

# Scooters revving up excitement, potential danger



Helmets don't come with a scooter rental, but state law says they are to be worn. Photo/Kathryn Reed

**By Susan Wood**

Is South Lake Tahoe providing a green light to the potential of dangerous road incidents or an innovative transportation alternative by allowing electric scooters in town?

This was the question on June 19 related to the green bikes and scooters dotting the city landscape, prompting the City Council to hear the pros and cons during a presentation at its regular meeting.

**LimeBike**, which calls its riders "juicers," first launched its computerized ride share program locally about a year ago with single speed bikes, then later with 3-speed versions and now has expanded into scooters. Last fall, it poured \$50 million

in the venture.

In a year, 40 employees were hired locally and the number of vehicle miles traveled (VMTs) dropped – thus reducing the carbon emissions in a heavily populated tourist destination during the peak summer months, LimeBike local Operations Manager Stephanie Sarradet told the council.

The assumption is if people weren't on a LimeBike, they would be in a car. Thus the VMT reduction.

Beyond economic and workforce benefits, Sarradet insisted the chief aim is assisting with lake clarity. Of course that is an uphill climb considering **2017 had the worst clarity reading** in the lake's history.

As Sarradet put it, the environmental mission helps in not turning Lake Tahoe "into a mud puddle."

However, the prevalence of these scooters has not gone unnoticed by council members, citizens – including a doctor, and the police department. Officers have issued three warnings to riders without helmets.

"They're buzzing around like hornets all over town," police Lt. David Stevenson told *Lake Tahoe News*. His vehicle code book was covered with Post-It notes to mark important points. "I've only seen one helmet, and it was (worn by) a 10-year-old."

California law requires a scooter rider obey the rules of the road, wear a helmet, have a driver's license, stay off the sidewalks and avoid lanes alongside thoroughfares such as Al Tahoe Boulevard with speed limits over 25mph.

Mayor Wendy David, who called the transit option "awesome," is also concerned with the lack of helmet use.

She was also the one **who in April** when it was announced scooters would be coming here held up a *San Francisco*

*Chronicle* article showing the problems with them. The council at the time dismissed her concerns.



Andrew Aquino and Jack Kixmiller out for a joy ride to the beach on June 19. Photo/Susan Wood

The mode of transit is not without its detractors.

Resident Oliver Starr read a statement to the council that rattled off a list of complaints about LimeBikes and scooters ranging from their disposal, including all over his neighborhood, to how they're being ridden. Sometimes two people are riding them, possibly underage, moving against traffic and at night.



"It's only a matter of time before a tragedy occurs. Mark my words," he said.

While supporting the idea of smart, shared transportation options, Starr even submitted a formal complaint to the company upon a run-in with a driver looking for equipment in his neighborhood.

He suggested that since the city can stop shopping carts from leaving parking lots it should be able to "geo-fence" where the San Mateo company's equipment is parked. LimeBikes and scooters cost \$1 to unlock through the computer app and are tracked through GPS. Bike rental prices are that much every half hour. For scooters, the price is 15 cents per minute.

Councilman Tom Davis strongly urged the company to facilitate education along with rentals. He also encouraged Lime to program the scooters to go slower. Lime scooters may travel at a maximum of 15mph.

"I see them racing down the street. There are dangerous situations. But I also see families out enjoying them," said Davis, who pledged to ride one this weekend.

The councilman also asked Sarradet whether the scooter governs itself to go no faster than 15mph.

Sarradet answered yes.

But that claim was disputed by a couple of riders on Gardner Mountain that afternoon.

Jack Kixmiller and Andrew Aquino were zipping on side streets in the middle of the road with no helmets when pulled over by *Lake Tahoe News*.

When asked if the scooters run faster, Kixmiller said yes. Aquino's reached 17mph.

How do you know?

"It says right here," Kixmiller said, pointing to the computer gauge on the handlebar.

As it turns out, a company representative told them to wear helmets, but Kixmiller retorted: "We're locals, we're just going to the beach."

And there lies the challenge with enforcing the rules of the road with vehicles deemed as toys.

John Riddle warned the council a few times during the meeting about the "no helmet" quandary among riders who may feel invincible.

