U.S. Olympic gold hasn’t made for winning bets

By Sally Ho, AP

Rowing, shooting and judo – the U.S. may have won big gold medals in those Olympic events but some of the most prominent sports books didn’t even bother with them.

The bookmakers in Nevada said there’s been little money and few expectations for Olympic sports wagering this year, as the Games returned to the betting board after being off limits for more than a decade in the Silver State.

“I know that they’re watching. I just know they aren’t betting,” said Jay Kornegay, who runs the sports book at the Westgate Las Vegas Resort and Casino. The largest single sports book in town offered more than 70 events for betting, but cut their losses with the so-called second- and third-tier sports that the U.S. took gold medals in.

Sporting events at the 2016 Summer Games from Rio de Janeiro have been the first since the 2000 Olympics in Sydney that bettors in Nevada could put their money on, though relatively few have.

State gambling regulators were previously against having wagers on what it considered amateur sports but Las Vegas bookmakers successfully lobbied them last year to change the policy. Rivals at the international sports books in Great Britain, Ireland and Australia and offshore Internet sites have already allowed such bets.

Officials at the local sports books said they didn’t expect a sweeping boon to business but that whatever action they’ve gotten, however little, has been better than nothing.

Basketball this summer has reigned supreme, as a steady number of bettors backed the familiar NBA stars dominating the men's Olympic games. Soccer and golf were also among the more popular events that were wagered on.

The same can't be said of the more obscure sports that some sports books said they didn't get any bites on whatsoever. The overall amounts seen per bet – $10 to $20 – for the Olympics have been peanuts compared to the record $132.5 million wagered in Nevada on this year's Super Bowl.

And though marquee events in the pool and on the gymnastics floor are always a highlight for viewers, the bookmakers said it appears that few people feel confident enough about a sport they only pay attention to once every four years to put their money on it.

"The ones that do well are the ones people are used to betting on a daily basis," said Nick Bogdanovich, the head odds-maker for William Hill, which runs more than a hundred sports books in the state.

Meanwhile, the Wynn Las Vegas resort and casino took a relatively conservative approach by offering only a half dozen events on the betting board. Johnny Avello, the longtime odds-maker and sports book director, said he sensed that there would be mild interest just like in the 1990s.

"I put in a lot of time in it for very little action," Avello said.

But the bookmakers also said it's not for a lack of interest in the Games, as the competitions have brought people out who just want to watch. That's created a festive, patriotic scene at the casinos during what is typically a slower sports betting month.

"We've had a lot of inquiries about the odds and people look them over and they just don't run to the betting windows,"

Kornegay said.

Michael Franti keeps crowd on its toes



Michael Franti thrives on interacting with his devoted fans. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

STATELINE – Seeing Michael Franti perform is a workout for the body and the brain.

The singer-musician, who can cross genres as wide-ranging as reggae and soul to rap and alternative, provided a personable,

press-the-flesh concert for hundreds at MontBleu’s showroom Aug. 19.

What the crowd received was a feast for the senses – hearing, sight and touch.

Franti with his five-piece band is known for getting up close and personal with his fans – especially through his signature messages of social consciousness.

This show was no different in delivering his messages of hope – all at the same time keeping the crowd on its feet, swaying, jumping and dancing for a few hours. A few people held up neon signs of “love” on cardboard.

His latest hit “Good to Be Alive Today,” which he performed, tells the story of an ideal world without violence, strife and racism. It went viral on social media before its formal release.

“Some people trying to get high. Some people losing their minds. Some people trying to get by. And when you look in my eyes, you see the sign of the times. We are looking for the same things. What if this song was No. 1? Would it mean that love had won? Would it mean that the world was saved, and no guns were drawn today?” – “Good to Be Alive Today”.

As he played a collection of songs for his Soul Rocker tour, Franti weaved his way through the audience on several occasions. Many reached out to touch him like he was a social justice prophet.

