Nevada group wants more money to aid problem gamblers

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – A state advisory committee wants the governor to restore funding to help problem gamblers that was cut in half in 2011.

A letter sent to Gov. Brian Sandoval today by the Advisory Committee on Problem Gambling says it "strongly urges you to recommend restoring this funding to the level intended by the Legislature when the revolving fund was established in 2005."

The program was originally financed from a quarterly $2-per-slot-machine tax but was lowered to $1 per machine during the budget crunch in 2011.

Carol O'Hare, chairwoman of the committee, said it is particularly important to increase funding to help Internet gamblers. Nevada is moving toward allowing intrastate online poker.

"If we are to play a leadership role in the Internet gambling era, as the state hopes, it is vital that we play a leadership role in every aspect," the commission's letter stated.

Restoring full funding "would not only allow expansion of treatment to cover internet clients, but also the restoration of prevention activities that would keep them from developing problems in the first place," the committee's letter to the governor said.

The committee estimates there are 68,000 Nevadans with pathological gambling problems.

Figures from the state Department of Health and Human Services shows $708,617 was spent in fiscal 2012 treating 455 problem

gamblers, and there was no money for prevention programs.

The advisory committee said research by UNLV shows 92 percent of those treated show positive results. Fifty-two percent stopped gambling and 40 percent reduced their gambling.

More than 3,000 Nevadans have received state-funded treatment since 2006, according to a fact sheet from the advisory committee.

Sandoval has declined to reveal details of his proposed budget, which will be released Jan. 16 in his State of the State message to the Legislature.

Free radon presentation in Incline

With January being National Radon Action Month, the Nevada Radon Education Program of University of Nevada Cooperative Extension is offering a free radon education presentation at the Incline Village Library.

The Jan. 10 event is at 6:30pm at 845 Alder Ave. Attendees can learn about the radon health risk, how to test for it and how to fix radon problems. A certified radon mitigator will also present information on radon mitigation and free radon test kits will be offered.

Radon is a naturally occurring, radioactive gas present in many homes, schools and buildings.

Genoa trail to open in late January

Construction on the Genoa Vista Trail has been moving forward and the project should be complete by the end of January. A dedication ceremony is scheduled for Jan. 26 at 10am at the northern end of the trail not far from the Genoa Station Bar and Grille.

Afterward, David Walley’s Resort will host refreshments on its property at the south end of the trail.

The trail will be open for walking, skating, running, and biking.

Safeway prone to overcharging customers

By CBS-5

SAN FRANCISCO – When is the last time you checked your receipts? Getting overcharged at the register is more common that you might think.

In a follow up to an undercover investigation into overcharges at Safeway operated stores, ConsumerWatch found Safeway Inc. is even more likely to overcharge you than the average California retailer.

In November, ConsumerWatch reporter Julie Watts went undercover shopping at five Safeway stores in three counties. She was overcharged five times and it turns out that was just the beginning.

According to more than 1,800 scanner inspections at Safeway-operated stores in 31 California counties and 11 states, ConsumerWatch discovered that inspectors were overcharged on 1 out of every 50 items purchased over the past 5 years in California alone.

"It's not shocking, complexity creates problems," said the Federal Trade Commission's David Newman. He points to Safeway's complex combination of club prices, personalized deals, and short-run sales. With more price fluctuation, comes more opportunity for error and that can benefit the store's bottom line, said Newman.

"Changing prices all the time generates a certain level Of confusion by consumers and that works to the stores advantage because they have the benefit of having drawn someone in with a sale price," he said. But Newman pointed out the store is legally obligated to get that sale price right.

“None of this is top secret stuff, you know you don’t need to be NASA or the CIA to figure out how to get the prices right,” said Newman. If stores are not eager to do it on their own, then it’s up to enforcement agencies to incentivize them appropriately.”