"As a doctor, even minor head traumas are a very serious injury," he told *LTN*.

Councilwoman Brooke Laine took the concern one step further by bringing up a scenario. She hypothetically mentioned a kid who flips over the scooter upon "hitting a pothole," placing the city at risk of being sued.

"I'm very concerned about the liability," she said.

Interim City Attorney Nira Doherty told Laine it was a pertinent scenario.

"Public agencies can be liable. Certain elements have to be met (though)," Doherty told *LTN*.

But the city would be exempt from litigation if the company and rider were found to be at fault, "even if dangerous conditions exist," she added.

More liability questions remain for those riding on U.S. Forest Service and California Tahoe Conservancy land. Representatives from those agencies did not respond to *LTN*'s questions.

At a minimum the equipment could be impounded, but that does

nothing to penalize the rider using a motorized vehicle where it's not permitted.

Lime has paid for and pulled a business license, the finance department confirmed. That, though, is just for the city. The vehicles are in Douglas County too, but that jurisdiction does not have business licenses.

Sarradet pledged the company would focus on safety and launch an educational campaign designed to make riders more responsible. The League has a limited number of helmets for those who can't afford one. Lime also plans to ask other businesses associated with its 50 local partnerships to chip in per the mayor's request.

Otherwise, Marissa Fox of the League reminded naysayers and those with concerns that once Lime works out the kinks, it will be a win-win economically and environmentally for the community.

"There's no cost but to the user, and it is a benefit to the community," Fox said, adding if the council works with the company: "I think you'll find a receptive party."

A few Lime company employees joined Fox in support of the idea.

LimeBikes is available in 60 markets worldwide; at least 4 million trips have been logged by users. The transit alternative has environmentalists and ride-share advocates and even government officials seeing green.

## **Bikes versus buses**

When the **Tahoe Transportation District** on the same day delivered a presentation lamenting a loss of revenue and decreased ridership that is likely to lead to fewer hours of bus service, the City Council seemed irritated the agency is not being innovative with transportation services.

Laine told TTD's George Fink that the agency appears to be "going in the wrong direction." In addition, the League is also advocating a program involving smart mobility vans, as mentioned by Fox during the public comment period.

"The community is not designed for these big buses," Laine said, adding she's "concerned and disappointed," finding the TTD's bad-news report as "extremely alarming."

Her response to the buses operating only 10 hours a day?

"You might as well not even offer it," she said.

Councilman Austin Sass wants to see more connectivity by combining buses and bike routes.

Davis would still like to see a free transit system, a dream of elected officials for years.

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## Agencies use every tool to face threat of fire

By Sage Sauerbrey, Moonshine Ink

"Forest fires happen because of decades of decisions that are made beforehand," says forest ecologist Malcom North of a long line of mistakes in forest management stretching more than 100 years into the past.

These unintentional blunders have compounded with climate change and natural forest processes throughout the years to create the most dangerous fire conditions in Tahoe's human history, leaving us struggling to play catch-up.

The toolboxes possessed by public agencies to prevent wildfire are unique in that they include not just a bevy of modern treatment methods, but also extensive access to the most current data, state funding and grants, as well as interagency cooperation and some unusual creative partnerships. Will these new efforts be enough to keep up with the looming threat of a catastrophic wildfire in Tahoe?

**Read the whole story**

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# **Calif. climate-related disasters impacting home insurance**

**By Molly Peterson, KQED-TV**

Insurers can calculate how likely your home is to burn down in a wildfire, or flood in a high tide, and for some time now they've been using climate science to shape those estimates.

KQED science reporter Molly Peterson spoke with state Insurance Commissioner Dave Jones. He told her the growing risk of climate-related disasters is already hitting the insurance market.

"We've seen about a 15 percent increase in nonrenewals. Now, that doesn't mean that those 15 percent can't find any insurance. But the company they did have decided it was too risky to write insurance for them and decided not to renew them," Jones said.

**Read the whole story**



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# Opinion: Alessi's resignation a welcome surprise

By Kathryn Reed

Quitting won't get Suzie Alessi what she wants.

