and recreational opportunities. To view assets that have been selected in the first phase region and/or to submit a nomination, go to www.sierranevadageotourism.org.

For more information, contact Becky Bell at the Sierra Business Council, sierrageotourism@sbcouncil.org, (530) 582.4800 or visit the county's website at www.douglascountynv.gov.

Green Weather at Tahoe Donner

Green Weather plays The Grotto at The Lodge at Tahoe Donner on Aug. 25 from 6-9pm.

The address is 12850 Northwoods Blvd., Truckee.