“It’s good to have him in the world,” John Eby of Nevada City said, summing up his love of the spiritual artist. He was surrounded by dancing women on the second level.



Michael Franti captivates an appreciative audience at MontBleu. Photo/Kathryn Reed

About a third of the time, Franti set up a mini stage near the back and brought several people on stage to dance and sing with him. In front, the guitarist even brought up his son, Cappy, to join the band and often turned the lights up to show off the audience.

“Hello, Tahoe. Anybody get any lake time, any beach time today?” he bellowed.

Franti, who was adopted by a Finnish-American couple, often engaged his fans with banter, chatting up his life and background. He was born in Oakland, grew up in Davis and lives in San Francisco – of which he invited all the fans to join him there.

The no-holds-barred show kept moving, albeit a bit repetitive at times, with Franti favorites such as his well-known opening number – "Hey, hey, hey," off the "Sound of Sunshine" album, a tune he also performed along with his last song – the cult favorite "Say Hey." (Franti even produced a San Francisco Giants version in 2010.)

Off his latest album, he graced the stage and beyond with "We Are Earthlings" and "My Favorite Wine is Tequila." To that, many raised their glasses. He tipped his hat to musicians we've recently lost such as David Bowie, Glenn Frey and Prince – to which he launched a tribute performing "Purple Rain."

Much of Franti's music serves to overcome obstacles with positive reinforcements such as his tunes – "I Got Love For You," which he performed along with the long version of "I'm Alive." The latter had the crowd bouncing as if at the gym during aerobics.

He even got the audience square dancing with "Life is Better With You" – the culmination of a story in which he had to dance in front of the class in grade school and later redeemed himself in a bar later in life.

Franti began his music career in 1986 as part of the industrial punk band The Beatnigs. Eight years later, he formed his mainstay band "Spearhead."

Alternative artist, Zella Day, in her rough Alanis Morissette style, opened for Franti.

Haase provides primer for Tahoe coaches



Jerrod Hasse is a leader among coaches. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

Skill is only part of what it takes to win.

Character is a large component of success, even more so when it comes to team sports.

Jerrod Haase was in town Friday to impart some of his wisdom to local coaches and athletes in separate talks.

Haase was a two-time Nevada most valuable player when he played for South Tahoe High School's basketball team. Earlier this year he was hired to be the men's basketball coach at Stanford University.



Jerrod Haase offers tips to South Shore youth coaches during a talk Aug. 19 at STHS. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

His return to STHS on Aug. 19 was the first time he had been back to the campus in close to two decades. It's changed a bit since he was there, especially with an infusion of nearly $100 million in facilities upgrades in the last few years.

The gym where two of his pictures hang (along with two of his

brother, Steven) is newly renovated. Still, this is where he started to make a name for himself.

“I learned the fundamentals for everything I am here in Tahoe,” Haase told the coaches.

Whenever he speaks, he talks about growing up here, his coaches, teachers and teammates. His roots run deep, having been the youngest of five kids – and all were exceptional athletes. His mom and sister still live here.

“He was a few years behind me, but he was a true student of the game. His court awareness was beyond his years,” Tom Fay told *Lake Tahoe News.* Fay brought his son, Sinjin who is a seventh-grader, to hear Haase speak.



Jerrod Haase, right, and Tom Fay, center, talk about their time at STHS, while Sinjin Fay listens. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

For STHS Athletic Director Tony Sunzeri it was like a homecoming to see Haase. He was a freshman when Haase was a senior.

“He was just larger than life at that time and he’s even larger now, and I didn’t think that was possible,” Sunzeri said of Haase. “He is a legend, a hero and an inspiration.”

Haase ran cross country in high school, which helped with his training to be able to run up and down the hardwood of the gym.

At 42, he is still fit and looks like he could be on the floor instead of courtside.

He recognizes that life’s lessons are on a continuum, with each stage providing an opportunity to build on the one before.

