Nevada trying to stretch its tourism dollars

The Nevada Commission on Tourism is updating its strategic plan for attracting visitors by combining cost-effective new initiatives and time-tested programs with proven track records.

Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki, NCOT chair, said the agency will target U.S. consumer markets that have large populations with convenient driving distance or easy air access to Nevada and international markets whose travelers have a strong likelihood of visiting Nevada, such as Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom and Germany.



Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course in Stateline is better known as a destination in the summer. Photo/Kathryn Reed

"In the current national economic climate, many people are still traveling, but spending less and staying closer to home," Krolicki said in a press release. "Visitor numbers are down, but Nevada is well-positioned as a centrally located,

easily accessed western destination where travelers experience unique entertainment and attractions and where dollars still go a long way.”

The plan, which extends through fiscal year 2011, was presented to the commission at its regular meeting in March.

The plan is online here.

It calls for:

• Expanding the promotion of meetings and conventions, weddings and honeymoons, and Nevada’s parks and museums;

• Expanding Web content to appeal to additional niche markets, such as travelers seeking pet-friendly accommodations, and conducting media campaigns for diverse markets, including Asian Americans and Latino Americans;

• Working with Nevada’s tourism “territories” to develop sales blitz programs for increasing overnight stays in rural communities.

“Many of our tourism initiatives will emphasize the rural Nevada experience, such as branding the state as a ‘free-spirited’ destination that offers new attractions and Old West cultural heritage and satisfies visitors’ yearnings for an educational, yet relaxing vacation that delivers great value,” NCOT Director Dann Lewis said.

NCOT, which promotes tourism for the entire state, is funded by three-eighths of 1 percent of the hotel-motel room tax that visitors pay. The agency’s operating budget was cut 41.1 percent from nearly $18 million in fiscal year 2008 to $10.5 million this year.

Grego adamant taxpayers should pay his legal bill

By Kathryn Reed

A $937.50 check to South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Bruce Grego signed by the city manager and city treasurer is not sitting well with Grego's colleagues. How it got approved is unknown. Other council members have said it will be a topic of conversation at Tuesday's meeting even though it is not on the agenda.

(The council meeting starts an hour earlier than normal – 8am – at Lake Tahoe Airport with discussion about how to replace outgoing City Manager Dave Jinkens.)

The check to Grego is for expenses he incurred last year when he was seeking an opinion from the Fair Political Practices Commission as to whether he had a conflict of interest regarding the convention center project or what is generically called Redevelopment Area No. 3.



Bruce Grego

Normally the city attorney reviews potential conflicts. If an FPPC ruling is sought, it's the city attorney who writes the letter, not outside counsel. Grego enlisted Dennis Crabb of Rollston, Henderson, Crabb & Johnson, Ltd. in South Lake Tahoe to help in his quest. He, not the city, hired Crabb to work with the FPPC to determine if having Lakeside Park Association

as a client would be a conflict.

The FPPC said there is no conflict, which has allowed Grego to vote on convention center issues.

Crabb on May 6, 2009, billed Grego $937.50 for 3.75 hours of work. The city wrote a check dated March 11, 2010, as reimbursement to Grego for that amount.

Grego said he submitted the invoice at least six months ago. Why the delay in payment is not known. A copy of the invoice was not available Friday because city offices were on furlough.

However, Grego really tried to get paid last summer, according to an exchange of emails. At that time he was denied reimbursement. Why there is a reversal of opinion is not known.

A memo to Grego from then City Attorney, now Assistant City Attorney, Jacqueline Mittelstadt dated Aug. 20, 2009, says, "Given that the South Lake Tahoe City Code does not authorize a single council member to hire outside counsel, nor allows the City Manager or City Attorney to retroactively hire legal counsel, I replied with the attached memoranda dated July 27, 2009 to Mr. Jinkens. As you can see, I recommended that this invoice be discussed with the City Council Finance Committee so that, if there were an appetite for Council approval of the fees, the matter could plausibly be taken as a consent item. As you can see from the note on the Memo, Mr. Jinkens replied 'My question is would reimbursement be legal?' The response is unfortunately, no. The City Code and the purchasing regulations do not appear to allow a retroactive payment for legal fees incurred by a single council member. It would require City Council consensus to return the item to the Council for approval in order to reimburse you for these fees. I did vet the issue with the finance committee and they did not feel they could approve the fees either. Full council

consensus and subsequent action would be required. Please let myself or Mr. Jinkens know if you would like this matter to be placed on the Council agenda."

The finance committee is Councilmen Hal Cole and Jerry Birdwell.

"When I was mayor, Bruce came to me with this bill. I told him that individual council members do not have the authority to spend city money without the consent of the City Council. The City Council did not approve this expenditure," Birdwell said. "What makes this worse is that Bruce went behind the council's back to get the city to pay it anyway."

Birdwell believes Grego must pay the money back to the city.

"To vote is paramount to what we do on the council. I think it was appropriate. It was a moderate charge," Grego said of the bill. "I think it should be addressed as a public expense and not a personal expense. Because this matter directly dealt with my ability to vote, that is a legitimate claim for reimbursement."

