Search and Rescue fund raiser at Riva Grill

Celebrate the opening of the Riva Grill deck on June 16 from 5-9pm as proceeds benefit the El Dorado County Search and Rescue team.

For $18 eat from a giant buffet from 5-7pm and listen to Trey Stone Band from 6-9pm.

Supervisor questions South Tahoe’s stance on redevelopment

By Norma Santiago

You have no doubt heard about redevelopment as tool in a community’s toolbox for revitalizing the community and making needed improvements. This much is true. Properly deployed, redevelopment can spur public and private investment in neglected areas of the City South Lake Tahoe and provide a boost to a struggling economy. For these reasons redevelopment is often an appropriate exercise of local government authority.

City officials have recently launched another redevelopment effort known as “Project Area No.2” which encompasses approximately 1,300 acres from the airport, through the Y and most of Lake Tahoe Boulevard. It is discouraging to think about the commercial core and key residential areas of our

city as fraught with physical and economic blight, but continuing to ignore these challenges would only further erode the South Lake Tahoe economy. Designating these properties as redevelopment area will allow the city to keep an additional share of your property tax so it can address these challenges. City officials have extolled the benefits that redevelopment may bring such as local job creation, economic growth and community improvements. We hope this much is true.



Norma Santiago

With any decision there are costs and benefits. While we like to contemplate the benefits of redevelopment and hope for the future, we are wise to also consider the costs. What are the costs of redevelopment? Perhaps more important, who bears the costs of redevelopment?

Unfortunately there is no such thing as a free lunch, or free money for that matter. The “additional share” of your property tax money that the city will use for redevelopment purposes must come from somewhere. That “somewhere” is the county of El Dorado and other local government agencies. Revised estimates indicate that the county of El Dorado will lose between $23 million and $48 million over the life of the 45-year redevelopment effort. These losses could impact the county’s ability to provide services which are also important to the success of the South Lake Tahoe community such as corrections and prosecution, public health and mental health services, social safety net programs and veterans assistance. We can’t know for certain how much the county stands to surrender under redevelopment because the actual dollar amount depends on the

success of the city’s efforts. In that regard, we genuinely hope that this new round of redevelopment is a successful endeavor.

Recognizing the potential benefits and costs of redevelopment, the county has taken a cautious approach, requesting more time and discussion from the city. As currently conceived, the city’s plan contains some potential weaknesses which do not strike an appropriate balance between redevelopment efforts and the potential impact on county services provided to the citizens of South Lake Tahoe. Specifically, the inclusion of non-blighted parcels in the redevelopment plan unnecessary burdens the county with unwarranted property tax loss. Additional dialogue, shared analysis and negotiation between the city and county is warranted to ensure a proper balance of public services is maintained.

To be certain, state law provides the city with the legal ability to divert property taxes for redevelopment purposes. Given the amount of time and resources that city officials have invested in the effort so far, I am confident that additional redevelopment in some new form will occur in South Lake Tahoe. However, recognizing that the city’s redevelopment effort is inextricably linked with the county’s ability to fund critical services, we should ensure that redevelopment goals are realistic and sustainable. Although I support the principles of redevelopment, I also support doing everything possible at this early stage to ensure that it is successful in practice. This includes a realistic discussion and balancing of costs and benefits. After all, it is the citizens of South Lake Tahoe who will live with results.

Supervisor Norma Santiago represents District 5 on the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors, including all El Dorado County communities in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

South Tahoe’s American Legion struggling to stay viable



By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe American Legion members are hoping their chapter does not go the same way as the local Veterans of Foreign Wars affiliate – by the wayside and being disbanded by the national organization.

With fewer people joining the legion, it is a real possibility South Lake Tahoe may one day not have an American Legion chapter.

“We need people to join,” said George Ramirez of American Legion Post 795 Stella Van Dyke Johnson. “We know there are a lot of veterans in town.”

Ramirez was speaking at the annual Memorial Day festivities this week. His plea was to those in attendance and beyond.

The legion has 114 members, but has a hard time getting a quorum of seven at its monthly meetings. The Legion meets the third Tuesday at 6pm at the hall on Highway 50 in the middle of town.