“I’ve never been the smartest guy in the room, but I have some level of common sense,” Haase said.

The goal of the gathering Friday was to help coaches be better at what they do. One asked about how to deal with social media.

Haase said to embrace it – which was not always his philosophy.

“It’s your opportunity to brand yourself,” Haase said.

Of course the flip side is when less than flattering things are posted it can turn into negative branding.

The coach believes in freedom of expression, but at the same time is adamant that when people are part of a team they need to be held accountable and that the organization can put in parameters regarding what is acceptable on social media.

“If the standards are broken, then there are consequences,”

Haase said.



Jerrod Haase and STHS Athletic Director Tony Sunzeri went to STHS for one year together. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

When he was most recently head coach at the University of Alabama, Birmingham, Haase knew he needed to define who the team was. It has to be specific or else it will get diluted.

After several months, he whittled it to honesty, loyalty, accountability, unselfishness and appreciation. It took time for the team to embrace those components and understand what they meant. And when it clicked, the team started winning.

Haase also noted that what defines a team will depend on the

institution. He is working on Stanford’s motto, but knows it will be different than UAB because the universities and students are different.

‘Blob’ may help drought-stricken California

By Joshua Emerson Smith, San Diego Union Tribune

As a series of marine heat waves linked to climate change has thrown ocean ecosystems out of whack from Australia to the coast of California, a cooling trend called La Niña has given scientists hope that water temperatures could come back into balance.

But so far, the cooling weather pattern – predicted to follow as a result of last winter’s El Niño – remains squeezed by warmer ocean temperatures along a narrow stretch of Earth’s equator.

That might be good news for drought-stricken California because La Niña often brings bone-dry winters, when the state has its best chance for substantial rain and snowfall.

Read the whole story

Mentally ill suspects test law enforcement

Publisher's note: ***This is one of several stories about mental health issues in the Lake Tahoe Basin that will be running through October. The other stories may be accessed from the Home page under Special Projects, then click on Mental Health.***

By Susan Wood

El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury has learned personally there is no magic pill in terms of eliminating mental illness on our streets and in the judicial system.

Even with her steely resolve, calming demeanor and steady hand on the gavel that delivers justice in South Lake Tahoe, Kingsbury – who serves behind the bench of Behavioral Court among other disciplines – couldn't save her sister from a debilitating struggle with bipolar disorder.

She knew the fatal result of her sister's well being when she got a call from the coroner in Sacramento a few years ago.



"It was heartbreaking," Kingsbury told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Like many, Kingsbury has seen her fair share of people "out there screaming and yelling and pushing shopping carts" barely able to hold onto some semblance of reality.

That's just how cunning mental illness is. Throw in alcohol and drug addiction, and the problem grows like it's on

steroids.

“Often there are substance abuse issues. That’s when it becomes difficult because you need these people to detox to get to the root of the problem,” the longtime judge explained.

Medication can only go so far. With bipolar disorder, aka manic depression, the pharmaceuticals have side effects that prompt many afflicted to want to avoid them. The period of elevated mood counters the down times enough that some people suffering from it don’t want to end the up feelings.

“They hate the lows and love the highs,” Kingsbury said.

In the 1980s, the bulk of psychiatric hospitals in California closed, leaving the mentally ill to fend for themselves on the streets. When they’re brought in, often from an episode with police, they can get an assessment and substance abuse help if necessary.

Transitional housing, including the few units available in South Lake Tahoe, provides for stability in the community for those just seeking another chance at life.

“Without the housing, a lot of folks will do OK for a while then things will go south,” Kingsbury said.

Jail is not the housing answer

“Do you know what the largest psychiatric hospital is?” El Dorado County Undersheriff Randy



El Dorado County Undersheriff Randy Peshon recognizes the difficulties his deputies have with suspects who have mental health issues. Photo/Provided

Peshon asked rhetorically, answering: “State prison.”