When Grego spoke with *Lake Tahoe News* on Friday he said Cole's letter to the FPPC was written by outside counsel, with expenses paid directly to the city.

"If I need legal advice, that's what my city attorney is for. I would not seek outside counsel," Cole told LTN. "If I did that, it would be my expense. If (the city) hired someone else, I didn't know it."

Jinkens is out of town. In an email he said, "I am having checked some background information in response to your voice message and will respond when I receive it. I am out of town but will reply this weekend."

He was advised a story would be published Saturday. No response was forthcoming. Therefore it is not known if outside

legal counsel was ever really sought in Cole's case, and if it were, what the fee was and to whom it was paid.

(The FPPC ruled Cole couldn't vote on Project 2 because he owns property too close to the proposed project.)

A series of emails dated March 1, 2010, involving Jinkens, his assistant Tina Shannon, Redevelopment Director Gene Palazzo and City Attorney Patrick Enright ultimately authorize the March 2010 check to Grego to be written. Enright did not return a phone call Friday.

"Please have a check processed to reimburse Councilmember Grego in the above amount from the New Plan Area Account" is handwritten by Palazzo on a printed email to him from Shannon.

The email in part from Shannon says, "Dave (Jinkens) told me to process the payment and expense to RDA, as was done with Mr. Cole's opinion."

This would indicate the money being used is from Redevelopment Area No. 2, which the city will vote on Tuesday. With city offices being closed, it's not known how or why the money is from that account.

"You raise a good question 'Why wasn't it billed to the City Attorney's Office?'," Mayor Kathay Lovell said. "The city attorney can seek another opinion. They often do that if they don't have the expertise or it's a time issue."

Neither Lovell nor Cole was aware of the Grego reimbursement until *Lake Tahoe News* telephoned. Birdwell was not issued a copy of the warrants with his April 6 agenda packet. Councilman Bill Crawford was the only council member besides Grego who knew about the issue.

"It looks to me that Mr. Grego and perhaps the city manager's behavior is ethically questionable," Crawford said. "Mr. Crabb sent the bill to Mr. Grego. That was his client, not the city,

so I don’t think it’s correct to reimburse Mr. Grego under those circumstances.”

Grego said Crabb did not want to bill the city. Grego didn’t have an explanation for why the former South Lake Tahoe city attorney would make that decision. Crabb did not return a phone call Friday.

Grego started the whole process with now former City Attorney Cathy DiCamillo, who no longer lives in the city. He said he didn’t like her draft letter to the FPPC. He said he didn’t want to wait for her to return from vacation to craft a final version because the vote on the Mello-Roos bonds regarding the convention center was going to be up for a vote.

But the reality is the vote was June 4. This was after DiCamillo had retired. Mittelstadt and Enright occupied her office June 1.

“It’s definitely money well spent. The benefit of my actions are the benefit of the public,” Grego said. “I voted to stop the issuance of $25 million of bonds. My vote did matter.”

The vote was 5-0.

When Grego was asked how he could keep voting against funding most of the training/education requests from city staff to do their job, he said those moderate charges are different.

“This is something that went to the foundation of why I ran for office and the issues regarding the hole and trying to find a solution,” Grego said as to why he believes taxpayers should pay for outside legal advice that is usually handled in house.

Honoring fallen soldiers at Sierra-at-Tahoe

Families of soldiers from El Dorado County who have died in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts will congregate at Sierra-at-Tahoe on April 10 at noon.

The Gold Star Parent ceremony will be at the top of Grandview.

Last year a plaque was put up on a large boulder overlooking Lake Tahoe to honor Tim Smith, the South Lake Tahoe soldier who died in Iraq. This month's ceremony will be by that plaque.

Mike Shreve is helping spearhead the project. He said he is doing it to "help our community heal."

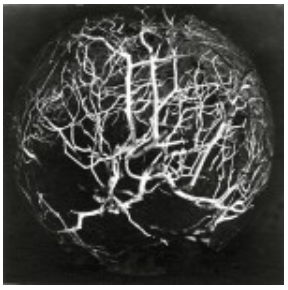
Non-skiers will be issued a lift voucher for free from Sierra. Lift access starts at noon. Everyone must download by 3pm.

LTCC student returns with photo exhibit

Roger Walker started taking photography classes at Lake Tahoe Community College about three months after he retired from Albertson's grocery store. It was something he always wanted to do, but never had the time.

In 2008, his photographic entry "Corn Lily Suite" took best in show at the college's annual student art exhibition. This month Walker will bring a new body of work to the college's Foyer Gallery.

One interesting aspect of this exhibition is that all of the photographs were created with a plastic camera.



Roger Walker's photos will be on display at LTCC.
Photo/Provided

“The inspiration for this body of work was based on a desire to explore a new territory of image-making,” Walker said in a press release.

He learned about the Diana+ plastic camera from a fellow photographer. Without the usual optic lenses the images from the plastic camera are less controlled. Walker also used a plastic fisheye lens.