“We want to get the next generation involved. The vets from the Iraq wars are not joining (the Legion),” Ramirez said.

The local auxiliary also needs members. The women’s group

meets the third Wednesday at 5:30pm at the hall.

Congress created the American Legion in 1919, a year after World War I ended. There are 3 million men and women in the world who are part of the Legion.

Someone is at the South Lake Tahoe site Thursday-Sunday starting at 4pm to answer questions about joining the Legion or renting the facility. For more information, call (530) 541.8788.

Elementary school fundraiser for PE program

A “Fundinner/Fundraiser” will be at El Papagayo in Meyers on June 15 from 4-7pm.

The money raised is for Lake Tahoe Environmental Science Magnet School’s physical education program.

A $10 ticket gets you two tostadas and a drink.

Tickets will be available for purchase from PTA parents or at El Papagayo that night.

Nitrates a growing problem in

California’s drinking water



By Julia Scott, California Watch

The water supply of more than 2 million Californians has been exposed to harmful levels of nitrates over the past 15 years, a period marked by lax regulatory efforts to contain the colorless and odorless contaminant, a California Watch investigation has found.

Nitrates are the most common groundwater contaminant in California and across the nation. A byproduct of nitrogen-based farm fertilizer, animal manure, wastewater treatment plants and leaky septic tanks, nitrates seep into the ground and can be expensive to extract.

Read the whole story

Remembering the Pony Express

The 150th Anniversary Celebration of the Pony Express will be on the South Shore June 6–13.

The National Pony Express Association will again conduct a re-ride of the Pony Express Trail. The 1,966-mile route follows the Pony Express National Historic Trail through California, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Nebraska, Colorado, Kansas, and Missouri.

El Dorado County grappling with millions of dollars in cuts

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County is looking to adopt a budget for 2010-11 that has $49 million less than the current one. Property taxes are projected to be down by 4 percent, sales tax off by 11 percent, and vehicle license fees reduced by 4 percent.

To attain the balanced budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1 there may be a reduction of 70 full-time positions, or 3.8 percent of the workforce.

In the $410,246,922 budget, 48 percent, or $195,248,053, is general fund dollars. This is the discretionary part of the budget. The bulk of the budget is money with strings attached that the county has no say in how it's spent.

The recommended budget is likely to be voted on June 22 or June 29. Any revisions based on what the state comes forward with will likely be adopted in September. With the state wrestling with a nearly $20 billion shortfall, the impact to all counties and cities could be more dire than what the governor came out with in his May revise.

The Board of Supervisors begins budget workshops June 7 at

9am, with another one June 9 at 9am and a third, if necessary, on June 10 at 9am. All are in Placerville.

“People are not purchasing as many goods that are taxable. That is a double whammy for us because a lot of state revenue is based on sales tax,” said Mike Applegarth, senior administrative analysis for El Dorado County. “If the money is not there, we cannot spend it.”

When it comes to property tax, people are having property reassessed at a lower rate as well as buying at lower values. This means less coming into the county coffers.

El Dorado County Economic Snapshot

Median Housing Price (March)	**Unemployment**	**Single Family Permits Issued**
2006: $515,000	4.6 percent	701
2007: $479,000	5. 1 percent	405
2008: $359,000	6.9 percent	205
2009: $335,000	11.3 percent	72
2010: $294,950	13.6 percent (March)	n/a

Unbalanced departments

All but the District Attorney’s Office and Sheriff’s Department have come forward with a balanced budget. The DA needs to trim about $250,000 and the sheriff $460,000 to make the numbers work that Chief Administrative Officer Gayle Erbe-Hamlin has come up with.

Law related expenses, including these departments as well as public defender and courts, account for 65 percent of the general fund.

For the upcoming fiscal year the DA's office has been asked to cut $539,000. It is more than half way there.

Jody Albin, fiscal administrative manager for the DA's office said, it's possible three or four prosecutors will lose their jobs if the CAO gets her way with the cuts. Placerville has 15 active prosecutors, while South Lake Tahoe has six.

"It becomes a balancing act between what we are able to handle," Albin said.

She said District Attorney Vern Pierson plans to tell the board again that certain crimes will not be prosecuted if more cuts come down on his department.

