EDC reviewing charter after grand jury criticism

By Cathy Locke, Sacramenton Bee

A committee appointed to review El Dorado County's charter has joined the 2008-09 grand jury in recommending a November ballot measure calling for the document's repeal.

Following a brief discussion Tuesday, the Board of Supervisors scheduled a workshop on the committee's recommendations for 9am March 15.

Read the whole story

Nevada Small Farm Conference

Western Nevada College Specialty Crop Institute hosts the Nevada Small Farm Conference March 12-13 at the Fallon campus and Fallon Convention Center. Cost is $75 for both days. There is a $20 late fee for registrations after March 2. Lunch is included.

The event's featured speaker is author Vance Corum, who brings more than 30 years experience as a marketing consultant, researcher, and lecturer. He is considered a pioneer in the farmers market industry, helping communities establish farmers markets since 1979. Corum is co-author of the book "The New Farmers Market, Farm-Fresh Ideas for Producers, Managers & Communities."

The goal of the two-day conference is to encourage the success and viability of small farm operations through educational

workshops, round table discussions, and networking opportunities. Three conference tracks include sessions on business planning, direct-marketing beef, hoop house production, egg and poultry production, sales and marketing, and more.

Lattin Farms in Fallon hosts a Friday-night wine mixer as part of the event. The mixer will include Nevada wines, beef, and produce, along with light entertainment. Cost is $25.

The conference is a collaboration of several Nevada agricultural organizations that realize the growth potential for the state's small farm industry. The organizations include: Western Nevada College; Nevada Department of Agriculture; University of Nevada Cooperative Extension and College of Agriculture, Biotechnology and Natural Resources; Nevada Farm Service Agency; Nevada Natural Resources Conservation Service and USDA Rural Development.

To register or for more information, contact Ann Louhela, (775) 351.2551, or visit www.wnc.edu/sci.

Lake Tahoe ski report, Feb. 10



Bring out the sunscreen – it's going to be one those blue bird days on the slopes of Lake Tahoe. Here is the ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

Great Basin Brass Band

The Carson Valley Arts Council will host the Great Basin Brass Band in concert on Feb. 12 at 7pm at the C.V.I.C. Hall, 1601 Esmeralda in Minden.

Admission is $17 for CVAC members and $20 for nonmembers. A no host bar will be available after the doors open at 6pm.

The Great Basin Brass has been entertaining Northern Nevada for the past 30 years and consists of two trumpets, one French horn, a trombone, and a tuba.

Paul Lenz (trumpet), John Lenz (French horn), Larry M. Engstrom (trumpet), Leonard Neidhold (trombone), and Russ Dickman (tuba) have played together for the majority of their career. The five are members of the Reno Philharmonic Orchestra and have performed in several venues ranging from High Camp at Squaw Valley to Nightingale Hall at UNR on their own.

Purchase your tickets online at www.cvartscouncil.com or at the Copeland Cultural Arts Center, 1572 Highway 395 in Minden. For questions or concerns, call the Carson Valley Arts Center at (775) 782.2532. Tickets will also be available at the door.

Fallen Leaf Lake concessionaire out after 14 years

By Susan Wood

With the Fallen Leaf Lake district board awarding its general store to a new concessionaire after months of fighting with some community members, the results provided two pictures of the aftermath as different as the scenery from season to season.

Rick Firkins of All Star Catering of Albuquerque, N.M., who lives part time in Christmas Valley, said Tuesday he was excited about the prospect of the new venture at the lake where he's fished for years. He called the place â€œunderutilizedâ€ and pledged to expand the cafe menu and grocery inventory.



Ruth and John Rich

The Fallen Leaf Lake Community Services District decided Saturday in a 3-1 vote to hand over the operation to Firkins under the supervision of the board and staff General Manager Tom Barnes after expressing months of distrust in Fallen Leaf Landing's accounting practices and disagreeing over what it would pay in rent. New board member Jennifer Thornton dissented.

Former President Dana Clark had resigned a few weeks earlier, capping off a tumultuous time for the quiet mountain village outside South Lake Tahoe at the base of the Desolation Wilderness.

And come August, the issue may be far from over as the divided community heads toward an election to fill a seat on the five-member panel. It may decide March 6 whether to place the open

seat on the Aug. 31 ballot.

Firkins admitted to walking into a hornet's nest that has divided the community, but looks forward to working with the board, which had outlined a contract and expectation of $134,000 to operate the district in the 2010 season. The board failed to get agreement from Fallen Leaf Landing on at least $101,000 in rent to run the store and marina.

Even though the contract highlights the marina operation, Firkins said he plans to focus on the store and cafe.

Terms of the five-year contract include the district receiving a minimum rent of $75,000 a year and a security deposit of $25,000, along with 10 percent of store, marina and boat-rental fees in addition to 65 percent of mooring revenue.

"I appreciate being considered. There had to be a problem or I wouldn't have been considered," Firkins said. "I told them it should have been done sooner."

On the other end, John Rich of Fallen Leaf Landing said he wants to focus more on his family but remains angry at a "few people in the community with an agenda." He expressed much disappointment in having years of experience and months of wrangling over a contract with the board come to such an abrupt end.

The longtime Fallen Leaf Lake residents were ousted after 14 years when contract negotiations reached an impasse, despite numerous letters against and legal threats aimed at the board when it explored taking over the operation. Ruth Rich told *Lake Tahoe News* she wished to thank all the customers and members of the community who supported her family so ardently.

"We've had a long track record of serving this community very well. I don't think (the board's) concerns were valid," John Rich said, citing the district insisting on open access to the revenue and expenses of his dual operation. "Expense access is

not conventional."

But board President Mike Kraft disagreed.