What South Lake Tahoe's city clerk wants is for potentially damaging or embarrassing texts and emails about her and written by her to not see the light of day. The multiple entities that have sought the documents, including *Lake Tahoe News*, will continue to pursue the records whether she is in office or not.



Suzie Alessi

Alessi on June 19 announced at the City Council meeting she would be resigning in July. She did not give an exact date.

The City Council was shocked, according to Mayor Wendy David. "We had no idea," she told *Lake Tahoe News*. They knew she did not intend to seek re-election in November.

Alessi has come under fire of late because she doesn't do her job. She has it cushy because as an elected official she is only held accountable to the public – not the City Council, not the city manager, not the city attorney. She can work when she wants, take off whenever she wants.

Her latest shenanigans regarding the delay of public records is to threaten to sue to stop them from being made public. A lawsuit may delay things, but it won't change the law. It is what it is.

There are very few instances where public records cannot be released. State law dictates what can be redacted. If she thinks the information won't be relevant after the taxpayers are no longer paying her to barely work, she is sorely mistaken. After all, we'll be the ones footing her six-figure retirement. After 32 years on the public dole she will continue to be on it. She will collect about 90 percent of her salary and that goes up about 2 percent a year. Her current salary is more than \$100,000.

It is only the city attorney and an elected city clerk who may redact anything from a public record. Most cities don't have elected clerks, and therefore it would only be legal counsel with the big black marker.

On June 1, Alessi emailed *LTN* saying, "Retrieval of the voluminous records subject to your public records request is nearly completed. If not all records are retrieved/received by early next week, the city will provide the records it has in its possession and the remainder will be provided to you as soon as received."

No records have been provided. None. Zero. Zip.

They have all been retrieved, so to speak, according to multiple sources at the city.

It is the city clerk, though, whose job it is to be in charge of Public Records Act requests – even when she is the subject of the request.

State law requires the city have a clerk, though it does not have to be elected. About 100 of the 478 incorporated cities in California have elected clerks.

There is nothing in the city's code that dictates how to replace a city clerk who does not fulfill her term.

Clearly, the system is flawed.

Alessi can't leave soon enough. She has brought such disgrace to the office.

She couldn't get along with the deputy clerk and ran her off earlier this spring. Speculation is Ellen Palazzo will run for the position in November. The filing period opens July 16.

There is an assistant clerk, Sue Blankenship, who would be left with the immediate duties.

Alessi told *LTN*, "It's time – a changing of the guard."

That's an understatement.

Interim City Attorney Nira Doherty told *LTN* she expects to make a recommendation this week to interim City Manager Dirk Brazil about how to proceed.

Brazil told *LTN* he is leaning toward filling the post from July to November with a retired city clerk. "I don't see this position being 40 hours," Brazil said.

Still, it is up to the City Council to decide what to do. And those five would be the ones to make an appointment.

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## Open Nev. seats play role in

# control of U.S. House

By Ramona Giwargis, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Two Nevada congressional seats are in play this November, setting up a showdown between national Democrats vying to win a House majority and Republicans determined to expand control of the chamber.

The pair of open seats are up for grabs because Democrats are vacating them. Rep. Jacky Rosen is leaving the 3rd Congressional District seat to run for the U.S. Senate. Rep. Ruben Kihuen is not seeking re-election in the 4th Congressional District amid accusations of sexual misconduct.

And while political analysts say the seats lean Democrat, national Republicans are coming after them. Both districts are top targets for the National Republican Congressional Committee – especially the 3rd Congressional District, which President Donald Trump won in 2016 by 1 percentage point.

