McCall to turn real estate profits over to 5 charities

By Kathryn Reed

Thane McCall's generosity could be monumental if the South Shore housing market returns to the glory days.

Even if home sales sputter as they have been, McCall has pledged to donate a total of $20,000 to five area charities. If profits are better than that for the entire calendar year, the larger sum will be divvied up among the recipients.



Thane McCall

At a press conference this morning, McCall and representatives of the five agencies – Lake Tahoe Boys & Girls Club, CASA, South Lake Tahoe Police Activities League, South Lake Tahoe Women's Center, and Tahoe Youth & Family Services – spoke of what his donation means.

"I wanted to do something that would help kids in our community and kids that are put in a position where they might be at-risk due to things that are out of their control," Thane told *Lake Tahoe News* before the conference. "Typically we are going after younger kids that haven't made poor decisions already, where it's a lot easier to steer them in the right direction."

McCall won't guess as to what kind of money could be raised this calendar year. He said real estate sales are picking up

and called April a “great” month.

This is McCall’s 30th year to live in Lake Tahoe. It’s his second stint at owning a real estate company bearing his name. He sold the company in 2005 and reopened McCall Realty last year.

“It really isn’t about McCall Realty as it is about the community,” McCall said. “It’s hard for me to predict what the consumer is going to do when they hear about this. Typically in the past all of my contributions have been quiet. This one I think we can raise the public awareness to raise more money for the charities.”

McCall said some of the charities he is working with have told him they’ve been trying to engage the business community to get different fund-raising campaigns under way.

“This might be what they need to kick it off,” McCall.

He shied away from offering a challenge to other businesses to see what they could raise in the same time period.

With funding being cut, grants not as prolific, donations diminishing, but the need increasing for the services these five charities provide, McCall said it was time to stop thinking about what he could do and instead create a plan where he could be writing hefty checks at the end of the year or in early 2011.

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2 days of dancing at Genoa

festival

The Genoa Cowboy Poetry & Music Festival features an unprecedented line up of nationally known Cowboy poets and musicians including Waddie Mitchell, Don Edwards, Paul Zarzyski, Lacy J. Dalton and the Dalton Gang, David John and the Comstock Cowboys, Dave Stamey, Larry Maurice, Richard Elloyan, Sourdough Slim, Old West Trio, Cross Town Cowboys, Dennis Golden, Tom Weatherby, Ron Scofield and more, but there's more to do than listen.

On Friday and Saturday nights, the historic Genoa Raycraft Dance Hall will echo to the sounds of boots scuffling on the wooden floor as the Festival hosts Cowboy Dances. On April 30, The Old West Trio brings their combination of contemporary and traditional Cowboy music to the stage and on May 1, it'll be the Cross Town Cowboys providing the melodies. Both dances start at 7, and tickets are only $10.

If your two step is a little rusty, Donna and Tom Betterton will be giving Western Swing Dance lessons at 5:30 each night at the Raycraft Hall. A Festival day pass is required to take advantage of those dance lessons. Those day passes will not only get you into the dance lessons, but also over 80 Western related workshops and demonstrations presented by talented artists.

Including storytelling, melodramas, a discussion about what a Cowboy poet is, what it is like to be Cross Town Cowboys Poet in the West, writing cowboy poetry and a discussion led by Lacy J. Dalton and the "Let 'em Run" Foundation on wild horses in Nevada. Demonstrations will include Dutch oven cooking, leather tooling, saddlery, silversmithing, Cowboy gear and blacksmithing.

All of this in the authentic setting of Genoa, the oldest settlement in Nevada. Lodging specials at a variety of Carson

Valley properties are available for festival goers. For more information, visit us at www.genoacowboyfestival.com or call (775) 782.8207 or (775) 782.8696.

Favorable bond sales keep LTUSD construction on track

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Unified School District was able to secure $2 million more in bond sales Tuesday than financial advisers anticipated because of a good bond rating and favorable yield.

The district will have $17.7 million in its coffers in the next week. The money is part of the $64.5 million bond approved by voters in November 2008. This is the second round of bond sales. Another is not anticipated for two to three years.



