Opinion: Ask questions before forcing change on people

By Kathryn Reed

The problem with the sentiment – If you aren't part of the solution, you are part of the problem – is that you might not agree with the solutions being presented. That, in my opinion, does not make you part of the problem.

That is one of the problems with some of the people in the Lake Tahoe Basin. They have a vision – be it for the South Shore, Tahoe City, Incline Village, Homewood, Kings Beach, you name it – and they expect everyone to jump on board. And when you don't jump on board, you are accused of being part of the problem and/or of wanting the status quo.

Wanting the status quo is a valid opinion. It might be working for someone even if it is not working for you.

Not being engaged is being part of the problem. And whining anonymously on *Lake Tahoe News* is barely being engaged – in my opinion.

People need to explain why they want or don't want something to happen. It's not that more studies need to be done. But people really need to start proving their ideas are valid. Showing pretty pictures is not enough. Saying someone wanted it in the 1980s is not a reason to do it 30 years later. And then they need to listen to those who disagree. And the dissenters in turn need to make a case for their ideas or a case for why the status quo is OK.

When it comes to the loop road on the South Shore someone asked me to name another town where a state highway goes through it where that city is doing well.

Solvang. That’s my answer. I visited this Central Coast city last month for the first time.

A disclaimer – it’s not an apples to apples comparison; I don’t know if any city is enough like another to have that apples to apples analysis.

But here goes – Solvang is a tourist town with a state highway through it. But the speed limit is much lower than South Lake Tahoe’s. That is where I think South Lake Tahoe needs to make a change. It needs to work on its legislators to lower the speed limit – to get Caltrans to change the policy of how it determines the speed limit. (And this suggestion is coming from someone with a bit of a lead foot.)

In Solvang, the sidewalks are wide. Has anyone noticed how narrow the sidewalks are in South Lake Tahoe that Caltrans has put in? Our sidewalks need to be wider – like Ski Run Boulevard, Linear Park, Heavenly Village.

I didn’t see any paid parking in Solvang. Cars were parked on the main street and some of the businesses had parking in front of their places.

I noticed fewer ingresses and egresses – so as a pedestrian I didn’t feel like I was about to get hit. Could property owners in the basin work together to share driveways?

A big difference between all the towns in the basin and Solvang is how they are laid out. The basin towns are linear. Solvang is on more of a grid, with several streets easy to walk up and down. The vision some have for Tahoe City is for businesses to go off the main drag of Highway 28. This would create a more pedestrian-friendly town like Solvang. If the types of businesses changed near Stateline, that’s what South Lake Tahoe could have, too.

Solvang didn’t have a single bike rack that I saw. I’m pretty sure we locked our bikes illegally.

However, I was not scared to ride my bike on that state highway. I can't say the same for any of the highways in the basin. I'm scared to be on two wheels on Tahoe's highways.

I didn't see any empty buildings in Solvang. This gave the appearance of a thriving economy. The opposite is going on in Tahoe.

How the built environment looks in parts of Lake Tahoe is atrocious. That is what needs to change.

But we also need to change the mindset of how much money we are going to make. The ledgers from the 1980s are history and are not likely to be repeated. It's time to adjust to that.

It is also time to accept that nearly every place else in the world has tourism as part of its economy. That means the traveler perceives there are more places to visit. That would likely mean fewer repeat visitors to Lake Tahoe.

When I was in England this summer a taxi driver said he likes to ski at Heavenly. But then he said something like, "But there really isn't anything to do in Tahoe in the winter if you don't ski." I paused. Then I agreed with him.

He nailed it. Not only is the Lake Tahoe Basin dependent on tourists, but also we only attract one kind in the winter – the kind who plays in the snow. And last winter we had no snow so we had no visitors.

To me, to stop the downward spiral, these are questions that need to be asked and answered of those who live, work and play in Tahoe, as well as those who own property and businesses:

• What improvements do you want to make to your property and/or business and why aren't you?

• Are you satisfied with how your property looks?

• Are you willing to join a business district like Ski Run

Boulevard in South Lake Tahoe created in order to establish a pot of cash for improvements to your area?

• Would you be willing to donate X number of hours a month/year to help another property owner (residential or commercial) to make improvements to their property so the cost of labor is eliminated or greatly decreased?

• What are you doing to market your business to locals and/or people outside the area? Do you know what the return on investment is? Would it be better to pool your resources – say all the restaurants in an area – to showcase the variety that is available?

• What are you doing to make Lake Tahoe a better place to live, work and play?

• What activities/events need to occur throughout the year to get locals engaged and tourists in beds?

(Note: I'm on the fence about the loop road. No one has proven to me that it is going to be better for the entire South Shore. If we eliminated all traffic through that area, I might be able to have a definitive opinion.)