**Read the whole story**

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## Douglas County strengthening VHR regulations

By Kathryn Reed

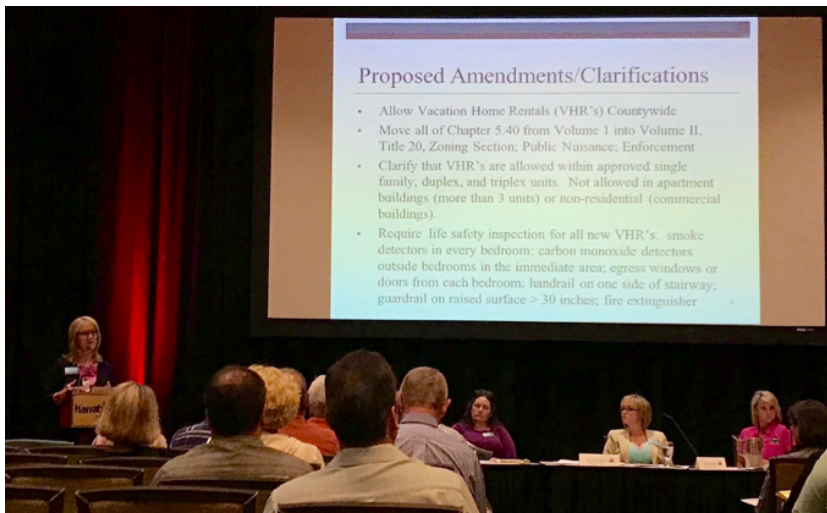
STATELINE – Douglas County is putting some teeth into its short-term rental ordinance in an effort to curtail problems and bring more oversight to the issue.

County officials came up with the ordinance and are just now

engaging the public. The plan is for the ordinance to go for a vote by the Board of Commissioners in August.

June 18 was the first opportunity for residents and others to ask county staff questions, offer suggestions and give advice on the draft ordinance. Twenty people spoke during the three-hour meeting at Harrah's Lake Tahoe. Staff said adjustments will be made based on public feedback.

A few issues are still being worked out, which is where public testimony is critical. One item that was brought up Monday was whether bear boxes will be mandated in the Carson Valley. The county hasn't decided.



Mimi Moss, left, explains Douglas County's draft VHR ordinance. Photo/LTN

Many comments centered on whether homeowners' associations because the county's rules will in some ways supersede the HOA rules. Mary Anne Martin, deputy district attorney, said the county will consider what the HOA wants, but the county will make its decision based on its rules. Owners will then have to contend with the HOA separately.

Still, it was a much quieter, more respectful gathering on June 18 compared to meetings in South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County. It helped that there was not a time limit for people

to talk so people had the opportunity to say everything they wanted. Plus, not a single elected official was at the front table. It was reps from planning, code enforcement and the District Attorney's Office who led the meeting, with Host Compliance also there. Also allowed was some dialogue with audience members after the formal comment period ended in order to get questions fully answered, and new comments to be voiced.

While a few regulations will be similar to what South Lake Tahoe has adopted, Douglas County officials more than once said they don't want to be unfriendly like its neighbor to the west. Some of those who spoke also belittled what the city has done, including limiting the number of VHRs that are allowed.

The county in its paperwork made a point of saying what the ordinance won't do. It won't limit the number of VHRs, it won't mirror South Lake Tahoe's regulations and it won't allow grandfathering of a VHR.

Part of the code change takes the VHR ordinance out of Business and Revenue and puts it into Zoning/Planning. This allows penalties and fines to be issued.

The number of fines and revocations to date has been low because there has been little recourse based on how things are currently written. Going forward it's likely the fine will be \$250/day if the owner is out of compliance, with a maximum of \$10,000. Unpermitted vacation home rentals would face a \$500 fine per day.

Parking will be restricted to on-site for overnight. The county will not be enforcing daytime parking. Ninety-eight percent of complaints are parking, according to the county.

Occupancy will be changed from two per bedroom plus four to two per bedroom plus two. This was a bone of contention for many in attendance because people believe their house can accommodate more than the proposed rule without it being an



issue.

“We believe if we curtail that number, it takes care of some of the problem of overcrowding in the residence,” Mimi Moss with the county said. Building code already has two per bedroom.

Josh Priou with Lake Tahoe Accommodations said the occupancy change would affect 30 percent of their rentals, which could equate to a decrease of \$135,000 in transient occupancy tax for the county on an annual basis because of the need to lower the nightly rental fee.

All new permits and renewals will require a life safety inspection, which has been going on for the last 2½ months. The VHR permit fee will go from \$100 to \$250, with renewals increasing \$125 to \$200.

Hot tub use won't be allowed between 10pm and 8am.