Students work in the new small engine lab at South Tahoe High School. Photo/Kathryn

Reed

Patrick Martin, vice chairman of the community bond committee that oversees how the money is being spent, gave a report to the board Tuesday night. He said the district has been cooperative in explaining the process and being able to simplify financial documents for the group to understand.

As someone who admittedly was a skeptic about what the district intended to do, Martin said he is thrilled with the accomplishments to date – which include a new building open at South Tahoe High School less than 18 months after the bond was passed.

Also at Tuesday's meeting, the board authorized LPA Inc. to begin design work on the wing at Bijou Community School that will house nine classrooms. This is all part of the bond.

The board also amended the agreement with LPA for its work on the joint use facility at the high school. It is now going to be a single-story facility with 10,000 square feet. South Lake Tahoe is a partner in this building.

The building will house the student union. The goal is to serve lunch to 750 of the 1,100 students. Right now 450 buy lunch on campus.

The reconfiguration is necessary to accomplish other goals – like building the sports medicine facility. That was a late addition by qualifying for matching funds from the state.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Tim Winters of Winters Electric closed escrow this month on the former House of Carpets building on Highway 50 in South Lake Tahoe. In May he plans to open a retail business selling green living merchandise, including home automation systems to turn off lights and appliances remotely, central controllers and thermostats, and LED lighting and other goods. For info, call (530) 541.8880.

• Traci Des Jardins, executive chef at Manzanita at that Ritz-Carlton at Northstar, will be part of the Farm to Feast event May 8 in Santa Rosa. Tickets are $150/person. For more info, call (707) 575.7194, ext. 105.

• Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington call Nevada Gov. Jim Gibbons one of the worst governors in the country.

• Sugar Bowl was recognized by the National Ski Area Association for having the best guest service program for ski resorts with skier visits between 100,000 and 250,000.

• The Environmental Science Magnet School in Meyers received a grant to provide professional growth and child development strategies for teachers and supplemental instructional materials for the students.

• Lake Tahoe Unified’s last day of school is June 23, graduation is June 18. The first day of the 2010-11 school year is Aug. 30 – which is before Labor Day.

Democrats to host McClintock's challenger

To the community,

Vote-by-mail ballots for the June primary election will be sent out in the next couple of weeks. These propositions aren't on many people's radar yet.

Primary and mid-term elections have notoriously low turnout. This year the tea-partyers are riled up and ready to vote. Let's match that with progressive energy and votes both this June and again in November. Remember, your vote is vital.

And mark your calendar. Clint Curtis, the Democratic candidate for Congress will address the LTDC meeting on May 12, 6:30pm in the Loft above the Blue Angel Cafe, 1132 Ski Run Blvd., South Lake Tahoe. Come and meet the candidate.

Judy Williams, President, Lake Tahoe Democratic Club

Study: Livestock polluting Sierra water supply

By Tom Knudson, Sacramento Bee

As director of the emergency room at the UC Davis Medical Center, Robert Derlet always wondered what made people sick.

Each summer, on hiking trips into the high Sierra, he brought that curiosity along, asking himself: Where do you get

infections in the wilderness? The most obvious possibility, he believed, was the water.

Now, after 10 years of fieldwork and 4,500 miles of backpacking, Derlet knows for sure. What he has learned – after analyzing hundreds of samples dipped from backcountry lakes and streams –



Cattle near Bridgeport. Photo/Daryl L. Hunter

is that parts of the high Sierra are not nearly as pristine as they look.

Read the whole story

Elija Bleu's House joins Green Cafe Network

In its ongoing endeavor to provide good juju and great java, Truckee's Elijah Bleu's House of Coffee and Good Eats recently joined the Green Café Network, a movement that promotes environmental and social responsibility.

According to café owner, John Evans, the nonprofit

organization’s mission aligns perfectly with that of Elijah Bleu’s.



John and Dawn Evans

“For instance, we serve Blue Bottle coffee exclusively,” notes Evans. “San Francisco ’s Blue Bottle Coffee is made using only the finest organic, pesticide-free, shade-grown beans.”

The Southern influenced café also offers fresh, healthy food made from quality local and organic ingredients whenever possible.