“There is no easy answer. Part of the problems we face is the money we have for mental health is in a silo – some people might not fit the criteria,” said Peshon, who worked in the county jail in South Lake Tahoe for years. He now works in Placerville as second in command.

Peshon has viewed the double-edged sword of the mounting issue. Medical privacy laws have become stricter, while the stigma attached to mental illness has increased. The burden lies heavily on law enforcement trying to quell or at least reduce the perplexing problem.

“If law enforcement is aware somebody is suffering from mental illness, we have officers who are trained in crisis intervention,” Peshon said. “A lot of these situations are brought on because these people go off their meds.”

From the county jail and mental health to the state court system and local beats of police and sheriff's departments, government continues to wrestle with the crisis.

In many cases, some refuse help. In others, the help fails to go far enough. Some are unaware of the assistance available – and sometimes, the system works for those who work it.

The highs and lows of fighting the good fight are as dramatic as the ups and downs of those struggling with mental illness.

Statewide, there are 112,300 people in California prisons, the Public Policy Institute reported. Last year 83,280 people were in county jails. Estimates are that 15 percent of those incarcerated are mentally ill.

In the entire state, California hospitals have about 7,500 beds, the Los Angeles Times reported in a recent study. The vast majority of these beds – 92 percent – is filled by patients from the criminal justice system and is no longer available for those in need of civil commitment. Only 600 beds are available for those just checking in, to say for example, to help themselves.

In other words, someone suffering from mental illness is apt to fall into law enforcement's lap to gain safe harbor.

Officers want more tools

The lack of safe places to go represents a tough quandary for police officers who see the most unpredictable members of society who may either hurt themselves, loved ones or even those who may be passing by.

About a decade ago, a man who appeared to have a psychotic break stood in the middle of the street between the Taqueria and the former *Tahoe Daily Tribune* building and threatened to shoot himself in the head. At times, he laid down as if surrendering but kept a gun in his hand. Bystanders gathered

around, exacerbating a pressing issue for police.

South Lake Tahoe SWAT Police Officer Brandon Auxier remembers the episode and points to it as just the tip of the iceberg in what police see almost daily.

“It’s a constant problem. We pick them up then sometimes Barton does not have any beds, and they’ve had to travel hundreds of miles,” Auxier said, adding he’s noticed more calls lately resulting in “5150s.” This term of condition relates to five-point restraints on the person who is suffering a mental breakdown.

“In the last couple of years, we’ve seen an increase,” the officer told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Many of those afflicted with mental illness are homeless. And with the popularity of the new winter warming center in the city, one can see there is a demand for a safe place for these people.

Auxier, a 13-year officer, has seen several repeat calls for those who are endangering themselves or others and create a scene. He’s part of a crisis intervention team, which prompts welfare checks on those who go through the county Mental Health program. Once a case is developed, restrictions abound on what caseworkers can do or say because of confidentiality issues.

Balancing the law of the land

And there lies a dilemma for law enforcement.

South Lake Tahoe Police Chief Brian Uhler would like to see more allowable communication between mental health caseworkers and police given the tenuous situations officers and the public are placed in when the call comes in.



“When we know the situation, we can have empathy and some patience.”

— South Lake Tahoe Police Chief Brian Uhler

“It’s a huge issue. The expectation is for us to manage or know a mental health breakdown. When we know the situation, we can have empathy and some patience. The issue is we face laws that prevent health care professionals from even talking to us,” Uhler said. “I’ve learned that even if we had the psychiatrist involved, we could not even confirm if this person is a patient. So we’re stuck out there with no help

from the mental health community even if they want to help. It takes a change in state law."

Law enforcement has a balancing act dealing with these calls.

Officers need to turn on a dime in terms of showing control and strength, while gently switching to empathy and heightening their listening skills.

When they pick these people up, some cases end well over time between bringing in the courts, transitional housing, medications, caring loved ones and police welfare checks.

