Tennis in Tahoe a challenge because of courts

By Kathryn Reed

Tennis is mostly a seasonal sport at Lake Tahoe because the lone indoor court is at Ridge Tahoe, which requires owning a time share there or being a guest to use that court at the top of Kingsbury Grade.

But the lack of indoor courts isn't because of lack of interest. Depending on the time and location it can be hard to get a court in Tahoe. Part of this has to do with the number of and access to public courts. So many of the courts are in subdivisions – like Tahoe Keys in South Lake Tahoe and Tahoe Donner in Truckee.

Once upon a time the long-term facilities' map for Lake Tahoe Community College called for covered courts. Lake Tahoe Unified School District has talked about covering courts, as has Douglas County Parks and Recreation Department.



Sheryl Herschman plays on a USTA team at Zephyr Cove. Photo Copyright 2013 Carolyn E. Wright

Funding is the main hold up.

As the South Lake Tahoe-El Dorado County Recreation Facilities Master Plan comes together, tennis will be part of the discussion. What that will look like remains to be seen, but there will be opportunities for the public to voice its opinion.

When expanding and improving facilities and offerings are talked about, the idea of bringing in tournaments and groups from outside the area are always at the top of the list for why to do something.

When MontBleu casino in Stateline was Caesars Tahoe eons ago, professional tennis was played there on occasion.

In summer 2008, Incline Village Tennis Center was the site of an exhibition match between Justin Gimelstob, who was once in the top 50, and Paul Goldstein, a Stanford graduate once ranked No. 40.

Zephyr Cove's six courts, which are owned by Douglas County, are home to an annual tournament as well as four USTA teams this season. Tahoe Donner has USTA teams and tournaments, too.

Granlibakken in Tahoe City and Northstar in Truckee (the courts there are run by the homeowners association, not Vail Resorts) are private, but offer clinics to people not staying at the resorts.

Carel James, who divides her time between Florida and Lake Tahoe, said of Florida, "Many residential developments have tennis courts on the premises and will participate in league play, allowing other players from outside the development the opportunity to pay a fee to join their private courts. Being a part-time resident in Tahoe for the past eight years, I have seen a growing interest in tennis almost rivaling winter sports."

Public courts in the basin

The Tahoe Paradise courts are open to the public. Two of the three are playable and were resurfaced in the last few years.

“The courts are available on a first come, first serve basis at no cost. Generally speaking the courts are unlocked. The only time they may be locked is if there is a wedding ceremony being held,” El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago told *Lake Tahoe News*.

“The two courts are in great shape and usually empty. As far as I know, the only option for me to play in this town is on those two courts,” Brenda Stewart of South Lake Tahoe said of Tahoe Paradise. “(South Tahoe) Middle School is a terrifying/dangerous, crack-filled nightmare. I’m locked out of the Keys and I still can’t figure out how to play at the high school.”

The use of the six taxpayer-funded courts at South Tahoe High School is not easy to understand. Instead of going out for bid, the district has historically allowed the school’s tennis coach to use the courts for his personal use in the off-season.

Superintendent Jim Tarwater told *Lake Tahoe News*, “What we usually do is work out where the money goes. (Coach Justin Clark is not paying a set fee) because it’s too volatile. We identify each year what we want to replace. This year it was windscreens. The district will pay for repaving.”

Tarwater said he has looked at Clark’s books and the most he’s made in a summer is about $4,000.

“This is not a profit thing. That is not legal to do,” Tarwater said.

Clark told *Lake Tahoe News*, “If I break even every summer or pay myself a little, then I am happy. Also, I employ six kids for summer jobs and provide usually four scholarships to the tennis academy needy kids and about four work/play

opportunities where the kids work and get free tennis. After all that, there is enough to pay me little.“

Without a formal process in which someone can make money off public facilities, this becomes a gift of public funds.

This email was sent to Tarwater by *LTN*, “With Justin using so much court time for his private Tahoe Tennis Academy that makes good money and the district not making a dime from it, how does the district justify a private business that didn’t have to go through and RFP process making money off public courts?”

There was no reply.

The academy has between 10 and 50 players in it each week, according to Clark.

This is the 2013 STHS court time-fee schedule that was provided by Clark. Clark wants people to reserve a court 48 hours in advance online. But the district hasn’t set up the online scheduling platform.