That’s what the State of California has attempted to do with three separate lawsuits against Safeway and Vons since 2003. As a result of a 2008 lawsuit, Safeway must now give you an overcharged item for free or a $5 gift card (pending price). During its undercover investigation, ConsumerWatch found that Safeway was violating that portion of the judgment.

Following its detailed public records request from every county in California and every state with a Safeway operated store, ConsumerWatch has now discovered that state, and local officials are well aware of Safeway’s widespread overcharges.

Records show since the most recent lawsuit, the supermarket continued to fail state scanner inspections by overcharging in nearly three-quarters of the reporting counties. That doesn’t include another nine counties which denied access to the documents citing open investigations. The remaining counties have done no inspections or have no Safeway operated stores.

Nationwide, Safeway operates stores in 20 states under sevent different names including Vons, Pavilions, Carrs-Safeway, Dominick’s Finer Foods, Randall’s and Tom Thumb. The retailers have overcharged items in more than 30 percent of the inspections compiled coast to coast.

When asked if the Federal Trade Commission would consider federal action against Safeway considering that the California DA has sued several times to no avail, Newman responded, “You know I can’t comment on whether or not there is any current FTC action involving Safeway or any other company.”

The California Division of Measurement Standards also declined to comment on any ongoing investigations, but last year the

agency performed a statewide price verification survey of various retailers.

It found that many stores make scanner errors and some are in your favor. However, the grocery stores inspected for the survey were nearly twice as likely to err in the stores' favor and overcharge instead of undercharge. By comparison, Safeway stores were four times as likely to overcharge than undercharge according to the county inspections preformed during the same year.

The survey also found 28 percent of all of the grocery stores that were inspected failed scanner inspections with at least one overcharge. Safeway's failure rate that year was 44 percent.

Safeway did not respond to those statistics, but it did comment on the findings that inspectors were overcharged on 1 out of 50 items over five years. Safeway claims this places the store "squarely within the industry norms". However, if you compare its 2011 records to the data compiled in the 2011 state-wide survey, their overcharge rate is more than 12 percent higher than grocery stores inspected statewide.

Safeway scanner issues extend far beyond California. Inspections show even higher failure rates in at least three other states yet none has taken legal action. Many states with Safeway operated stores have done no inspections at all.

Safeway said it is committed to eliminating all pricing errors and never intends to overcharge customers. It does not think the inspections compiled for this report accurately reflect its actual performance.

The FTC won't confirm or deny a federal investigation but said it's up to consumers to check receipts and hold Safeway and other stores accountable for overcharges. Consumer in California should hold Safeway to the court-ordered policy and request overcharged items for free.

Safeway's full response:

Dear Ms. Watts:

We have received your email of December 10 regarding your plan to run a follow-up to your recent scanner investigation story.

We are hampered in our ability to respond to your message because you have not given us access to your specific data. However, you say that you have reviewed records showing that "Safeway has overcharged about 1 out of every 50 items inspected over the past 5 years." The California Department of Food & Agriculture's 2011 Statewide Price Verification Survey reported a 1.97 percent overcharge rate out of thousands of purchases at many retail establishments across the State. So, if you do run a follow-up story, we trust you will explain to your viewers that your own research on this subject places Safeway squarely within industry norms. With that said, we would never be satisfied with just being average when it comes to pricing accuracy and, indeed, we are confident that our actual performance is even better than the 98 percent accuracy rate you attribute to Safeway.

It is worth noting there will always be some potential for an occasional discrepancy given the complexity and scale of the retail grocery business. A typical Safeway store carries more than 50,000 items that come in a broad range of sizes, flavors and varieties – not to mention the constant flow of newly introduced and discontinued items. We are frequently adjusting prices based on promotional activity and product cost and supply. Having said that, Safeway has a strict set of policies and systems in place to manage this activity and minimize errors. For example, we self-audit our stores and have our employees sign off to ensure all are following an established and rigorous set of programs and standards to ensure accuracy. We spend significant resources and time and attention to make sure our customers are accurately charged, and we strive to be even better than we are today. Our efforts in this regard are

ongoing.