One way the county will be able to enforce the rules is by hiring Host Compliance, a Bay Area firm that since 2010 has been helping jurisdictions find rentals – permitted and not, offer a complaint hot line and provide data. This is the same company South Lake Tahoe and Truckee use.

Ulrik Binzer with Host Compliance said the short-term rental market has grown 800 percent since 2011. When his company started there were 16 websites that were regularly patrolled. Now there are 50, with those targeting 90 percent of the portals where people list their homes.

His stats show there are 1,272 unique rental units in Douglas County, with 90 percent in the Tahoe area. The median nightly rate is \$295. Ninety percent are entire house rentals.

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**Notes:**

- Future meetings:

July 10, 9am – Douglas County Planning Commission, CVIC Hall, Minden

Aug. 2, 10am – Board of Commissioners, CVIC Hall, Minden

Aug. 16, 1:30pm – Board of Commissioners, Harrah's Lake Tahoe

Sept. 6, 10am – Board of Commissioners, Minden (optional meeting if first and second readings are not taken care of in August)

- Draft ordinance is **online**.

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# El Nino may be back by winter

**By Brian K. Sullivan, Bloomberg**

It's time to start watching natural gas, coffee and cocoa markets again – because a weather-changing El Nino could be arriving just in time for winter.

The U.S. Climate Prediction Center issued an El Nino watch across the equatorial Pacific Thursday, with the odds jumping to 64 percent chance that it will come from December to February. That's up from a 49 percent chance in the agency's monthly report in May.

**Read the whole story**

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# Rent control decision coming to California voters

By Angela Hart, Sacramento Bee

A hotly contested battle over rent control in California just got more explosive.

Tenants rights activists have qualified for the November ballot an initiative that would clear the way for cities and counties across California to pass strong rent control laws, as local and state lawmakers struggle to address a widening housing crisis that has pushed people into homelessness and out of the state in search of cheaper living elsewhere.

The Secretary of State's office reported Friday evening that proponents behind an initiative to repeal a 1995 state law called the Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act have gathered enough valid signatures to qualify for the November 6, 2018 ballot. The existing state law sets tight limits on the type and number of housing units that rent control can apply to.

**[Read the whole story](#)**

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## Truckee – a Gold Rush town turning 25



Downtown Truckee has the feel that it did decades ago.  
Photo/John Corbett (year unknown)

**By Susan Wood**

TRUCKEE – The Sierra Nevada town known for its deep snow, cold temps, growth potential, pedestrian-friendly downtown and outdoor lifestyle celebrates a milestone this September of its most significant achievement – its history.

The town marks a quarter century of incorporation on Sept. 8, with a grand picnic and new town photo. The first one featured about 6,000 people (more than half the population in 1994) and was taken from a fire engine ladder.

But to get a true sense of Truckee's history in terms of its people and progress, one needs to perhaps date it in dog years. The establishment of the haven along the Interstate 80 corridor just north of Lake Tahoe covering a 34 square-mile swath of mountain and valley terrain dates back to 1863.

Through the years, the town flourished with lumber mills, a working railyard, a meandering river and later tourism – the latter responsible for the surge in interest of snow sports

and on-foot travel. (One could argue there's a reason the Donner Party braved treacherous conditions to get to a better life.)

Many others have followed. For the most part, Truckee has made all the right moves. This is according to historians, business owners, resort workers, city leaders and other stakeholders.

The number of permanent residents has grown to more than 16,000 living in 13,000 housing units. And with a population that can suddenly boom on a winter or summer holiday weekend to 30,000 people counting tourists who may dream about staying forever. Those 13,000 units can quickly fill to the point in which nearby Northstar ski resort has a housing specialist on staff. Some workers commute from Reno.

This may be what happens when one has too much of a good thing.



*Second story Truckee Hotel. winter 1890*  
The Truckee Hotel is barely visible in winter 1890. Photo/H.K. Gage

## **Seizing on and maintaining a good thing**

Stefanie Olivieri knows the town's peaks and valleys first hand.

The lifelong Truckee resident will commemorate a milestone of her own this 4th of July upon her clothing store started by her parents reaching the centenarian mark.