“We’re committed to serving food that is for locals, by locals, from our purveyors and distributors down to our farmers and coffee growers,” explains Evans, who owns the café with his wife, Dawn.

The Green Café Network is a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to greening the coffeehouse industry and harnessing café culture for community and individual environmental education.

Launched in the Bay Area, the Green Café Network takes a two-tiered approach. First, the organization works with independently owned coffeehouses to actively reduce their ecological impacts and become certified green businesses. Secondly, the group assists in educating the coffeehouse staff and community members to implement environmental responsibility to their personal lives. Currently, there are 17 member cafes in the Bay Area.

Elijah Bleu’s is located at 10115 Donner Pass Road in Truckee in the historic Loading Dock building. The colorful café is open for breakfast and lunch and features a full selection of handcrafted coffee and espresso drinks.

For more information, click here; email info@elijahbleus.com or call (530) 582.1040.

For more information about the Green Café Network, click here.

Sand Harbor to open boat launch

The boat launch at Sand Harbor will reopen May 1. Boating launching hours will be 6am-8pm throughout the summer.

Boat inspectors from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency watercraft inspection program will be present during these hours. Tahoe boaters are encouraged to get watercraft inspected early due to summer crowds.

Lake levels are still low and launch conditions are less than ideal, especially for boats over 16 feet in length. Boaters will need to use caution when launching their boats.

4% proposed STPUD rate hike

comes with questions



By Kathryn Reed

When ratepayers in South Tahoe Public Utility District incurred a 4 percent hike in 2007 it generated about $668,000 in revenue. Salary and benefit increases that year for STPUD totaled about $750,000. When ratepayers incurred another 4 percent hike in 2008 it raised about $700,000, with the district spending about $1.7 million on salaries and benefits that year.

The district is proposing a rate hike of 4 percent that would take effect July 1 – the start of the fiscal year. No raises are expected for the more than 100 employees. The money generated is earmarked for capital improvement projects.

On May 6 at 6pm the board will conduct a public hearing on the 2010-11 budget at 1275 Meadow Crest Drive, South Lake Tahoe. The board will vote on the rate increase on the May 20 meeting that starts at 2pm.

That is also the last day the 17,000 ratepayers can submit comments about the proposal. If 50 percent plus one objects to the increase, the proposal dies per California Proposition 218. The board could also vote against it.

As of April 27 there were 66 objections. Two years ago the rate increase received 65 objections and there were more than 160, or less than 1 percent of the ratepayers, who objected three years ago.

“The thing that is the driving force for the increase is the

capital improvement program for the next two years," South Tahoe PUD General Manager Richard Solbrig said. "The next two years there is a real glut of projects to get done. We need some cash upfront right away to take advantage of all of these programs."

Part of the urgency is matching dollars and low interest loan programs the district has received from the state and federal governments. Some of the money will be spent on installing water meters, some to upgrade the water flow for fire suppression and some to improve the 51-year-old wastewater treatment plant.

Board President Dale Rise believes a 4 percent rate increase is too much.

"I was hoping to convince the board of 2 percent," Rise said. "My problem is they want a 4 percent increase every year for the next 10 years."

If the rate hike were approved, the average household would pay an additional $8 per quarter or $32 a year. Rise is concerned about the cumulative affect of 4 percent hikes, pointing out that in three years it's more than $100 more a year that people would be paying for water and sewer each year compared to today's rates.

The district does its budget calculations on a 10-year cycle to project its current and anticipated needs.

"If we did zero percent this year and did 4 percent for the remaining nine years and did all the capital projects, we would have a deficiency in the ending balance," Solbrig said.

To that, Rise says perhaps some of the projects should be deferred.

If the 4 percent hike is not approved, Solbrig says the board will have to decide which capital improvement projects need to

be shelved and/or approve other cost-cutting measures.

In the $40 million annual budget about one-third is used for capital improvements, one-third for maintenance and operations, and one-third for salaries and benefits.

The latter has caused several disgruntled ratepayers to voice their dissatisfaction with how the district spends ratepayers' money. The highest paid employee in the district is Solbrig, who makes $180,744 a year. The lowest wage is $16/hour. The average annual salary at the district is $75,474.