Regarding your question about retraining, we have taken steps to ensure our employees are aware of and understood our scan guarantee policy as it relates to all transactions, including our Just For U program.

As we have said before, Safeway has a well-earned reputation for responsive service, as well as a committed desire to achieve fairness in all of our business dealings. Price accuracy is no exception and we never intend to overcharge our customers under any circumstance. When these matters are brought to our attention, we will continue to respond quickly and correct the situation, refund any overpayments, and apply our price accuracy guarantee in a fair and reasonable manner.

Sincerely,

Keith Turner, director of Public Affairs

Pot grows wreaking havoc on California's environment

By Joe Mozingo, Los Angeles Times

EUREKA – State scientists, grappling with an explosion of marijuana growing on the North Coast, recently studied aerial imagery of a small tributary of the Eel River, spawning grounds for endangered coho salmon and other threatened fish.

In the remote, 37-square-mile patch of forest, they counted 281 outdoor pot farms and 286 greenhouses, containing an estimated 20,000 plants – mostly fed by water diverted from creeks or a fork of the Eel. The scientists determined the

farms were siphoning roughly 18 million gallons from the watershed every year, largely at the time when the salmon most need it.

“That is just one small watershed,” said Scott Bauer, the state scientist in charge of the coho recovery on the North Coast for the Department of Fish and Game. “You extrapolate that for all the other tributaries, just of the Eel, and you get a lot of marijuana sucking up a lot of water.… This threatens species we are spending millions of dollars to recover.”

The marijuana boom that came with the sudden rise of medical cannabis in California has wreaked havoc on the fragile habitats of the North Coast and other parts of California. With little or no oversight, farmers have illegally mowed down timber, graded mountaintops flat for sprawling greenhouses, dispersed poisons and pesticides, drained streams and polluted watersheds.

Because marijuana is unregulated in California and illegal under federal law, most growers still operate in the shadows, and scientists have little hard data on their collective effect. But they are getting ever more ugly snapshots.

A study led by researchers at UC Davis found that a rare forest carnivore called a fisher was being poisoned in Humboldt County and near Yosemite in the Sierra Nevada.

The team concluded in its July report that the weasel-like animals were probably eating rodenticides that marijuana growers employ to keep animals from gnawing on their plants, or they were preying on smaller rodents that had consumed the deadly bait. Forty-six of 58 fisher carcasses the team analyzed had rat poison in their systems.

Mark Higley, a wildlife biologist on the Hoopa Indian Reservation in eastern Humboldt who worked on the study, is incredulous over the poisons that growers are bringing in.

“Carbofuran,” he said. “It seems like they’re using that to kill bears and things like that that raid their camps. So they mix it up with tuna or sardine, and the bears eat that and die.”

The insecticide is lethal to humans in small doses, requires a special permit from the EPA and is banned in other countries. Authorities are now regularly finding it at large-scale operations in some of California’s most sensitive ecosystems.

It is just one in a litany of pollutants seeping into the watershed from pot farms: fertilizers, soil amendments, miticides, rodenticides, fungicides, plant hormones, diesel fuel, human waste.

Scientists suspect that nutrient runoff from excess potting soil and fertilizers, combined with lower-than-normal river flow due to diversions, has caused a rash of toxic blue-green algae blooms in the North Coast rivers over the last decade.

The cyanobacteria outbreaks threaten public health for swimmers and kill aquatic invertebrates that salmon and steelhead trout eat. Now, officials warn residents in late summer and fall to stay out of certain stretches of water and keep their dogs out. Eleven dogs have died from ingesting the floating algae since 2001.

The effects are disheartening to many locals because healthier salmon runs were signaling that the rivers were gradually improving from the damage caused by more than a century of logging.

“Now with these water diversions, we’re potentially slamming the door on salmon recovery,” said Scott Greacen, director of Friends of the Eel River.