“The online public facilities use scheduling portion of the software has not yet been tested. We are still building the final fee schedules/pieces in the software and hope to test in a controlled environment this summer,” LTUSD CFO Deb Yates told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We most likely will roll the software out to the school sites first, then determine when it will be ready for the live public.”

If Clark or one of his designees is not at the courts, the public is shut out because the courts are locked.

Douglas County puts out a request for proposal for a licensed tennis professional to run the six courts at Zephyr Cove. Rob Wheatley is in the middle of a multi-year contract that calls for him to pay the county a flat fee each year.



Suzy Allione serves during a match at Zephyr Cove. Photo Copyright 2013 Carolyn E. Wright

There was a time when the county took a percentage of gross receipts, but the time and paperwork involved made it not cost-effective.

Scott Morgan, who runs the county's parks department, said the courts are now self-supporting. About $20,000 will be spent this summer to repair cracks.

If a player is not a member of the Zephyr Cove Tennis Club, then she is supposed to pay $5 each time she steps on the court. The highest seasonal membership fee is $70 for non-Nevada residents who aren't kids or seniors. The county approves all the fees Wheatley charges.

When Wheatley is not there, the courts are open and free to anyone, according to Morgan.

"In his contract he has to do a free youth clinic to grow the game," Morgan told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Other public courts around the Lake Tahoe area include:

• The Incline Village Tennis Center is part of the Incline Village General Improvement District. The 11 courts have a fee based on time of day and whether the player is an IVGID member. Reservations are encouraged. There are four pros on

staff.

• Two at the top of the tram at Squaw Valley. They are free to play on with the purchase of a tram ticket.

• Two courts at Kilner Park near Sunnyside. No fee, no reservations needed. The Tahoe City Public Utility District runs them.

• Four courts at North Tahoe High School are also run by TCPUD.

Wyland to visit S. Tahoe gallery

Environmental artist Robert Wyland, who is better known just by his last name, will be at his South Lake Tahoe outlet June 28-29.

Wyland Galleries expand across the United States, from Hawaii to Florida.

His Tahoe visit is the only Northern California appearances.

These appearances coincides with his 35th anniversary as a professional artist and the 20th anniversary of the Wyland Foundation, which uses art and science education to inspire kids to be interested in ecology and water conservation.

Wyland will be at the Tahoe store June 28 from 5-9pm and June 29 from 3-7pm. The gallery is at 4000 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South

Lake Tahoe.

Opinion: LTUSD tennis policy cheats taxpayers

By Kathryn Reed

I’m usually a supporter of user fees even when I’ve already paid for “the thing that is being used” through some sort of other tax.

That is why I am not up in arms about the thought of paying for parking at Cove East or Lakeview Commons – the two areas in South Lake Tahoe I will frequent most that will have meters.

(I’m still a firm believer a flat annual or seasonal fee of some sort for all city parking areas should be available. This could be similar to what the U.S. Forest Service does with its beach parking permits.)

That is also why I don’t have a problem paying $5 for a tennis court at Zephyr Cove. I don’t even pay taxes in that county, so this is a sweet deal. I could also pay a flat fee of $70/season for unlimited access to those six courts.



Kathryn Reed has an easier time finding a public court out-of-state than in S. Lake Tahoe. Photo Copyright 2013 Carolyn E. Wright

Douglas County has a guy operating the facility. What the county takes in is put in a separate pot for repairs to the facility. And Rob Wheatley, who was awarded the bid to be concessionaire there, has to sweep the courts of pollen, make sure the nets are not sagging and gets the pine needles off the courts. That's why I don't have a problem paying $5 – the county has funds for big-ticket items, and the tennis pro can make a living and does the day-to-day stuff.

But what has me seeing green fuzz and wanting to treat LTUSD officials and their affiliates like a line judge in a Serena Williams match is what is going on at South Tahoe High School.

This summer it's $7 for no more than 90 minutes of playing time. The courts aren't even open until 1pm on Sundays.

Justin Clark, the guy making money off the public courts who has a handshake deal with the school district to give back some of his cash for improvements, says get a court time using the district's online service. District staff says it's not ready.

I say the whole thing is all a bunch of manure.