But others break the hearts of officers – especially after they get to know the people behind the case numbers.

El Dorado County sheriff's Sgt. Michael Yarbrough empathizes with Chief Uhler on wanting to gather as much information as possible on someone struggling with mental illness creating a threat in public.

He's seen his fair share of crises as Officer of the Year honored by the National Alliance of Mental Illness.

Like Auxier, the county sheriff's department recognizes Yarbrough as spearheading the county sheriff's response through the CIT program. After all, he had three years on the police force on the rough streets of Stockton before landing in South Lake Tahoe in 1997.

Yarbrough said it's tricky dealing with the mentally ill. Officers need to maintain that sense of control but show it in a kinder, gentler way. Communication – verbal and non-verbal as in body language – is key.

"It's a different way of controlling, but you're still in charge," he said.

With "off-the-wall" individual behavior, Yarbrough has been trained and is experienced to see the body language and hear

the responses of the subject of the call to be able to tell whether someone is undergoing a mental breakdown.

There's such a new perspective in law enforcement to deal with these calls.

"It's social services driven now," Yarbrough said, comparing the situations to the old ways of handling a call where officers would just pick up the parties and throw them in jail to simply get them off the streets.

"Sometimes it would take six hospital visits before (the subjects) get it or for their families to get it," he said.



El Dorado County sheriff's Sgt. Michael Yarbrough is a leader in his agency when it comes to handling mental health issues. Photo/Susan Wood

Now officers are known to approach an individual with care, passing out pamphlets mentioning resources. Yarbrough reached in his desk drawer and quickly got out a county mental health brochure labeled "Guidelines for calling 911" in the event of

a mental health emergency. Within the pamphlet, there's even a script a family member may use to call in a mental health crisis at home. Also included is a list of critical phone numbers of resources.

The sergeant understands the call often doesn't end with one response.

If he doesn't have the answer, a member of a multi-disciplinary team that serves as a local think tank in dealing with mental health cases may have it. The think tank involves law enforcement, county jail, Mental Health Department and Barton Memorial Hospital.

The need is overwhelming. In three years, Yarbrough has seen 1,500 reports go through the system.

"It took some time to get (the caseload) managed," he said.

He analyzed the cases to determine who would be best served by regular visits among his officer force. The dozen deputies who may go out on the welfare checks count medications, sit down with the subject for some positive reinforcement and talk to family members to get a sense of how the person is doing. They also keep an eye on whether clandestine substances appear.

"I'd say about 70-80 percent involve drugs and alcohol," he said.

Yarbrough has become so keenly aware of the human condition he's become an expert in the topic. He's been invited to speak about the programs at a mental health conference in September in Sacramento.

"I can't give enough credit to the whole collaboration. (The sheriff's department) wouldn't be able to do this on our own," he said.

Beyond the agency resources, Yarbrough relies heavily on caring, knowledgeable family members.

Mental illness is a tricky condition to deal with because it comes with a stigma and emotions attached. Sometimes family members are reluctant to say something or intervene because they're afraid of offending the loved one.

California AB1424, signed into law in 2015, requires any person who is authorized to have a person taken into custody for involuntary treatment consider available relevant information about the historical nature of the person's mental disorder.

Upon the CIT visits, waivers are signed enabling family members to make critical decisions on the subject's behalf. There's a long questionnaire asking for information detailing the loved one's historical condition, with a list of phone numbers to contact in the event of a crisis.

Yarbrough sees the slow-moving legislative changes as long in coming and necessary to a person's well being because there is no easy fix.

"Why do we think the brain is the only thing completely immune to illness?" the sergeant asked. "That's the hardest thing for people to understand."

Help for those who help

The need to assist the mentally ill on the streets prompted retired San Rafael police Officer Joel Fay to make a business out of training officers to handle their calls.

The Marin County town has a plaguing homeless population with many classified as mentally ill.

"I thought: 'Where do these people go?'" he said.