In June, Bauer and other agency scientists accompanied game wardens as they executed six search warrants on growers illegally sucking water from tributaries of the Trinity River.

At one, he came upon a group of 20-somethings with Michigan license plates on their vehicles, camping next to 400 plants. He followed an irrigation line up to a creek, where the growers had dug a pond and lined it with plastic.

“I started talking to this guy, and he says he used to be an Earth First! tree-sitter, saving the trees,” Bauer said. “I told him everything he was doing here negates everything he did as an environmentalist.”

The man was a small-timer in this new gold rush. As marijuana floods the market and prices drop, many farmers are cultivating ever bigger crops to make a profit. They now cut huge clearings for industrial-scale greenhouses. With no permits or provisions for runoff, the operations dump tons of silt into the streams during the rainy season.

Scanning Google Earth in his office recently, Bauer came upon a “mega grow” that did not exist the year before – a 4-acre bald spot in the forest with 42 greenhouses, each 100 feet long.

Figuring a single greenhouse that size would hold 80 plants, and each plant uses about 5 gallons of water a day, he estimated the operation would consume 2 million gallons of water in the dry season and unleash a torrent of sediment in the wet season.

“There has been an explosion of this in the last two years,” he said. “We can’t keep up with it.

Every grow has its own unique footprint. Some farmers on private land avoid pesticides and poisons, get their water legally, keep their crops small and try to minimize their runoff. Urban indoor growers might not pollute a river, but they guzzle energy. A study in the journal Energy Policy calculated that indoor marijuana cultivation could be responsible for 9% of California’s household electricity use. Other producers, like the Mexican drug trafficking groups who

set up giant grows on public lands right next to mountain streams, spread toxins far and wide and steal enough water to run oscillating sprinkler systems.

But it’s not just the big criminal groups skirting the rules. Tony LaBanca, senior environmental scientist at Fish and Game in Eureka, said less than 1% of marijuana growers get the permits required to take water from a creek, and those who do usually do it after an enforcement action.

Responsible growers could easily get permits, with no questions asked about what type of plant they’re watering, LaBanca said. They just need to be set up to take their water in the wet season and store it in tanks and bladders.

Fish and Game wants to step up enforcement, but the staff is overwhelmed, he said. The agency has 12 scientists and 15 game wardens in the entire four counties on the North Coast, covering thousands of mountainous square miles.

Until the last few years, dealing with marijuana cultivation was usually a minor issue. Now, LaBanca said, it is “triage.”

On a recent day, Higley, the Hoopa wildlife biologist, took a reporter and photographer to some of the damage he finds in the most remote mountains, where bears, fishers, martens, rare salamanders and spotted owls live in cloud-mist forests. With his colleague Aaron Pole at the wheel, Higley headed north up the Bigfoot Highway and then up a dirt logging road 13 miles into the snow-peaked Trinities.

They were going to a grow that the sheriff had raided by helicopter in August. Deputies cut down 26,600 plants in eight interconnected clearings along Mill Creek, which flows into the Trinity River.

They parked the truck and started threading down precipitous slopes, through thick wet brush and forest. They stepped over bear scat, slippery roots and coastal giant salamanders.

Crossing a 2-foot-wide creek, they came across a black irrigation line. Vague footpaths emerged, empty Coors cans began glinting in the mud, more water pipes spidered out.

After another 40 minutes, they reached a clearing in the bottom of the canyon – a field of stumps, holes of dark potting soil and hacked-down stalks of marijuana. Dead gray brush and logs ringed the site. A few heavily pruned trees were left standing, to help mask the marijuana grove from the air.

Deputies had severed the irrigation lines during the August raid, but when Higley returned in September to study the environmental impact, some of the line had been reconnected to sprinklers and plants had re-sprouted. He saw a wet bar of soap on an upturned bucket and realized workers were hiding nearby.

