

Training is the key to school resource officers' success

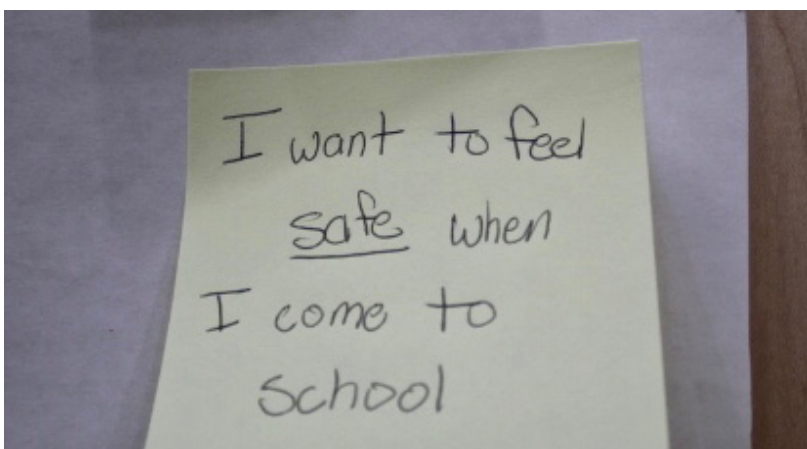
By Elizabeth Englander, The Conversation

Despite legitimate concerns about the effects of placing school resource officers in the nation's schools, the reality is having these officers on a school's campus can literally save lives and avert tragedy.

That much became clear on March 20, when school resource officer Blaine Gaskill rushed toward a shooter who had opened fire at Great Mills High School in Maryland. He effectively stopped the shooter, who had already wounded two students.

Gaskill's heroic work stands in stark contrast to that of Deputy Scot Peterson, who was seen on video footage standing outside Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., as the school shooting there was under way. At Marjory Stoneman, 17 people, mostly students, were killed on Feb. 14.

So why do some resource officers perform so well while others don't?



A South Tahoe High School student's plea. Photo/Julie Threewit

The need for training and standards

What makes a school resource officer successful, though, isn't only about how they respond to emergencies. In fact, a critical part of their role is in prevention. Stopping school violence before it ever begins relies heavily on the training that school resource officers, commonly referred to as SROs, receive or don't receive.

I make these observations as the director of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center and as one who has co-authored a technical report on campus violence prevention and response to active shooters.

Incredibly, there are no national standards – and in many cases no state standards – for school resource officer training. That means there is little consistency in how SROs are prepared to work in schools.

While school resource officers have already undergone regular police training, SRO training that exists tends to focus on legal issues or school security, as opposed to other things like de-escalation techniques, bullying and cyberbullying, child development, symptoms of trauma, or educational issues, such as working with children with special needs.

How school officers could make things worse

In my opinion, this lack of training is one of the factors that is fueling the debate over the use of police officers in schools. The U.S. Department of Education has recommended that school resource officers not be involved in school discipline, as inadequately trained officers may inadvertently escalate problems or criminalize students and contribute to what has come to be known as the “school-to-prison pipeline.” This is a particularly sensitive issue when it comes to dealing with minority and disabled students.

In 2015, Deputy Ben Fields garnered national attention when a

cell phone video emerged of him appearing to body slam and drag a female student across a classroom at Spring Valley High School in Columbia, S.C. Such incidents force us to question the wisdom of putting police officers, particularly officers not trained to work with children, in American high schools.

To complicate things further, one study that examined the impact of SROs found that their presence in schools was not all good or bad. For instance, while arrests for disorderly conduct increased, arrests for more serious offenses decreased.

And yet other studies suggest how positive an influence school resource officers can be. Research on almost 2,000 students found that youth who had positive opinions about police officers reported feeling safer in schools with SROs present. In a study in which researchers interviewed dozens of SROs, officers themselves tend to emphasize the importance of informal discussions and education, instead of being overly reliant on formal discipline, whenever possible.

Training is emerging as key in helping SROs successfully increase school safety, as recognized in a U.S. Department of Education guide on improving school climate and discipline and "A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools."

Yet despite a high level of consensus among researchers and criminal justice experts that school resource officers should undergo specialized training, few of the 19,000 SROs in the United States are in fact trained.

Different training, different outcomes

Gaps in training could also explain the difference between the responses in Florida and Maryland.