Hearst Castle – a legacy of a media giant for all to bask in

By Kathryn Reed

SAN SIMEON – Clearly, I worked for the Hearst Corporation in the wrong era. Well, come to think of it, I don't think any of William Randolph Hearst's employees were ever invited to his castle, so I guess it didn't really matter when I worked for the Examiner and Chronicle.

But what is so great is that his mega-estate on the Central Coast is now a state park, so even the grunts (or former as the case may be) in the Hearst empire can visit and not be thrown out. The family gifted the property to the state in 1958.

I have always heard wonderful descriptions about this oasis on a hillside five miles from the ocean. But in many ways, superlatives would lessen the true grandeur of this architectural wonder.



The Neptune pool at Hearst Castle makes one want to take a few laps. Photos/Kathryn Reed

After all, this is a Julia Morgan designed Mediterranean-style estate that took 26 years to build.

She had the foresight to use reinforced concrete in this seismically prone area.

The Neptune pool is probably one of the most photographed

entities of any state park. With cushy chairs near the pool, it is easy to fantasize about what life was like in the first half of the 20th century as Hollywood's elite flitted about.

While the structure is all Morgan, the décor represents Hearst's eclectic tastes – from 15th century choir stalls, to tapestries also centuries old, to using paper napkins and having ketchup and mustard bottles on the table, to somewhat tacky furniture coverings.

The "big house" contains 115 rooms in 69,000-square-feet of space. Three cottages would have provided privacy for his many guests – many who hailed from Hollywood. Thirty fireplaces helped keep the ocean chill away. An elevator could take people between floors.

To manage his media empire Hearst had 100 telephones installed at the castle so he could talk to editors wherever he was on the estate. He also had each of his papers flown in daily so he knew exactly what was going on. Obviously, this was long before the days of cell phones and the Internet.

At one time this working ranch had 250,000 acres associated with it. Plus, there was a menagerie of exotic animals that would have rivaled the best zoos of the time or even today.

The gardens are lush. Being on the coast, flowers are vibrant this time of year. And varietals that are never seen in the mountains fill the landscape.

Three tours are available. The one we went on was described as the best for first-time visitors. At a cost of $25, it is well worth it. But what is also great about the park is the visitors center has a ton of displays and information if people don't want to take the ride to the top of the hill to tour the castle.

A 40-minute movie at the visitors center sets the stage for what visitors will see. It explains why the media mogul chose

San Simeon as his home even though his business interests were nowhere near there. The film delves into Hearst's upbringing, his marriage, children and mistress.

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S. Tahoe council keeps nonprofit in place as avenue to accept donations

A program started in 2001 by the South Lake Tahoe Parks and Recreation Department as a means for people to earmark a donation is now under the purview of the City Council.

The change that took place this month is because there aren't enough people to form a board of directors the old way. Members had primarily been parks and rec employees and now that arrangement doesn't work with staffing levels.

Greg Ross, parks supervisor and board member of Great Ideas For Tahoe (GIFT), lobbied the council to essentially be the board of directors.

The council agreed to this.

Staff will come back at a future council meeting with the appropriate documents to solidify the changes. It's also possible this nonprofit could encompass more than donations related to parks and recreation. That will be up to the new board of directors and how the bylaws are written.

City Manager Nancy Kerry said the reason to have something like GIFT is because "community members don't feel comfortable

donating to the city. They want to have a nonprofit where it cannot be absorbed by the general fund.”

Donations could be for a bench in the dog park, improvements at ball fields – things like that.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Finding the center of California requires time to explore it

By Susan Wood

CAMBRIA – It’s easy to fall in love with the Central Coast of California in autumn – or during any other time of year for that matter.

With so much to do and see, what will soon become apparent on a trip through a region that stretches from Santa Cruz to Santa Barbara is the time allotted to fully take in the varied sights and activities will require that of a vacation hopping countries in Europe.

California has maintained the reputation for being the land of the active. But for the more docile wanting to appreciate the finer tastes and bountiful harvests in life, the Central Coast has emerged with formidable wine regions.



Fall is evident throughout the vineyards of the Central Coast. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Paso Robles (which the locals nickname “Paso”) and Santa Ynez Valley may make the case of being the next Napa and Sonoma valleys.

This is the land of Pinot Noir. But as the more than 200 Paso Robles area wineries such as J. Lohr, Peachy Canyon and Robert Hall have proven, bold tastes may come from bottles of Grenache, Cabernet Sauvignon or even Sauvignon Blanc on a 90-degree day 25 miles east of Cambria.

Cambria, this crown jewel of the Central Coast, represents the proverbial California lifestyle – a quaint town broken up between two villages and a beach where a one-mile boardwalk allows a walker the experience of being on the bluff or in the sands and moonstones.