"The district has to know the value of its asset," Kraft said. "In order to properly operate, the district needs to accrue $126,000 minimum."

After balancing assets and liabilities, the district reported $744.41 in its general fund as of Jan. 31.

"Given the options the board was presented with, we felt we had no option than to go with the plan we went with," Kraft said.

On the contrary, resident Debra Barnes took issue with what she perceived as "the board's inept decision-making that has outraged the community," she told *Lake Tahoe News*.

"The residents are shocked and appalled at the Community Services District vote and decision to hire a concessionaire that has no experience running a retail store and marina. This caterer did not participate in the (request for proposal) process and did not submit a bid within the RFP deadline," Barnes said.

Firkins made a presentation to the board on Saturday. It is not known who invited him to do so.

"I expect that voters of Fallen Leaf will pursue every available option to them to return the governance of the Fallen Leaf community to a majority vote of reasonable minds. Jennifer Hall Thornton's swearing in last month was a step in that direction, but more needs to be done and I expect will be," Barnes added.

Lake Tahoe News inquiries went unanswered from Betsy Wheeler, who came armed at one recent meeting with a petition legally challenging the board's last proposed ousting of Fallen Leaf Landing.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



Car wash in South Tahoe is not open.

â€¢ One of two drive-through car washes in South Lake Tahoe has what looks to be yellow crime tape keeping people off the property. But no crime has occurred. City officials havenâ€™t heard a word from the operators nor did they have a contact number for the business.

â€¢ Melody Rebbeck has joined the Tahoe Maritime Museum in Homewood as exhibits and marketing associate.

â€¢ Longtime manager of Raleyâ€™s at the Y in South Lake Tahoe Bob Lear is now running the Carson City store. Seth McGrath took Learâ€™s place.

â€¢ NV Energy Inc. (locally known as Sierra Pacific Power) needs a CFO. Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer William D. Rogers resigned this month.

â€¢ The Food Bank of Northern Nevada, which helps those in need on both sides of the South Shore, was one of 26 to receive the national Victory Against Hunger Award. The honor is for its efforts to end hunger, and improve nutrition and health.

â€¢ Kohlâ€™s Department Stores Inc. bought the former Mervynâ€™s location in Carson City for $4 million. Mervynâ€™s closed in 2008. Kohlâ€™s could open this year.

St. Theresa School fending off rumors of its demise

Danette Winslow was making the rounds Tuesday to quash the rumor her school is closing.

The principal of St. Theresa Catholic School in South Lake Tahoe told the City Council and Lake Tahoe Unified School District board the K-8 school is staying open. She has also been to talking to other groups to quiet the gossip mill.



Danette Winslow

“The goal is to keep the school open for many years to come,” she told the LTUSD board.

SLT gets rid of firm that handled Poland, Mittelstadt

By Kathryn Reed

The law firm that handled the Johnny Poland and Jacqueline Mittelstadt cases for South Lake Tahoe no longer has a contract with the city.

Normally items on the consent agenda are a slam dunk for approval. Not so in this particular case.

On Tuesday, the South Lake Tahoe City Council voted 5-0 to deny City Attorney Patrick Enright's recommendation to "authorize city manager to execute agreement for special services" with Liebert Cassidy & Whitmore.

The issue was supposed to come to the council last summer, but that was just after Enright and Mittelstadt were hired and in the early discussions of the expense of outside counsel. The president and managing partner for Liebert Cassidy & Whitmore signed the agreement July 3, 2009.

The city and law firm had been operating under an agreement from 2007. The firm, which has offices in San Francisco, Fresno and Los Angeles, had been brought in to handle labor negotiations. In the past, city personnel led by the city manager was responsible for negotiating with the various bargaining units.

Councilman Jerry Birdwell was the first to speak against retaining the group that specializes in employment labor law.

He called the firm's representation "detrimental" and expensive for the city.

An attorney for the firm unsuccessfully argued in court for Poland to not be reinstated to the South Lake Tahoe Police Department. The veteran officer returned to work this year. More than $120,000 was paid to the firm to handle the Poland matter.

Councilman Bill Crawford accused one of the partners in the law firm of not being prepared when he tried to convince the council why Mittelstadt should be bounced from her job as city attorney.

The council in closed session reversed course and kept Mittelstadt employed, but demoted her to assistant city attorney.

"I would never employ them again," Crawford said of the firm.

Attorney fees for Liebert Cassidy & Whitmore ranged from $160-$290 an hour, with paraprofessional staff commanding $110-$130 per hour.

Although the firm has not raised it rates since 2007, Birdwell commented that in this economy fees should be coming down.

The law group also charges 15 cents per copy – which can add up in a business that is wordy and redundant in its writing.

"I don't want to re-up on an agency I was not happy with," Councilman Hal Cole said.

He was the first to suggest the city go out for request for proposals to allow other firms to compete for the city's business.

Gene Harter, representing Public Employees Union Local 1, said it was time the city brought some of the work in-house.

Hiring two city attorneys last June was supposed to reduce the expense of outside counsel.

With the 5-0 vote by the council, it was included that an RFP would be sought; with the realization the two city attorneys can’t do all the work this law firm specializes in.

Also at the meeting, but with no discussion, the council approved the annual litigation report. Click on report for the details.

Distinguished LTCC alumni sought

Lake Tahoe Community College Foundation is seeking nominations for its Distinguished Alumni Award.

This award will be based on the person’s exemplary achievement in his or her particular endeavor in life,

which encompasses academic, business and professional and civic activities.

The deadline to make a nomination is March 1.

Click application to get started.

Skier drink special at Lakeside Inn

Lakeside Inn and Casino in Stateline is offering a free drink to skiers between 4-7pm every day. Flash a season pass, lift ticket, or mountain employee ID from any resort to get a drink toke.