In "Campus Violence, Prevention and Response," a 2008 report that I co-authored, my colleagues and I recommended that campus officers should all be trained in active shooter

response tactics. In an active shooter situation, as my colleagues and I argued, campus police need specialized equipment to gain forcible entry into locked buildings and classrooms. This is different from traditional training, where police may be instructed to wait outside. Their staffing levels need to be adequate for the size and layout of the school.

But our report also made recommendations about prevention. A key recommendation was that school personnel need to be trained to identify students at risk.

The Parkland school shooter clearly demonstrated many such warning signs. This is one of the reasons why police there are reviewing why all these warnings did not suggest a significant pattern to local police.

Elizabeth Englander is a professor of psychology and the director of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center at Bridgewater State University.

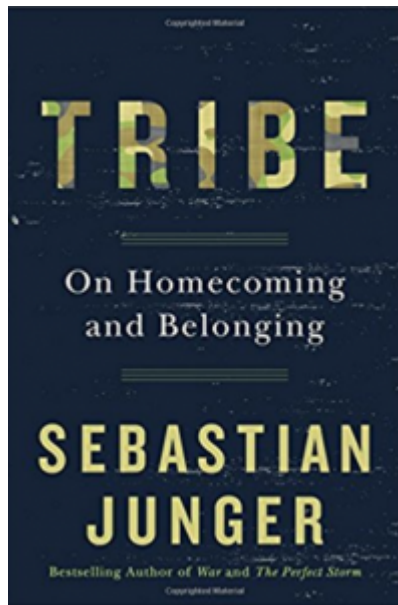
LTN Book Club: How we all need a 'Tribe'

By Susan Wood

The epiphany occurs near the end of the book when it becomes quite clear that the times that try our souls the most are the ones that unite us like no other.

In "Tribe" (Hachette Book Group Inc., 2016) acclaimed writer Sebastian Junger takes us through examples – some severe – in which even in the face of death people not only overcome

life's worst trials and tribulations. They rejoice being a part of humanity.



He cites in the chapter “In Bitter Safety I Awake” how veterans “find themselves missing the war after it’s over” because soldiers experience an unparalleled brotherhood not found when they get home. This talked-about theory may seem hard to understand for civilians who have never stared down the barrel of the gun. Ironically, part of the trauma of war appears “to be giving it up.” A gunner quoted in this fine, easy-read as being in a “tribal sort of situation where we could

help each other without fear.”

Junger should know. His past works include the book titled “War,” as well as the best-selling, contemporary masterpiece about deep-sea fishing while fighting Mother Nature in “The Perfect Storm.” (That was one of my all-time favorite books; Junger makes weather a sexy topic.) His other works, “Fire” in particular, are masterfully crafted in such a way to bring sense to the human condition and living through the elements that make it difficult.

Most people may only relate to the notion that tragedy brings people together if only having been through a natural disaster. We’ve all seen it and said it. Assisting one another in a true sense of community is the one shining light at the end of the tunnel, so to speak.

Modern society isn’t a piece of cake, nor is it a paradise – emotionally, that is. Yet, we have so many choices that are designed to make life easier. Are they?

As Junger points out, early tribes pulled together in unprecedented ways. The clearest case in point shows how the

Native Americans relied on each other for their survival through the basic processes put into place to help them carry on.

But nowadays, the vast majority of us don't personally have to grow or kill our own food, build our own dwellings or defend ourselves from wild animals and enemies. Nonetheless, "we can travel a thousand miles by pushing our foot down on a gas pedal" among other means of modern conveniences.

Perhaps this subtle observation goes to show how simplifying one's life down to the basic needs – connections being the most crucial – makes us happier.

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- Please join in the discussion via commenting. Feel free to pose questions.

- Questions: Can you name and therefore explain a time in your life when you were the most frightened but emerged feeling better about the connections you made through the experience? Do you belong to some type of tribe? If so, what do you get out of the gathering that you don't get elsewhere?

- The next book is "Suitcase Sefton and the American Dream" by Jay Feldman. The novel blends baseball and Japanese internment camps. The review will be published May 1.

Fire funding fix comes with environmental rollbacks

By Jessica Kutz, High Country News

Congress accomplished something unprecedented last week: They passed a bipartisan solution to a knotty budget issue that has hobbled the U.S. Forest Service's ability to do restoration and fire-prevention work in Western forests. The \$1.3 trillion federal spending package, signed into law by President Trump, included a long-sought funding fix for wildfire response. Starting in 2020, the Forest Service will be able to access over \$2 billion a year outside of its regular fire suppression budget.