When the fog doesn’t roll in, the sunset brings out all types to Moonstone Beach in the hopes of catching the last-second green flash at the horizon line. It’s worth driving hours to see.

Then, there are the stones the beach is named after. Even on an average weekday morning, people were spotted looking down or even digging for the small, bluish rocks.

“The good news is people decided to travel this summer,” said

MaryAnn Carson, executive director of the Cambria Chamber of Commerce. Carson added that after two bad, recession-spawned years in 2009 and 2010, the town has used 12 major events – to bring people to the region.

San Luis Obispo County assists the promotional efforts. Towns as far away as Pismo Beach take part.

Plus, the multitude of area hotels has supported the ventures by taxing the tourists 1 percent to subsidize these events.

Visitors have a place

The El Colibri Boutique Hotel and Spa is situated above the popular Moonstone Beach, requiring just a three-minute walk on the boardwalk from the hotel to see the ocean.

Nestled within a nature preserve, it's the only hotel lining the boardwalk on the west side of Moonstone Drive.

The place is a perfect launching pad for a 10-minute drive north to the monumental Hearst Castle, cycling one of the best, most scenic stretches of the California Coast where elephant seals are bountiful on the beach and flocks of pelicans soar over the water.

Named after a hummingbird, El Colibri is as intimate, charming and relaxed as its picturesque surroundings. Inside, there's a romantic feel to the 34-room hotel. Every room comes with a gas fireplace to take the nip of the fog away. Saturday nights feature jazz performers and a local winery. On one September night, the Midnight winery uncorked a Zinfandel that rivals those in El Dorado and Amador counties.

The spa stands out as an exceptional amenity. Dunking in the hot tub in a semi-private, open space may be the ultimate remedy for capping off an evening in a restful state – if not for the more-than-memorable massages from therapists Terri and Diane.

The latter provided Kae, who declared she was a “new woman” after receiving “one of the best massages (she’s) ever had.” Among the many treatments offered, Kae got an aromatherapy massage.

(Just one shortfall: the offerings of the complimentary continental breakfast and evening tapas in the comfortable wine bar don’t live up to the service level of the hotel, so you’ll need to look elsewhere for nutrition – especially if out wine tasting.)

Robin’s restaurant in the “east village” fits the bill for lunch or dinner.

Going south to ‘Sideways’ land

Filling the tummy for a day of wine tasting or evening out is not an issue in Buellton, located four miles west of the cute Danish town of Solvang in the Santa Ynez Valley.

A chef cooking eggs to order can get any day off on the right foot at the Marriott Santa Ynez. This Marriott is large and comes with many amenities, including tennis and squash courts and even a game room near the swimming pool patio.

It’s yet another perfect jumping off spot for cycling the Santa Ynez Valley, home of one of the most acclaimed organized bike rides in the state – the Solvang Century, which is always in March. (Bring your rain gear as this reporter has been caught in hail twice during that event.)

On the way to the Danish town, it’s advised to take the time to check out Ostrich Land, if only from the road on a bike. The rescue farm is listed as one of the area attractions between Buellton and Solvang.

Solvang is the quintessential walkable town – with wayfinding signs, an inviting village green and sidewalks lining the shop-filled streets. (Note: the Danish eateries may introduce

the aebleskiver for those seeking a delightful puffball pastry in the middle of the day.)

The Santa Ynez Valley is a wine region that's made it to the big screen. More than 80 wineries offer vintages ranging from Syrah to Chardonnay. But it was the love of Pinot Noir that put the region on the map when the movie "Sideways" was released in 2004. The story of two very different men out wine tasting before one gets married became a cult hit that brought scores of people discovering the region.

According to Buellton Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau Executive Director Kathy Vreeland, the fascination has endured yet another year despite a 20 percent recessionary dip in visitation in 2009 and 2010.

"I don't think any of us expected (the popularity)," Vreeland said.

And now, there's a sequel called "Vertical" in the works.

Still, the original saga of Miles and Jack lives on at the Hitching Post restaurant in its real name in the movie. The steakhouse still boasts throngs of people who stop to just have their pictures taken in front of the sign or eat at the movie characters' table.

"People want to follow what Miles and Jack did," Vreeland said.

There's even a Sideways wine tour.

That aside, followers who swear off Merlot (as Miles declared in the movie because his ex wife drank it) and onto the more hearty Pinot Noir will still appreciate the vast varietals found in the valley such as Lincourt's tangy Chardonnay and Beckman's four-way, Syrah-based blend of Cuvee Le Bec.

(Note: a preceding stop at Wandering Dog Bar for a few flights of local wines and advice from fourth-generation wine taster

and staffer Ian may be just the ticket if time is a factor.)