Cabonas, in the center of the historic district, opened as a general store selling worms, tackle, guns, work clothes, appliances and diapers – all the necessities 100 years ago. A gas pump sat outside, fishing flies were made inside.

She worked with her two siblings in the 2,500-square-foot store at 9 years old. So, when her parents retired in 1967, a light bulb came on.

"I was the one who loved it most," she said.

The 75-year-old pioneer expanded the clothing lines to include more sportswear.

"The town sort of grew up around us," Olivieri told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Olivieri vividly remembers when Nevada County approved a Kmart to be built before Truckee's incorporation. It was a watershed moment in which the town's fathers, pioneering families and visionaries decided to be the "determiner of our own destiny."

Big box stores were viewed as almost sacrilege to those trying to hold on to the charm and quaintness of their village.

"We nipped that in the bud," she said.

And so it goes with Truckee's grand achievements intertwined with its one perplexing issue plaguing a lot of resort communities people love to death.

The lack of housing led Olivieri to last year log seven months



manning the store without a day off because she couldn't find workers who could afford to live there.

It's an issue Truckee's second town manager and first mayor are quite familiar with.

Who would have thought that the wise decision to incorporate and let smaller government pave the way for its own future would have led to such a wagon-train style insurgence from the Bay Area?

"A big change occurred in this community in the 1970s," said Tony Lashbrook, who recently retired as the town's manager. He recalled the town's history over breakfast at the Squeeze Inn with *Lake Tahoe News*, along with 1994's mayor, Kathleen Eagan. The two hugged and spoke in unison as if they've known each other a lifetime.

Lashbrook listed the building of the Tahoe Donner community, one of the largest in the United States with 6,000 lots, as one example of Truckee's growth potential seen decades ago. Plus, the addition of Northstar ski resort in less than a five-year period essentially placed Truckee on the map, following nearby Squaw Valley's hosting of the 1960 Winter Olympics.

"Alex (Cushing) was a visionary – eclectic. He may not have had a regional vision, but he had a Squaw vision," Lashbrook said of Squaw's founder.



Truckee has had three town managers in 25 years, with Tony Lashbrook No. 2 and recently retired. Photo/Susan Wood

### **Taking names and taking charge**

To Lashbrook, it was up to government with him working in community development at the time to rein in expenses and allocations. All the while, the first priority was taking the resources away from a county that appeared removed at times at understanding the town's character.

"We thought we could do a better job with the same amount of resources," Lashbrook said.

If anything, the idea of a big box store as development represented the catalyst for forming its own town government to service the half permanent population, half transient that still exists today.

In the 1990s, the community saw the writing on the wall as the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency placed its grip on development along the lake.

Truckee stakeholders decided to be proactive and deflect the

building interest while abiding by its longtime citizens' wishes.

"I think we're darn community oriented," Lashbrook said.

To prove that point, the question on the ballot asking to incorporate was followed by a crucial second: "We asked whether to be a town or a city," Lashbrook said. With 72 percent voting in favor of forming its own government, an even larger percentage declared it wanted to be called "a town" – a psychological precursor to how the community folk saw themselves.

Beyond land-use, snow removal and street maintenance were main considerations, along with public safety. Lashbrook chuckled with Eagan as they recalled more police showing up on the roads.

"All of a sudden there were cops everywhere because now they live here," Lashbrook said.

Certainly, pulling away from the county and taking charge of such a large area posed a risk.

"We had a doomsday scenario, but we knew we were all in this together," Eagan said. "We knew we bit off a big part of the hamburger."

When objections and concerns arose, "they were not dismissed," Eagan insisted. "There was minimal backlash that ended in remarkable joy."

The forming town had a financial plan to address costs. And Eagan, being a retired San Francisco banker, worked on the economic study.

Even now, the town conducted much discerning discussion over whether the community of residents and tourists would support five proposed grocery stores within city limits.



Public Works Director Dan Wilkins is proud the town put money into infrastructure at the get-go. Photo/Susan Wood

## **Progress has a price**

As a new town, Truckee hit the ground running in terms of making the infrastructure up to par.

Dan Wilkins, the director of Public Works and town engineer, came on board at just the right time to make a difference 20 years ago. The roads were considered “a disaster,” Wilkins noted.