Some conservation groups question whether the fix was worth the compromises included in the bill, which could undermine environmental protections for forests and wildlife. The bill includes two riders that concern them. The first will allow logging projects less than 3,000 acres in size to move forward with little environmental review, so long as the goal of those projects is to reduce heavy fuel loads that increase fire risk.

A second provision could delay habitat protections for newly listed threatened and endangered species.

Read the whole story

Potential danger for start of rafting season

By Tom Stienstra, San Francisco Chronicle

"Stay out and stay alive."

That's the message a state ranger has for anyone planning a

little fun in the sun at Northern California rivers this weekend.

Warming temperatures in the 70s together with a late-season snow can make for a deadly mix in the upper reaches of the American River – a popular destination for white water rafters – as swift rapids, unseen undertows and frigid temperatures in the 50s can overwhelm even the most experienced swimmers.

Read the whole story

SLT's financial future on precarious ground

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe's finances are stable today. Look again in November and it may be a completely different story.

That will be one of the messages delivered Tuesday by Debbie McIntyre, the city's finance director, when she goes over the midyear budget with the City Council.

What could change in seven months for the city is the potential ballot initiative that would ban vacation home rentals everywhere but the tourist core.

"We could create our own depression in our own city because of the initiative," McIntyre told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The hotel tax is one of three main revenue streams for the city, with property and sales taxes being the other. If that income were to suddenly go away, so would services and staff.

The other concern is what the VHR ban would do to the real estate market, and therefore property taxes. That's a scenario that frightens those who are looking at it from a financial standpoint.

The first thing being hit is the new recreation center. Voters approved Measure P in November 2016 which raised the TOT by 2 percentage points. The added cash is to be dedicated solely toward recreation. That includes what is supposed to be a state-of-the-art recreation center to replace the dilapidated one from the 1970s, improvements to Regan Beach and other items.

The rec center started out at \$25 million, went to \$40 million and now has a price tag of \$33 million. The problem is there is only \$2.5 million in the bank. Without stable TOT, the city doesn't know what it would have for debt service on the rec center.

The council will receive an update about the rec center in late April or in May.

Complicating the matter is that the rec center was used as collateral for the 2006 bonds that the city took out. Now the D Street building and Fire Station No. 1 are the collateral, which means the D Street site can't be sold until the bonds are paid off in 2026.

This makes it more imperative to finish the D Street project so that site can be used by the city. It is one of the projects, which includes relocating the city's corporation yard, that is being recommended by staff to be funded by undesignated reserves.

The city has more than \$10.27 million in the undesignated reserves account. Of that, about \$1.5 million is being recommended to be spent on midyear expense adjustments. McIntyre is proposing then spending about half of the remaining \$8.8 million on one-time expenses.

Her other suggestions include:

- Fully funding the retiree health insurance commitment for the remaining two years
- Police building remodel
- Police, fire, public works radio system
- City vehicle and equipment replacement.

It will be up to the electeds if they want to spend any of that money and then to decide how to do so.

The staff report for the April 3 meeting says, "The finance department did a comprehensive revenue study of the major revenues encompassing the past three years, and determined that TOT budgets should be increased upward but only to the extent actual collections in 2015-16."

Revenues at midyear (the city's fiscal year starts Oct. 1) are up nearly \$2 million. Much of this is TOT and property taxes. Expenses, though, are at more than \$3.2 million. This is why the cash from undesignated reserves is being requested.

Some of the larger additional expenses include:

- \$1.159 million one-time costs for employees per contracts that were recently agreed to;
- \$500,000 to account for salary adjustments;
- \$220,000 for city attorney contract;
- \$200,000 for snow removal from the 2016-17 season;
- \$160,000 three new firefighters.

What isn't in the report is any compensation for Fire Chief Jeff Meston for taking over as acting city manager. Nor is there money for an interim to take over. The budget is being

adjusted by \$140,000 to pay out former City Manager Nancy Kerry for her sick and vacation time. The city manager budget stays the same to reflect Kerry's payout of nine months' worth of salary. The report notes it is not anticipated to have a new city manager until after Sept. 30, at least as far as budgeting goes.

There also isn't any money for roads. This is usually when that budget is adjusted.