When I pay my twice-annual property taxes I am paying for

three Lake Tahoe Unified School District bond measures. The newest one is for the $64.5 million facilities bond. Part of that bond included the resurfacing of the six high school courts.

Those courts are closed more than they are open to the public.

I grew up playing on public courts in the Bay Area. Much of the time I was playing on the high school courts – long before I was a student there. There were no locks. And yes, some skateboarders went on the courts.

That is the refrain LTUSD Superintendent Jim Tarwater chants on a regular basis as to why he doesn't want the courts open all the time – fear of skateboarders mucking up the courts.

Those are public courts. It's time to let the public in. If there has to be a fee, make it reasonable, have a fair process so it's not just the high school tennis coach who has a chance to make money on the courts, and if he can't be there, then unlock the courts.

Or maybe it's just time to shop for bolt cutters.

Barton Auxiliary gives $14,500 in scholarships

The Barton Memorial Hospital Auxiliary recognized 13 students during the annual scholarship luncheon this month at Tep's Villa Roma.

Scholarships of $1,500 were given to the following students who will pursue an education in health care and attend a university in the fall:

Douglas High School: Kaelin Mejia and Kendra Wynar.

South Tahoe High School: Melanie Grady and Christy Walowit.

Whittell High School: Garrett Bronken and Colette Craig.

Lake Tahoe Community College: Sunshine Campbell and Morgan Leilani.

Additional scholarships of $500 were awarded to graduating Mount Tallac High School students who are continuing their education at Lake Tahoe Community College or a trade school: Ashley Hernandez, Omar Gonzalez, Dulce Antonio, Clark Cabristante and Jaron Fields.

Ehrman Mansion looking for volunteers

The California State Parks and the Sierra State Parks Foundation are hosting Living History Day at Pine Lodge, also known as the Ehrman Mansion, July 27 from 10am-3pm.

Living history activities will include tours, a children's activity zone, an antique car show and a wooden boats display. Refreshments will be available for purchase.

All events are free, though there is a $10 parking fee.

Organizers of the event are looking for members of the community to help put on this annual living history day presentation. People of all ages are needed to wear costumes and play roles of the Ehrman family members, guests and employees. Helpers are also needed for the children's zone that will include crafts, games, and activities.

Volunteers are needed to serve as greeters, parking attendants, facilities assistants, boathouse docents, crafters and raffle assistants. Volunteers may contact Heidi Doyle at (530) 583.9911 for additional information.

Volunteer orientation is either July 15 or July 23 at 4:30pm at the Sugar Pine Point State Park Nature Center.

Partial ruling favors TRPA in Regional Plan lawsuit

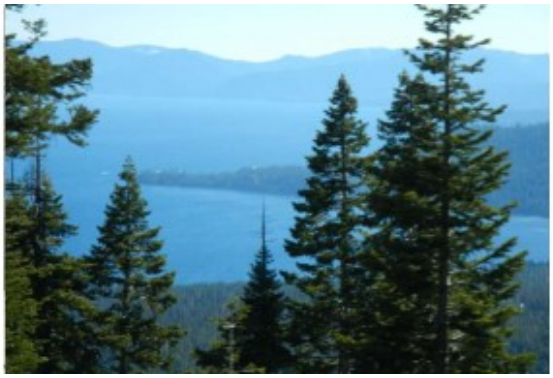
By Kathryn Reed

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency on Monday won a partial decision in federal court when the judge dismissed some of the claims against the bi-state regulatory agency.

“The litigation is still pending, but this answers a lot of questions TRPA raised at the start,” TRPA spokesman Jeff Cowen told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The Sierra Club and Friends of the West Shore filed a lawsuit in February in U.S. District Court in Sacramento to stop the TRPA’s Regional Plan that was approved in December from taking effect in its entirety.

Neither of those groups was immediately available for comment June 17.



A federal judge is handing out the ruling on the TRPA Regional Plan update lawsuit piece-by-piece. Photo/LTN

Judge John A. Mendez said the Regional Plan update does not violate California law by allowing local jurisdictions to have more authority. This was one of the items in the lawsuit.

Plaintiffs, not taxpayers, are to bear the expense of litigation. Mendez upheld that stipulation, too, which has existed since 2010 when the Rules of Procedures was amended.