"Aid to fire" is a phrase that is likely to be heard a lot next week during the budget hearings. It's an issue with the DA, sheriff and assessor. Fire departments in the county are supposed to be self-sustaining, but that has not always been the case. The current budget calls for $1.3 million from the general fund to go to various fire agencies.

This in turn means there are fewer dollars in the general fund to go to the District Attorney's, Sheriff's and Assessor's offices.

Sheriff Fred Kollar is being told to trim an additional $460,000 from the upcoming budget year.

It's possible supervisors will pass the working budget this month without the DA and sheriff issues resolved. The final figures may not be realized until July, county officials said.

As for timing of things to be discussed on Monday, an internal email from Erbe-Hamlin says, "I am putting the DA's discussion down as first Policy Issue for discussion. This will come

after the Overview, Structural Deficit discussion. Cannot tell for sure the time needed for those items since that will be the opportunity for the board to ask questions and provide input. Policy Issue discussion could be late morning June7 or sometime right after lunch."

Kollar said three scenarios are being talked about for his department. They include eliminating vacant positions, restructuring the department (he doesn't have specifics on that yet) or contracting out food services at the South Lake Tahoe and Placerville jails.

The sheriff's department has 377 employees. It was at 400 2.5 years ago.

For 2010-11, the Sheriff's Department budget is about $53.4 million. Of that, about $41.5 million is from the general fund and the rest comes from the state, feds and grants. The total budget in 2008-09 was $55.4 million.

"We are doing less things. We are not doing the nice to have stuff," Kollar said. "About two years ago we eliminated the DARE program in grammar schools. About a year ago we eliminated school resource officers. We used to have four deputies and a sergeant assigned to special events detail."

The department handled 85,000 service calls with 80 patrol officers last year.

Kollar said the public probably hasn't noticed the cuts made to his department, but he doesn't know how much longer it will go unnoticed.

But another thing that may go unnoticed is the 10 percent raise many in Kollar and Pierson's departments have gotten in the last two years under Measure 504. The Charter Review Committee recommended to supervisors they take the issue to the voters in November. The board said no and the automatic raises stayed on the books, though it's not a countywide

raise, just for certain departments – like the sheriff's and DA.

Looking forward

Even after the Board of Supervisors finishes with the 2010-11 budget, the reality is the forecast is bleak for future years. Erbe-Hamlin is projecting a deficit of $15 million for fiscal year 2011-12 based on today's forecasts.

For the last three years the general fund has gone backward. The trend before the financial crisis hit was for a growth of 4 percent to 7 percent.

"All indications are that the fiscal situation will continue to worsen over the next year or more. Property taxes continue to decline; there are potential increases of 2-4 percent in our PERS rates, and there is still much uncertainty in regards to state actions," Erbe-Hamlin says in her staff report.

Wet winters tend to lessen threat of wildfires



By Paul Rogers, San Jose Mercury News

Regardless of how wet the winter, fire officials often broadcast the same warning as summer begins: "Prepare for a bad fire season."

If it didn't rain much, they say conditions are bone dry. If

it rained a lot, they often say the tall grass translates to lots of fuel.

So what's the real story?

A *Mercury News* analysis of rainfall and fire records over 40 years shows the worst fire seasons come after dry winters, not wetter ones like the one we've just had.

Read the whole story

Ranked by acres burned, 12 of California's 15 worst fire seasons back to 1970 – including the four very worst – all occurred in years after drier-than-normal winters, according to the analysis.

Festival of Trees and Lights seeks volunteers

Would you like to help make this year's family friendly Festival of Trees and Lights even bigger and better?

Then attend an information session June 7 from 5-6:30pm in the Aspen Room at Lake Tahoe Community College in South Lake Tahoe.

CPR class in South Tahoe

BLS CPR class on July 12 from 5:30–9:00pm. Cost is $50 for

this one evening class. Fee includes manual.

This course is geared for the general public, covering the 30:2 CPR for adults, children and infants, AED, airway, masks and choking.

With successful completion, students will receive a two-year CPR certificate.

The instructor is Duane DeClerck. Call (530) 906-8171 for more details.

To register, stop by the South Lake Tahoe Parks & Recreation Complex at 1180 Rufus Allen Blvd. or call (530) 542-6056.