The line item capital improvement projects are \$100,000 for the stream environmental restoration at the Whole Foods site and \$85,381 for new equipment in council chambers.

A change going forward is that the city is likely to return to where it has a more comprehensive budget process in the fall, and the midyear would have fewer alterations. McIntyre said this is easier on her department. Doing it the current way, she said, is like preparing two budgets. For department heads, it will mean being more precise at the get-go. That doesn't mean there won't be a midyear budget adjustment, it will just be less robust because of the change.

How much is too much with marijuana edibles?



Marijuana edibles are a big seller in Nevada. Photo Copyright 2018 Carolyn E. Wright

By Chris Kudialis, Las Vegas Sun

Open a pack of convenience store gummy candies and it's hard not to grab a handful at a time to satisfy your craving.

But doing the same for a tube of marijuana gummy candies could leave users on the floor.

Marijuana edibles have quickly become a hot seller in the first seven months of legalized pot in Nevada, with as much as 45 percent of all weed sales being edibles, according to figures from several dispensary owners.

Read the whole story

LT Humane Society's future in state of flux

By Kathryn Reed

It will take the will of community members to make the Lake Tahoe Humane Society relevant, solvent and functioning without a cloud of distrust. Today it is teetering on becoming just a memory.

A handful of people gathered Thursday at the South Lake Tahoe office of the 51-year-old nonprofit, begging the board not to shut down the Humane Society.

The three-member board – Sue Pritchett, Lorna Lefler and Kim Stephenson – were at the helm when former Executive Director **Niki Congero** allegedly stole more than \$100,000. She was fired a year ago this month. The case rests with the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office.

In the past year, the three have done nothing to build the community's trust. They have not taken control. They have implemented few new policies. They have not brought on new board members. They have not tried new fundraising techniques.

They admit to being exhausted and burned out.



Lake Tahoe Humane Society board members Lorna Lefler and Sue Pritchett on March 29 express a willingness to move on. Photo/Kathryn Reed

"I can't think of anything we haven't done," Pritchett said when asked what the board is doing to be solvent. Yet specifics were in short supply, and ultimately it was evident little has been done.

At least three people on Thursday expressed interest in keeping the Human Society's doors open. Wendy Jones said she would help keep the Disaster Animal Response Team viable. After Hurricane Katrina the federal government said cities had to have a plan to care for animals during an emergency. However, Fire Chief Jeff Meston told *Lake Tahoe News* the city has functioned just fine without the Humane Society and wasn't even aware of its DART group.

Others at the gathering questioned how the Humane Society had the audacity to simply give away crates that cost more than \$100. Or why the trash service was canceled, which then led to

wild animals getting into the garbage. This all occurred in the last week.

The board appears to be on a path of downsizing, purging assets and throwing in the towel.

The **board fired** the last remaining staff member. They have paid off some debt. They would all like to resign. They have contemplated selling the office on Emerald Bay Road that is paid for.

It was only about three weeks ago that Pritchett even asked Judy Brown, the now former office manager, how to go about changing the bylaws. Brown told her it's a complex process. Pritchett didn't pursue it further.

The bylaws are an issue because they put a great deal of power into the executive director's hands. This was a problem when Congero was at the helm. It's not known why the board, which is the boss of any employee, has not made the changes to prevent another fiasco.

Brown became the interim executive director last summer and at that time was directed to come up with a budget for the last six months of the year as the agency transitioned from a fiscal year starting July 1 to being on a calendar year. Revenues did surpass expenses for those six months, but that is also the time when the bulk of the income comes in.

The relationship between Brown and the board has completely soured, but why is a mystery.

Board members said they don't know how to use the office computer or get onto the website. They didn't even know where a copy of the bylaws reside.

When Brown was there she kept documents like that in a folder on the desk because she knew the public had a right to view them if requested.

Stephenson, who came to the meeting late, had a better handle on the financials and was able to answer some questions her colleagues couldn't, even though Pritchett is the treasurer and Lefler is the president.

There is about \$40,000 in the bank account. A hard loan of \$180,000 that was secured last year comes with a \$1,500/month payment for 10 years. Veterinarians are owed about \$20,000. Those aren't the only debts, though.

The board didn't have a definitive dollar figure March 29 for what is owed, nor what the operating budget is. The board's only plan to pay the bills is to sell the building.