“The only new rules not in effect are the land coverage credits and exemptions which are on hold waiting for parallel approval of the Lake Tahoe Water Quality Management (208) Plan by the U.S. EPA, which is expected to be considered by the end of this month,” Cowen said. “TRPA is expecting to be able to process applications with the new coverage rules this summer and we are working closely with local jurisdictions to develop their area plans.”

Area plans have replaced community plans in the TRPA paperwork world. Douglas County is expected to approve the first area plan in the basin at its June 20 meeting in Stateline. South Lake Tahoe is having a special meeting in July to discuss its plan for what is being called the tourist core.

It is not known how future rulings by the judge could impact an area plan that the TRPA Governing Board approves.

Further litigation is always possible when it comes to specific projects in an area plan.

USFS to apply herbicides on invasive plants in Tahoe

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit will continue a project to eradicate, control, and contain known and future infestations of invasive weeds using chemical treatment.

Work will occur June 24-28.

An environmental assessment released by the Forest Service in 2010 identified 493 known infestations located on National Forest System lands managed by the LTBMU.

Current project areas include 64 Acres Beach parking lot (Tahoe City), Angora burn area, Baldwin Beach meadow, near Big Meadow Trailhead (FS Road 1213), Brockway Summit, Slaughterhouse Meadow, west shore of Fallen Leaf Lake, Heavenly Creek Meadow, Heavenly Mountain Resort, Rabe Meadow, Pope Beach parking lot, Spooner Summit area, Tahoe City area, and the Tallac historic estates.

In addition, weed infestations on Forest Service urban lots will be treated in the vicinity of Ralph Drive, Terry Lane, Ski Run Boulevard, and Mt. Rainier Drive in South Lake Tahoe, Sugar Pine Drive in Incline Village, Marge Court in Zephyr Cove, and Pine Street on Kingsbury Grade.

Target invasive weeds are Tall Whitetop (Lepidium latifolium), Dalmatian Toadflax (Linaria dalmatica), Yellow toadflax

(Linaria vulgaris), and Canada thistle (Cirsium arvense).

Treatments will use herbicides similar to the commercial product Roundup. Applicators will apply the product by hand.

Caution signs will be posted in treatment areas and will remain posted for at least 48 hours after treatment. Orange and black caution tape will mark the boundary around each treatment area. A blue marker dye will be used to easily identify locations that have been sprayed. Treatment areas are less than 2 acres across all sites.

Access to treatment sites will be restricted for several hours during and after the application.

For more information, contact Blake Engelhardt at (530) 543.2879.

Truckee youth hit by car while on bike

An 8-year-old cyclist was flown to Renown Medical Center in Reno from Truckee on Sunday after being hit by a vehicle.

Authorities say the youth sustained non-life threatening injuries.

The accident happened in the Glenshire subdivision of Truckee.

The exact cause of the collision has yet to be determined, but Truckee police officers said speed and alcohol were not factors.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Race the Lake of the Sky

Race the Lake of the Sky returns to El Dorado Beach in South Lake Tahoe June 28-30.

This video is a recap of the 2012 inaugural event.

Mixed bag of results in banning plastic bags

By Paul Gabrielsen

SANTA CRUZ – An employee gathering carts from the sunny parking lot at a Santa Cruz Safeway said shoppers are warming up to Santa Cruz's ban on single-use plastic bags. But some still miss the bags' convenience.

"I used to be able to carry so many at a time," a senior woman remarked.

"Wrong thing to do," said a middle-aged man of the ban.

"But they're killing the innocent turtles," his wife said, adding that in Europe, reusable bags are just a way of life.

The couple's disagreement is typical of the strong feelings evoked by plastic bag bans, which seem to delight environmentalists and aggravate retailers and consumers who value the bags' convenience.

While there is some evidence for reductions on litter on city streets and beaches, ambiguities in the data seem certain to fuel further heated debate.

California cities enacting bans commonly cite two main justifications: reducing unsightly street litter and protecting marine life.

So, have the bans had the desired result? San Francisco led California's war on plastic, banning bags at large grocery stores and chain drugstores in 2007. Litter surveys in the city, covering the first two years after the ban went into effect, paint a foggy picture. These city-commissioned surveys occurred in 2007, 2008 and 2009, covering the first two years after the initial ban went into effect. The studies, said environment department spokesman Guillermo Rodriguez, were commissioned "to see what San Franciscans are throwing away."