He found a way to balance being a police officer and psychologist.

"I knew that police needed to change the way we respond to

calls," he said. "For me, it was kind of like a mission in life."

He moved into the field of psychology before fully retiring from the force five years ago. He contracts with counties to bring his specific expertise to their law enforcement units.

El Dorado County, which included Yarbrough, is among the jurisdictions that hired Fay's business to assist them.

Fay trains the officers to look for signs of psychotic behavior such as the subjects reacting to other stimuli. There are clues of what to look for – whether they "see" the officer, can they feel the officer's presence and do they comply with requests. If they can't meet any of the criteria, there are other forces at work in the subject's brain.

"At that time, the officer knows to slow it down and make them come around to their way of thinking," he said.

There are also telltale signs of depression the psychologist trains officers to look for.

"There are things to say to work with these people. I tell (the officers) that it's important for you to stay calm," he said. "I tell them to pretend like it's someone you know."

Fay admits it takes a while for law enforcement to change their frame of mind on dealing with these types of scenarios.

"The goal of the training is to show how to use less force and for officers and the citizens to get hurt less," he said.

Granted, the approach sounds simple and inroads are being made to treat the mentally ill differently. However, there are still cracks in the overall system.

Fay was empathetic to Uhler's complaints about not having enough information to keep all involved safe from harm. He echoed the chief's sentiment about the need to change the

laws.

“There are so many road blocks. One problem is the law requires a person to be in imminent danger to get some help,” Fay told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It’s very frustrating because frequently we’re not allowed to collaborate.”

Mental health on the case

Sabrina Owen, the manager of the county’s mental health programs, sympathized with law enforcement wanting more information readily available on mental health cases. However, she reminded that privacy laws override the need to find an easier way to deal with public displays from those afflicted with a mental illness.

“It’s nice that family members can always call. We can take phone calls all day long and take information, but we can’t acknowledge a case or give it out unless a patient signs a consent form,” she said.

Nonetheless, the programs set into place seem to be working if one looks at the numbers.

Despite what law enforcement projects, mental health evaluations between jurisdictions in the city and county have trended downward in the last few years.

The sheriff’s department in South Lake Tahoe reported 543 cases assigned to subjects for 2014; 501 in 2015; and halfway through 2016 lists 187.

South Lake Tahoe 5150 evaluations number 404 in 2014; 381 the following year; and to date this year show 160.

Owen attributes the drop in statistics to the combined efforts of the CIT consortium and other similar programs.

The mental health professional views the well-being checks as a tried and true way of keeping a careful eye on people who

face the very large swings in life’s ups and downs.

Owen strongly supports the idea of intensive case management. This means tracking the subject’s medication, meeting with the person and urging family and group therapy.

“And in respect to law enforcement as first responders, (the mentally ill) would just like to know someone cares,” she said.

Fantasy sports operators seek return to Nev.

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Review-Journal

FanDuel and DraftKings, the largest daily fantasy sports operators in the country, are angling to return to the Nevada market and a representative will make a presentation to the Nevada Gaming Policy Committee next week.

Scott Ward, a public policy attorney with the Washington-based Orrick law firm, is expected to address the committee Tuesday on proposed legislation establishing a framework for regulating daily fantasy sports in the state.

FanDuel and DraftKings abandoned the Nevada market in October when regulators and Attorney General Adam Laxalt issued an opinion that daily fantasy sports is a form of gambling and that game operators are required to be licensed.

Read the whole story

Silver lining of Vail’s bid to take over skiing

By Devon O’Neil, Outside

When Vail Resorts announced this month its plan to buy Whistler Blackcomb, the Canadian ski resort, you could almost hear the sound of 10 million jaws dropping. It wasn’t Coke buying Pepsi, but to skiers and snowboarders and anyone who follows the balance of snowsports power, it was close.