On this return visit, the site was empty, and he started picking through the rubbish. “That’s d-CON rat poison right there, 16 trays.”

At a dump pile next to the creek, he found propane tanks, more rat poison, cans of El Pato tomato sauce, and empty bags of Grow More fertilizer, instant noodles and tortillas.

A lot of the trash had been removed during the sheriff’s eradication – dozens of empty bags accounting for 2,700 pounds of fertilizer and boxes for 10 pounds of d-CON (enough to kill 21 spotted owls and up to 28 fishers), as well as two poached deer carcasses and the remains of a state-protected ringtailed cat.

“It wouldn’t matter if they were growing tomatoes, corn and squash,” he said. “It’s trespassing, it’s illegal and it borders on terrorism to the environment.”

Ski report: Incredible conditions



It’s like mid-winter conditions on the mountains.

Get out and enjoy the day.

Here is the Dec. 28 ski report.

– Curtis Fong

Mancuso 25th in giant slalom in Austria

By USSA

SEMMERING, Austria – Mikaela Shiffrin (Eagle-Vail, Colo.) battled a rugged Audi FIS Alpine World Cup in Semmering on Dec. 28 to finish a career best eighth in giant slalom and leap into 10th in the overall World Cup standings.

Julia Mancuso (Squaw Valley) finished 25th as wind and fog made the already bumpy course exponentially more challenging.

Austrian Anna Fenninger posted the wire-to-wire win with a massive 1.1 second margin over Slovenian overall leader Tina Maze.

A slalom is slated for Saturday, a year to the day after Shiffrin's first World Cup podium. Shiffrin claimed her first World Cup win with slalom victory a week ago in Are, Sweden and currently leads the World Cup slalom standings.

Lindsey Vonn (Vail) did not start and is still regaining strength following a late November stomach illness.

The U.S. Ski Team now as three women in the World Cup overall top 10 (Vonn 5, Mancuso 7, Shiffrin 10).

LTN has a gift for someone

Lake Tahoe News would like to thank everyone who became a paid subscriber this month. We used a chunk of that cash to buy food for local groups that help those in need as well as supplied items to the animal shelter in Meyers.

Becoming a paid subscriber means being part of the NEWS Team. And that in turn gives you the opportunity to win various goodies through *Lake Tahoe News*. In keeping with the food theme, we have a copy of the "Food & Wine Annual Cookbook 2012" to give away.

All you have to do is tell us why you should get the cookbook. A winner will randomly be chosen and announced on New Year's Day.

Here is the paid subscriber form in case you aren’t already part of the NEWS Team.

S. Tahoe’s persistence pays off with state

By Kathryn Reed

Hours of phone calls, countless emails and several meetings resulted in the state Department of Finance on Dec. 26 saying it only wants a check for $274,473 instead of $1,911,519.

South Lake Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry played hardball with the state agency when it came to what the successor agency to the city’s Redevelopment Agency would relinquish from its housing fund.

It’s a double-edged sword as to why the dollar amount dropped so significantly. Because the El Dorado County tax collector provided the state with the revised assessment figures on the “hole in the ground” near Stateline, the successor agency doesn’t have as much money as the state believes it is owed.

While this is good news for now, it means those 11 acres are not bringing in the projected revenue even as near-vacant land.

The successor agency will use what funds it has to make a modest dent in the $100 million debt it has for having borrowed so much money to get the Heavenly Village project built.

The dissolution of redevelopment agencies by the governor was all about getting more money into state coffers. It has

backfired a bit because of all of the outstanding debt tied to various redevelopment agencies.

The local oversight board is scheduled to meet Jan. 4 to go over the next series of due diligence reports from the county auditor. The board will meet again Jan. 14. Both meetings are at 2pm at Lake Tahoe Airport.