There are 100 workers who are represented by one union. The 15 managers operate under a memorandum of understanding with the district. The highest paid union worker makes about $95,000/year.

Below is the salary range for the 10 highest paid positions beneath the general manager. All are management positions.

Position	Minimum	Maximum
Assistant GM	$127,016	$162,108
CFO	$108,587	$138,588
Eng Dept Manager	$110,205	$140,652
Mgr of Field Ops	$102,213	$130,452
Principal Engineer	$99,157	$126,552
Mgr of Plant Ops	$99,157	$126,552
Human Resources	$90,215	$115,140
Senior Engineer	$88,100	$112,440

Hydrogeologist	$88,100	$112,440								
Land App Mgr	$88,100	$112,440								

Most employees in the district are at the highest level of the five-step range for their position, Solbrig said.

He and CFO Paul Hughes explained the large salary-benefit spike in 2008 was twofold. First, salaries were adjusted to bring STPUD employees inline with the state median for their respective positions. This was the first survey conducted since Solbrig started with the district in 1990. It was a board decision to pay the median salary. Second, the district switched to a wellness program that mandated employees get baseline exams. This meant more visits to doctors than would be normal.

“The district’s view is investing in the cost of the wellness program in a long-term investment. We expect to reap benefits for years to come,” Hughes said.

In the current budget the salary and benefits category is down 1 to 2 percent from the previous year because the health plan is working, Hughes said. The district is self-insured.

This is the last year of a four-year contract with the union. It’s anticipated an extension of one year will be agreed to a by all sides that will include zero raises.

The general manager and the chief financial officer defend the salary and benefits packages for the 115 employees of South Tahoe PUD.

“It’s easier to retain people when you pay a fair, livable wage. We need an adequately trained staff. We don’t have a high turnover rate,” Solbrig said. “We don’t want to be like the police and fire departments where at times they have been like a training ground.”

Below are the cost of living adjustments for STPUD employees

compared to the consumer price index:

Year	COLA	CPI
2009	2.0%	-1.3%
2008	3.8%	3.8%
2007	3.2%	3.2%
2006	2.5%	2.9%
2005	2.5%	3.1%
2004	2.5%	2.5%
2003	2.5%	1.1%
2002	2.5%	2.8%
2001	2.0%	3.2%
2000	2.0%	2.0%

Wages have been frozen. However, STPUD employees have not incurred furlough days like their brethren throughout the public and private sectors. Nor have they had salary reductions since the recession hit.

Solbrig said the district maintains the staff it needs. He said when more construction was going on in Lake Tahoe the district hired a consultant or paid overtime to handle the new connections.

Solbrig said the maintenance and operations budget has been trimmed some and that grants are continuously being sought so ratepayers don’t foot as much of the bill.

He said the staff and board have not identified what services could be cut and still have public health and safety issues addressed.

“What work are we not going to do if we have people on furlough?” Solbrig asked. “Are we going to reduce service? If your water is off, are you willing for us to get to you in a couple days?”

El Dorado County seeks grand jury members

The opportunity for citizens to submit their names for possible nomination for the 2010-11 El Dorado County Grand Jury is available. The grand jury acts as an investigative body to ensure county, special district, and city government is being effectively run.

The grand jury is not a jury for a trial. The judges of the Superior Court shall select names from those submitted, as well as other nominees, and currently seated grand jurors who wish to be held over, to be put into the jury pool. Nineteen jurors are then selected in a random drawing from this pool. Jurors serve for a period of one year. Final selection will take place the end of June and you must be present.

The El Dorado County Grand Jury generally meets two or more times per month to conduct its regular business. In addition to the monthly business meeting, members frequently meet in committee meetings to study particular concerns and problems.

Meetings are compensated at the maximum rate of $15 per day of meeting, plus a mileage expense is compensated at the rate payable to employees of El Dorado County for each mile actually and necessarily traveled for purposes of said sessions or committee work. No other compensation is provided.

Qualified citizens who have an interest in this unique type of service may pick up an application form at the Superior Court, 495 Main St., Placerville. The application is also available online at www.edcgov.us/grandjury. You can also call (530) 621.6451 and request an application/questionnaire to be mailed to you. May 21 is the deadline for submitting your application.