Lefler revealed, "Donations never covered everything."

In other words, expenses were always more than the revenue. This became even more apparent when three years ago the board bought the building with money that had been bequeathed to the Humane Society. (Lefler and Pritchett were on the board at that time.) This meant the cash reserves were drawn down by more than \$300,000.

Lefler said this was done on the advice of a financial consultant.

The board intends to schedule a meeting soon with the desire to have prospective board members come forward, as well as volunteers. The current board is ready to walk away and turn everything over to others. For more information, to donate or learn about being a board member, email info@laketahoehumanesociety.org or call 530.542.2857.

Nevada high court rules private devices subject to open records law

By Colton Lochhead, Las Vegas Review-Journal

A public employee's personal devices are open to public inspection under the state's public records laws, the Nevada Supreme Court ruled on Thursday.

"We conclude that the (Nevada Public Records Act) does not categorically exempt public records maintained on private devices or servers from disclosure," Justice Michael Cherry wrote in the opinion, which was unanimously affirmed by the six other justices. "To withhold a public record from disclosure, the government entity must present, with particularity, the grounds on which a given public record is exempt."

The ruling overturns a decision by Washoe County District Court Judge Steven Kosach determining that records on personal devices and accounts are not subject to public inspection because they are outside the control of the public agency.

[Read the whole story](#)

Tahoe's Miracle March falls short of 1991 original

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Tahoe's drastic, late-season snowpack recovery was the weather equivalent to the TV show "Fuller House," a sequel that fueled nostalgia for the early 1990s but didn't quite measure up to the original.

From March 1 through Sunday snowpack in the Lake Tahoe area grew from 25 to 73 percent of the median peak for the basin, an increase of 48 percentage points.

The recovery was enough to push the season's snow totals from dismal to respectable and conjure memories of the "Miracle March," of 1991.

But by the numbers it fell slightly short of matching that legendary period.

Read the whole story

**Tahoe aquatic invasive
species program takes hold**



Milfoil was first discovered in the Tahoe Keys in the 1980s and curly pondweed in 2003. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

No one foresees the threat of aquatic invasive species going away, so permanent inspection stations for boats are probably going to become the norm in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The first one is likely to be built in the Spooner Summit area. Nevada and U.S. Forest Service officials are studying it as part of the Highway 28 upgrades.

This is the 10th year the AIS program has been in existence under the purview of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. It's a multi-faceted program that involves several agencies.

The goals include keeping out new invasive species and trying to reduce or eradicate the ones that exist.

Inspecting boats before they launch at Lake Tahoe is one way to keep AIS out of the water. In 2017 no new invasives were detected. However, there were 38 boats that were intercepted that had known AIS, with seven of those being mussels that can

be devastating to a water body.

Of the 8,870 inspections conducted last year, 67 percent of the boats arrived here clean, drained and dry.

This season a new decontamination trailer will be used that should speed up the process and mean fewer trips around the lake by the service technician. Truckee will be getting new equipment so it can handle more complex boats.

While it's not mandatory yet, TRPA is lobbying state and federal officials for inspections when boats leave a body known for having invasives – especially mussels. Lake Mead is one of those areas local officials would like to see have more stringent rules because it has the destructive mussels.

“Education is key so the public understands what we are doing and why,” Dennis Zabaglo, TRPA aquatic resources program manager, told the TRPA board at its meeting March 28 in Kings Beach.

Besides inspecting boats, the agency with partners are using a variety of techniques to curb infestations already in the lake. Some are more successful than others.

The **UV light pilot project** at Lakeside Marina to get rid of invasive weeds has been positive, with monitoring continuing.

Mats used on a 6-acre plot at Sand Harbor to stamp out the clam problem didn't work as planned, with the infestation spreading to 20 acres. TRPA is working with Nevada agencies to chart another course. A clam harvester could be the next tool that is used.

Tahoe Keys and Ski Run Marina are two of the problem areas. The Keys has submitted an application to regulatory agencies to use herbicides in the canals of the South Lake Tahoe neighborhood. A decision has not been made to grant that request.

Officials continue to look at all available resources including LiDAR, aeration system and working with the boating industry to develop engine components that would keep out AIS.

The rapid response plan in case there is a serious threat detected will be revised this year, which will include a practice scenario.

TRPA is also finding that lab results are taking longer because more agencies are testing for AIS. A secondary lab has been secured if needed.