“Conceptually, my objective was to create a series of photographs that present a new perspective of familiar and not-so-familiar images,” Walker explained.

The exhibit titled, Roger Walker, “A Plastic Perspective,” will be on display in the Foyer Gallery April 10 through June 19. There will be an opening reception April 15 from 6-8pm. It is free and open to the public.

Bijou School thanks community

To the community,

Besides having a wonderful, hardworking staff with teachers who put in endless hours making school a wonderful place for its students, Bijou Community School has seen the generosity of many community organizations this year.

We just wanted to take a bit of time to thank all the different groups who have contributed to Bijou this year. Where do we start? Well, this past fall, we received grants from Barton Health Foundation for the prizes for our walk-a-thon along with playground equipment for every classroom. Shortly thereafter, El Dorado Community Foundation stepped up to support our library, a character education curriculum, supply costs, and books for our Two-Way Immersion Program.

Bijou also received donations from Big George Ventures, Rotary Club of South Lake Tahoe, Heavenly, and our own PTA for the conversion of our dirt play area into a grassy field [that will occur this spring].

Lake Tahoe Educational Foundation also contributed by funding the 10 after school clubs we started with the help of dedicated parent volunteers. Bijou Community School was also supported by local restaurants including Chevy’s and Ernie’s Coffee Shop which held fundraisers for us.

And the list continues … Heavenly Mountain Resort through its Echo grants gave contributions to the Two-Way Immersion Program as did the Serendipity Fund and Foresight Fund of the Parasol Tahoe Community Foundation.

Lastly, the Rotary Club of South Lake Tahoe has also reserved its entire volunteer day for our school … they will be making improvements and helping clean up our school on April 24.

In times like these, it is truly amazing to see so many organizations working so hard to contribute to our local children. We really cannot find the words to express my gratitude. We sincerely appreciate the time and effort so many people are putting towards our children, our families, our staff, and our school.

Thank you!

Kathy Haven

Tahoe bears foraging for food early this year

By Barbara Barte Osborn, Sacramento Bee

The Lake Tahoe-area bears are up early, and they're ravenous.

"They feel the warmth and come out of their dens, but there's no natural food for them yet," said Ann Bryant, executive director of the BEAR League, a Tahoe-area group that educates residents on coexisting with bears.

"The grasses, herbs and roots they like are still covered with snow, and there will be more storms," she said. "So they're looking for garbage, pet food and bird food – those are the biggest lures – and empty cabins with food in them."

Read the whole story

Earmarks divide California lawmakers

By Rob Hotakainen, McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON – In Elk Grove, the local congressman is not backing the city's request for $250,000 in federal money for a new teen resource center, one of the city's top local projects.

That's because Republican Rep. Dan Lungren of Gold River, who represents the city of Elk Grove, doesn't support earmarks, the money used to pay for special pet projects back home.



Rep. Tom McClintock

In Calistoga, the local congressman is trying to get Congress to approve $2 million for a new building that would house both a teen center and an art center.

Read the whole story

Training for hospitality workers

For any business, getting a customer through the door is important. Getting that same customer to return again is essential.

To address these concerns and provide those in the South Shore hospitality industry with customer service training tools tailored for Tahoe, the Leadership Lake Tahoe class is offering “Ask Me’’ concierge training.

Training will be April 13 from 9-11am at the South Shore Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce office, 169 Highway 50, Stateline. Cost is $20 for chamber members and $30 for non-members.

To sign up, call (775) 588.1728.

Sierra-at-Tahoe sets closing date



Sierra-at-Tahoe is closing April 18. With the forecast for the next 16 days, it’s possible there will be more powder days than groomers.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

• David Kelly of South Lake Tahoe, the ultimate advocate for people with disabilities, is celebrating that his bladder cancer is in remission.



David Kelly

• The California Department of Education selected the El Dorado County Office of Education's School Attendance Review Board as a model program for its dropout prevention efforts. This is the first year a county office of education was recognized by the board for its dropout prevention efforts.

• Two hundred forty acres on a ridge above Donner Lake near Interstate 80 may be preserved if the town of Truckee, Truckee Donner Land Trust and Tahoe Donner Association can come to an agreement.

• Lake Tahoe students came away with several awards during the 43rd annual Western Nevada Regional Science and Engineering Fair at UNR. Mata Rodolfo, grade seven at Whittell High in Zephyr Cove, placed third for "Soil". Zephyr Cove Elementary's Samantha Forvilly and Gigi Stetler earned a fourth in the fifth-grade team category for "The Bacteria Among Us," while Skye Kidd, Kate Krolicki and Kenya Maltase received fourth place in the sixth-grade team category for "Ski and Snowboard Speed". Lake Tahoe School second-grader Ingrid Altunin took

third place with her exhibit “Tanning of Leaves,” while the Incline Village school’s Thyra Altunin won first place for fifth-graders with “Playing Dice with Mozart”.

• Tahoe Grizzlies will compete in the junior hockey California Championships April 9-11 in San Jose. The skaters are age 10 and younger.