Surveyors assessed more than 100 randomly selected sites in the city each year, counting every piece of litter in an area half the length of a city block. In 2007, before the ban was introduced, plastic bags amounted to 0.5 percent of large litter. By 2009, the percentage climbed to around 1.5 percent.

During the same three-year period, the average amount of litter stayed about the same.

San Francisco's ban effected no measurable change in plastic bag litter, at least in the first two years.

The city hasn't collected any litter data since the 2009 survey, Rodriguez said.

But the ban expanded to all retailers in July 2012 and will continue to expand to all restaurants this year. Once the restaurant ban is a year old, San Francisco plans to commission another litter survey to see whether the new scope of the ban makes a measurable impact.

San Jose has already seen that impact. The city's 2012 bag ban immediately covered all retailers. Last December, San Jose presented results of litter surveys in city creeks, streets and storm drains. Surveys after the bag ban in 2012 found 89 percent fewer bags in storm drains, 60 percent fewer in creeks, and 59 percent fewer in San Jose streets, compared to surveys before the bag ban.

Plastic bags only comprised 8 percent of total creek litter in 2011 and 4 percent in 2012. In contrast, a 2012 survey of Bay Area storm drains found that "other plastics," not including plastic bags, constituted around 50 percent of storm drain trash. Paper, Styrofoam and drink containers together made up another 30 percent. Plastic bags are only one part of the urban litter problem.

But the bags also show up in marine litter, comprising around 15 percent of trash in the deep reaches of Monterey Bay. The Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute reported finding plastic bags in water nearly 2½ miles deep, according to a paper published online last month in the journal Deep Sea Research I.

Closer to the surface, concern for the bags' effect on marine life stems from the fact that ocean-borne plastic bags look similar to jellyfish, which sea turtles love to eat.

Are bans preventing bags from reaching the ocean? That's hard to measure, but surveys of litter on Monterey Bay beaches provide the best available picture.

Santa Cruz-based Save Our Shores promotes weekly cleanups around Santa Cruz and Monterey counties and collects trash data from many of these events. On average, volunteers pick up only six bags at each event, down from a high of 65 in 2008.

The number of bags collected per cleanup has dropped in the past two years because of four bans which took effect in 2012, said Save our Shores executive director Laura Kasa. The four

bans covered unincorporated Santa Cruz County and the cities of Watsonville, Monterey and San Jose. The latter ban matters because of the volume of tourist traffic coming “over the hill” to Santa Cruz beaches. Kasa also credits the shift in public perception toward plastic bags in the region.

“In Santa Cruz it’s become the trend to be green and to bring your own reusable bags and not use plastic bags,” Kasa said. “I think we can attribute it to that as well.”

Save Our Shores Program Manager Brad Hunt pointed out that Monterey County has not yet implemented a bag ban, which affects Save Our Shores’ average cleanup numbers.

“It could go down to one bag per cleanup after Monterey County implements theirs,” Hunt said, “but we won’t know that until a year or two down the road.”

Volunteers – not professional trash surveyors – collect Save our Shores’ cleanup data, and do so at targeted beaches, not in randomly selected site surveys. But the focused, local and frequent data captures the best available picture of Monterey Bay’s beaches.

Opponents of plastic bag bans point out that bags comprise a small fraction of litter. “You’re talking about such a small amount to begin with that you wouldn’t notice any change,” said Stephen Joseph of the Save the Plastic Bag Coalition.

Joseph said political leaders have exaggerated the plastic bag problem, using figures he claims are unsubstantiated. He disputes claims by Oakland-based Save the Bay that a million plastic bags enter the Bay each year. In 16 years of living in the city, Joseph said, he never saw one bag in the Bay. “It’s a hoax,” he said.

“There’s obviously plastic bag litter,” Joseph said. “Anyone who’s never seen a plastic bag flying around is blind. But that does not justify all the exaggeration.”

What form of litter will cities target next? Nearly two dozen Bay Area communities have banned Styrofoam takeout food packaging, in addition to plastic bags. And San Francisco’s Rodriguez said the city is looking at ways to reduce the use of bottled water.

Until definitive, rigorous results of bag ban effects emerge, the debate will continue, from the Senate floor in Sacramento to the Safeway parking lot in Santa Cruz.