For years, the only North American resort that has attracted more skier visits than Vail Mountain has been Whistler Blackcomb. Vail’s 5,289 skiable acres sounds like a lot. In fact, until last year’s merging of two other ski areas Vail Resorts recently bought, Park City and Canyons in Utah, it was by far the most in America. But Vail’s size is a mere 65 percent of Whistler Blackcomb’s 8,171 skiable acres.

A healthy ski industry is good for the towns and regions that host it, good for the people who work in it, and, most importantly, good for everyone who hopes their great-grandchildren get to enjoy this most fulfilling pastime of sliding downhill on snow.

Read the whole story

Squaw’s McKinney set the pace for U.S. skiers

By Sam Taggart, Powder

In the 1980s, Tamara McKinney skied fast down icy race courses across the globe, setting records and accumulating podium appearances in every event possible on the international circuit. She was the first American woman to win the overall World Cup title, and many of her records held strong until Lindsey Vonn began racing years later.

Today, McKinney channels her competitive and friendly spirit selling luxury real estate in her adopted hometown, Squaw Valley. McKinney, the youngest of eight siblings, was born in Lexington, Ky., but moved west when she was just a toddler, and spent most of childhood at her family’s home near Lake Tahoe. McKinney’s parents were steeplechase jockeys who balanced a long-distance marriage. At one point, her father, Rigan, was the fastest jockey in the country, and a handful of her siblings also held positions on the U.S. Ski Team—including her brother, speed skier Steve McKinney—so, it’s clear, racing is in her blood.

Powder sat down with McKinney to find out which lessons she learned as a ski racer still resonate, the importance of giving back to younger generations, and why “you’re never too cool to be nice.”

Read the whole story

No solutions come out of housing forum

By Terra Breeden

Whether you own a home in Lake Tahoe or rent one, count yourself lucky to have a roof over your head. The housing crisis in Lake Tahoe is reaching a crescendo.

On Aug. 17 a throng of concerned residents met at the Tahoe Beach Retreat for a community meeting regarding the South Lake Tahoe housing crisis.

The meeting, hosted by Tahoe Regional Young Professionals, addressed the issues that have led to the affordable housing shortage in the community and discussed solutions to the problem.

Jenna Palacio, Executive Director of TRYP said, “This isn’t your mom’s affordable housing event. It’s a serious problem and we are saying goodbye to a lot of people who can’t afford a house here.”

A panel of experts from Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, Urban Housing Communities project, Tahoe Prosperity Center and Tahoe Truckee Foundation presented the reasons Lake Tahoe is experiencing a housing crisis.



Dozens of people on Aug. 17 attend a housing workshop in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Terra Breeden

According to a study conducted by the Tahoe Prosperity Center, the housing shortage is because of the very nature of the area. Quite simply, Lake Tahoe is a resort community that relies on tourism dollars to support the economy.

Employment in the Lake Tahoe community is primarily focused on tourism and visitor services. The majority of residents work in these industries where pay is low and jobs are often seasonal. Sixty-three percent of Tahoe residents fall into a low-income bracket.

Because Lake Tahoe is a world-renowned destination, many people from outside the community buy houses in Tahoe as vacation homes. With limited land to build and expand towns, property is becoming scarce. These factors combined have made Lake Tahoe houses expensive, and home rentals are becoming harder and harder to find.

“We are in a housing crisis simply because there aren’t enough houses for residents and there is limited room to build more,”

speaker Sara Schrichte from the Tahoe Truckee Foundation said.

According to the study by the Tahoe Prosperity Center, nearly two-thirds of Tahoe's houses are second homes, not primary residencies, and the median home price in the Tahoe basin was 1,007 percent of the median income. This ratio was significantly higher than ratios observed in other areas such as Reno (530 percent) and the Bay Area (838 percent).

After laying out why the community is experiencing a housing shortage, the panel and audience began a discussion about what can actually be done to solve this problem. There is so much red tape from the state government and local planning agencies such as TRPA, that solutions to the housing crisis seemed daunting.