Other adults taking over when parents fail to teach manners

By Matt Richtel, New York Times

It’s dinnertime, and 6-year-old Joaquin Hurtado is staying in his seat. He hasn’t stood up, run around the table or wrestled with his little brother. Good thing. It wouldn’t take much unruly behavior to shatter the dishware or the mood in this upscale restaurant.

“This is a place where you come to eat,” the boy says softly, explaining nice manners. “It’s not a place to play.”

The place is Chenery Park, a restaurant with low lights, cloth napkins, $24 grilled salmon and “family night” every Tuesday. Children are welcome, with a catch: They are expected to behave — and to watch their manners, or learn them. Think upscale dining with training wheels.

Chenery Park has many allies in the fight to teach manners to a new generation of children. Around the country, there are classes taught by self-appointed etiquette counselors — Emily Posts for a new age — delivering a more decentralized and less

formal approach to teaching manners than in years past. A few restaurants, like Chenery Park, and high-end hotels set aside space and time for families.

These etiquette experts say that new approaches are needed because parents no longer have the stomach, time or know-how to play bad cop and teach manners. Dinnertime has become a free-for-all in many households, with packed family schedules, the television on in the background and a modern-day belief of many parents that they should simply let children be children.

Some of these manners-minders acknowledge that they can sound like curmudgeons, just another generation of older folks mourning the lost habits of more refined times. But they also say that parents welcome their efforts as a way of outsourcing the hard work of teaching youngsters to follow rules.

During a recent family night at Chenery Park, Joseph Kowal, an owner, roamed among the regulars and newcomers, saying hello and occasionally playing parental ally. He's got a twinkle in his eye but a steely commitment to having children — even if they're not etiquette role models — at least sit politely and not scream or throw food.

"Some parents will say, 'Uncle Joe's going to come up here, and he's going to be cross with you,'" Kowal said. "They use that to their advantage." He recalled one child who wouldn't settle down, and he threatened to tape the child's mouth. The child told him to go ahead and try.

"I went to my office, got some blue painter's tape, came back and ripped a piece off," he said. The kid piped down. "The parents looked at me like, 'We're going to try that at home.'"

All of which raises some intriguing questions: Is it Joe who brings out the best in his young patrons? Or something else? And what are the best strategies for training children to be polite, to pay attention to the world around them, whether they are in dim lighting with fragile dishware or at home?

Etiquette teachers, other parents and people who spend time thinking about how and why we mind our manners have some interesting ideas about new strategies.

“These days, you have to teach kids about return on investment,” said Robin Wells, the founder of Etiquette Manor in Coral Gables, Fla., which holds classes on etiquette for adults and children. When it comes to children, she said, long gone are the days when you could tell them that they have to behave a certain way “just because.”

So, even as she imparts lessons about using forks and the importance of looking the waiter in the eye, she does so by framing the lessons in a constructively selfish way for the children. She often exhorts her young students: be polite to your mother because she’ll be happier, and if she’s happier, you’re happier.

On the first day of her five one-hour sessions, which cost $285, she tells the children to go home and do one unexpectedly kind thing so that they can see how wide-eyed and impressed their parents will be. “It’s almost manipulation at its finest,” she said.

Then she starts in with the knives and forks, and the proper way to address an adult or a waiter. On the last day of class, they attend a three-course meal at an upscale restaurant. (Among her lessons: she slams a clunky landline phone on the table and asks children if that seems O.K. No, she responds, so don’t put your cellphone on the table either.)

Around the country, hundreds of entrepreneurs teach versions of etiquette and manners classes, said Elena Neitlich, the founder of Moms On Edge, a company, with offices in Osprey, Fla., that offers online certification for manners teachers through a course called Etiquette Moms, at prices ranging from $250 to $1,250.

She believes that teaching manners to children has grown more

challenging, and necessary, in part because of technology.

“Kids have stopped making eye contact at one another,” Neitlich said. “They bring their technology to the table. She added that it is true of parents, too: “Everyone is in a hurry. Things are clipped, clipped, clipped.”