If you go:

Cambria: Off Highway 1 between Monterey and Morro Bay

El Colibri Boutique Hotel and Spa

Rooms start at $169 (midweek specials for $139).

Buellton: Off Highway 101 between Santa Maria and Santa Barbara

Marriott Santa Ynez

Rooms start at $149.

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Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Avalon Lodge in South Lake Tahoe is giving 10 percent of its annual Monday profits to one charity. Nominate and select a nonprofit beneficiary via a short five-question form online.

• Lake Tahoe Unified School District's board will have its annual retreat Oct. 23 at 3:15pm at the student union at South Tahoe High School. The regular meeting will immediately follow the retreat.

• Travel website TravelOrMove.com calls Reno one of the world's "super cool" communities.

• Fire restrictions have been lifted for most of western

Nevada on state and federal land, including at Lake Tahoe.

• There will be a political forum Oct. 17 from 7-9pm at Sierra Nevada College for the two candidates for Washoe County School District board of education. Lisa Ruggerio and Dale Richardson are running for District A.

Woman survives fall of more than 100 feet at Eagle Falls

A 20-year-old Chico woman sustained serious injuries when she fell near the Emerald Bay overlook at Lake Tahoe on Oct. 13.

According to El Dorado County sheriff's deputies, she fell approximately 100 feet down the lower Eagle Falls.

The woman's name has not been released.

The incident occurred about 2:15pm.

"Due to the location of the victim and her major injuries, rescuers called for the California Highway Patrol helicopter H-2) to conduct a hoist operation and turn the victim over to CalStar for transport to Renown Medical Center," Deputy Damian Frisby said in an email to *Lake Tahoe News*.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

El Dorado County man found dead at Soledad prison

By AP

California prison officials are investigating the recent death of a Soledad prison inmate as a homicide.

Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation officials made the announcement Thursday after receiving an autopsy report.

Rick Stockton, 52, was found unconscious in a bathroom at the medium-security Correctional Training Facility on Sunday. He was declared dead at an outside hospital shortly afterward. CDCR didn’t disclose the cause of death.

Stockton entered the prison system on August 1999 from El Dorado County, where he was convicted of possession of a deadly weapon, grand theft, robbery, and forgery. He was serving a sentence of 25-year-to-life.

Letter: Wollan is good for Placer County Water Agency

To the community,

Returning Otis Wollan to the Placer County Water Agency

District 5 director’s seat is a good idea for a number of reasons, not the least being his “at-home” knowledge of District Five that comes from years of working with a large network of Tahoe, Truckee, American and Bear

River expertise and experience, that he helped create.

He has 20 years of previous experience on the PCWA Board of Directors. That’s given him a whole-district focus that is particularly important for residents in the Lake Tahoe area, where he has an established track record of making sure that local concerns aren’t orphaned because of their distance from Auburn.

During his previous time on the PCWA Board, for instance, he brought $1.5 million to the Lake Tahoe area for local water projects, an investment he called a “down payment for the future.”

Otis Wollan envisions a District 5 future with secure water supplies, in an environment made safer from the threat of wildfire. I’ll definitely vote for that.

Will Stockwin, Colfax

Art event benefits Tahoe Tallac Association

Run Salmon Run, a community art project and fundraiser for the Tahoe Tallac Association, is Oct. 20 from 5-8p at MontBleu casino in Stateline.

Thirty-five fiberglass fish designed by local artists will be featured at a live auction emceed by George Alm.

Valerie Kuda, project organizer, was inspired to celebrate what she calls Tahoe's favorite fall fish. Kuda paired local artists with sponsors to create a unique design on 4 inch x 24 inch fiberglass salmon.

Local artists such as Jared Manninen, Kristen Boles and Gina Stowell donated their time to create a fish.

Vehicle found in S. Lake Tahoe belongs to missing Elk Grove man

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

A vehicle registered to an Elk Grove man who was reported missing in May was located Friday down a steep embankment off Highway 50 in South Lake Tahoe.

Sgt. Dan Paxton of the California Highway Patrol said the vehicle, a 2001 Honda Civic, was spotted near Johnson Pass Road about 2pm Oct. 12 by a person walking a dog in an area above the crash site. He said the vehicle was about 100 feet down an embankment on the south side of Highway 50.

When officers reached the vehicle and found no one inside, the El Dorado County sheriff's search and rescue team brought in a dog to search the area. Paxton said human remains were found about 100 feet from the vehicle.

The remains were turned over to the coroner. Efforts will be made to identify the body from dental work, Paxton said.

The vehicle had major damage, which could have been sustained as it went down the embankment, he said, but it has not been determined when the crash occurred. Paxton said no reports of a collision at that site had been reported.

When officers ran the license plate number, they learned it was registered to an Elk Grove man in his mid-40s who had been reported missing five months ago.