"We are always going to have a very limited supply and a very high demand for people who want to buy homes in Lake Tahoe," South Lake Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry said.

Yet, many of the ideas focused on solving the housing problem and boosting the local economy so that Tahoe residents can actually afford a home in the area where they live and work.

Heidi Hill Drum from the Tahoe Prosperity Center proposed said that building the economy in Lake Tahoe is a key factor in solving the housing crisis. If residents can generate higher incomes, they will be able to afford homes in Lake Tahoe.

"The way our organization is approaching housing is with a work force project that allows businesses to expand and offer higher wages," Drum said.

Another solution to combatting the housing crisis is to develop more affordable housing projects. All of the low-income housing that has been built in the Tahoe basin has been immensely successful. The Aspens, an affordable housing project in South Lake Tahoe geared toward low-income residents, has more than 40 units and all are occupied. In

fact, there is a six-year waiting list to rent a home in the Aspens.

But to build more affordable housing in Tahoe requires government funding for building permits, land parcels, and housing development. Local taxpayers won't fund these projects, so the state government – still taxpayers – has to step in and make it happen.

"We need affordable housing in our towns, but we are competing for government funds with cities like Fresno where people really need affordable housing," Kerry said.

Once the panel laid out the issues and possible solutions to the housing crisis, the audience asked questions and ones submitted online were asked.

One of the questions focused on the tiny house trend that is taking the country by storm. "Are tiny houses available in Tahoe? Could tiny houses help revive the housing crisis?" were questions posted by a resident in the online discussion.

According to the panel, tiny houses require the same amount of government fees as a $450,000 private residence.

"The fees don't pencil out. But I have a developer interested in building smaller units to make it economically feasible," Susan Simon from Simon Consulting said. "However, it's a great question and worth looking into."

Lyn Barnett, a local resident and founder of the nonprofit organization Saint Joseph Community Land Trust, said, "I advocate that TRPA set aside a large percentage of homes to be owner-occupied only and not be a second home for someone in Los Angeles." Barnett used to work for the bi-state regulatory agency before starting his own consulting firm.

Barnett's sentiment echoed that of many community members because his statement was met with a resounding applause.

After Barnett suggested putting a cap on vacation homes in the Tahoe basin, many other audience members voiced similar opinions. Everyone seemed to agree that, yes, Tahoe is a place where people from all over the world want to live, but if we keep letting non-residents buy all of the homes in the Tahoe basin, pretty soon there will be nowhere for local residents to reside.

“It’s going to take all of us to solve the housing problem – the community, the city, everyone. But we have to do what we can to provide affordable housing for everyone,” Mark Irving from the Urban Housing Communities project said.

Ex-Truckee resident seeks first medal in 5 Olympics



Katerina Nash, who trains in Truckee, will compete in mountain biking in Rio on Aug. 19. Photo/Clif Bar & Company

By Chris Murray, Reno Gazette-Journal

Atlanta. Nagano. Salt Lake City. London.

It sounds like a nice list of cities to travel to while on vacation. But for former Wolf Pack star Katerina Nash, it's the list of Olympic Games she has participated in. And come Saturday, you can add Rio to the list. Nash, who lived in Truckee from 2000-13 and still trains there, will compete in her locally unparalleled fifth Olympics this weekend. It will be her third Summer Games to go with two Winter Games appearances.

Nash's Olympic career has spanned a ridiculous 20 years, her first appearance coming in Atlanta at age 18 and what will likely be her last Olympics coming in Rio at age 38. Both of those appearances were in mountain biking, but Nash also added two Winter Olympic appearances in Nordic skiing in between.

Nash, one of 30 in the field for the cross country mountain bike, is one of the world's most experienced active Olympians. She'll toe the line for her 11th event in her five Olympics appearances Saturday at 8:30am. When she does so, she'll be just as nervous in Rio as she was in Atlanta, which marked her first trip to America.

Read the whole story