It all makes teaching manners at home challenging, said Faye de Muyshondt, the founder of Socialsklz, which teaches workshops in New York City on etiquette and social skills. Modern children seem to want no part of the conversation, she said.

“Say the words ‘manners’ or ‘etiquette’ to kids these days, and they run the other direction,” she said. She prefers teaching the children that they are “building the brand called ‘you.’”

“People don’t want to eat with someone whose plate looks like a science project,” she tells the children in her workshops. “If you want to be invited back on a play date,” she explains, be polite.

She thinks that one key aspect of her workshops, which take place in schools or with Brownie troops, is that they don’t happen in the home or at the dinner table. “The casual nature of the home makes it difficult,” she said, adding that most children she talks to say that their families have the television on during dinner.

Indeed, she and other experts talked repeatedly about setting, and how it affects manners and behavior.

It turns out that this concept is connected to science from a group of seemingly unrelated researchers: criminologists. They look at what is happening at a place like Chenery Park through a very different lens called ecological psychology, or its subset, broken-windows theory. It suggests that when an environment is dilapidated, it gives permission to people to

misbehave. When the proverbial windows are not broken, neither is the behavior, or so the theory goes.

“A fancy restaurant gives off so many cues that this is a place for refined behavior,” said Ralph B. Taylor, a professor of criminal justice at Temple University who studies how environments influence behavior. And he and other people in the field say that the environment changes not just the youngsters. “The parents are changed,” he added. “You’re not talking loud; you’re not yacking on the cellphone. Everybody is with the program.”

Taylor and other experts said that parents can take some of the ecological psychology lessons from places like Chenery Park.

“Take parts of the restaurant home with you,” he advised. Use a tablecloth or nice napkins to simulate the environment that changed children’s behavior. He suggested also introducing children to other environments — like highbrow concerts or museums.

Wells, the Florida manners teacher, made a similar point: take a child to the window of a nice restaurant, look inside and ask how people are behaving and what the child loves about the scene.

And when you bring the well-mannered rules back into your own home, don’t do it every night, counseled de Muyshondt, of Socialsklz.

“You turn into a nag,” she said. Given the less formal nature of our society, she suggested creating a “bridge” through periodic training, like one formal night a week.

On a recent night at Chenery Park, Joaquin, the well-behaved 6-year-old, sat in the upstairs dining area near the front, eating pasta with butter and Parmesan cheese. He was joined by his brother, Sisto, 4, eating a Hebrew National hot dog, one

of the handful of inexpensive kid-friendly Tuesday night menu items, and their two mothers.

One of them, Arcelia Hurtado, said that the family regularly goes to Chenery Park, largely because the adults want a nice meal. But it's a bonus that the boys think about being in "an adult space." At home, Hurtado said, dinnertime is chaos.

"There's something about the physical setting" of the restaurant, she said. "They see the cloth napkins, and they know to put them in their laps." She sometimes has to tell them to remember to behave. "I kind of feel an obligation for kids to behave well, since Joe is doing this nice thing for us."

Kowal, who does not have children of his own, grew up in Rhode Island in a family that wasn't super strict, he said, but did require children to be polite. He started his family nights after the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001 — initially because business was slow on Tuesdays, but then it evolved as a popular training ground. The restaurant's website says, "We're here to help kids learn proper ways of eating in nicer restaurants with Mom and Dad."

Kowal himself can sometimes come across as hurried and even brusque. He has been known to scold parents, too. He once reprimanded a woman for talking on her phone and ignoring her son, who was yelling loudly. The woman was offended and told Kowal she wouldn't be going back. He responded that that was her choice, and the people at nearby tables applauded.

Another night, two families were sitting at adjoining tables. At one of them, a 5-year-old starting yelling and jumping up and down.

"The second or third time it happened, one of the kids at the other table goes over to the one jumping up and down and said, 'You can't do that,'" Kowal recalled. "That was the best."