Under his direction, the town government spent the first nine years resurfacing its 160 miles of roadway with \$23 million. Forty-four of these miles got Class 2 bike lanes alongside the streets. Roundabouts (wider than most to accommodate snow removal) were installed. Eight were built in 1998 alone. This was a huge feat considering Wilkins figured Public Works moved 10 billion pounds of snow in the phenomenal 2016-17 winter season. The town’s original maintenance yard was purchased under a five-year lease option from the Truckee Sanitation District. Stemming from safety concerns, the local government

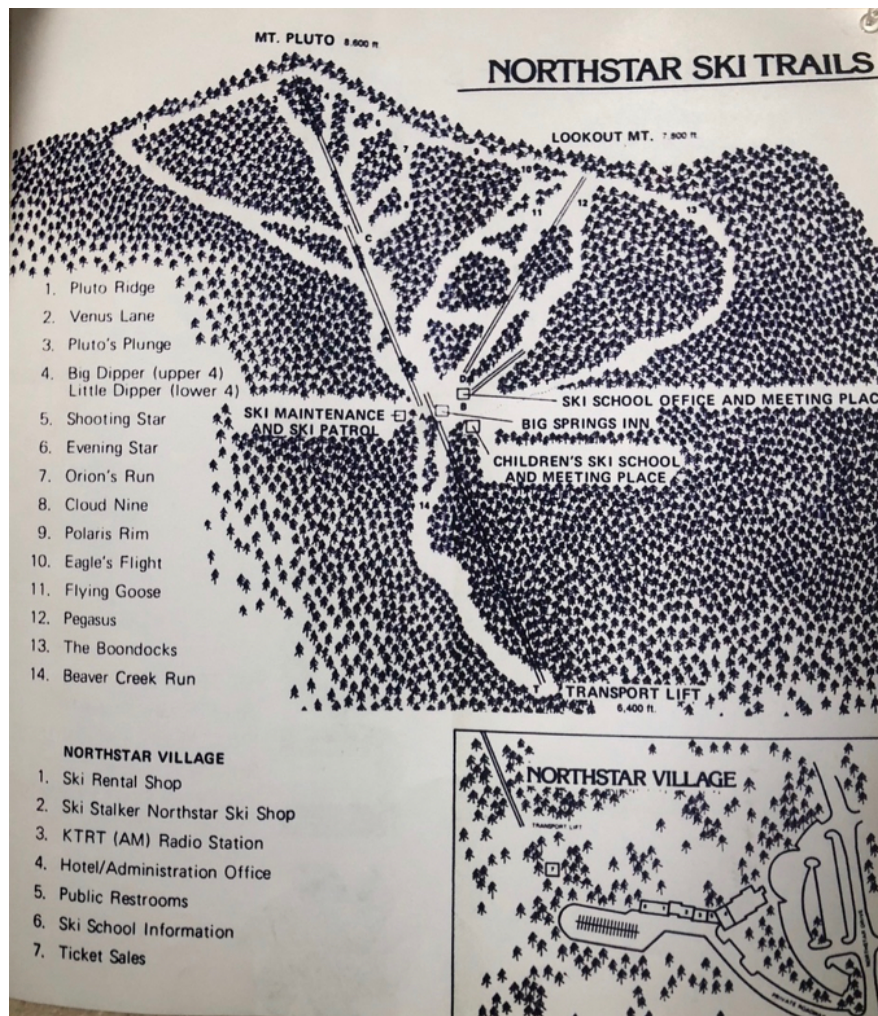
teamed up with Caltrans to install a pedestrian tunnel leading into town on Highway 89.

“That was an example of where the town saw a problem and addressed it,” Wilkins said, while walking the bike lane. “It was an accident waiting to happen.”

Paid parking meters were put in at the town’s core as a source of revenue, while beautification projects popped up everywhere. They still do, as the town is taking bids on burying utility lines underground and extending the sidewalk along Donner Pass Road. Public art and monument displays celebrating the town’s whimsical nature and undaunted history were set in roundabouts and on the main historic thoroughfare. Sidewalks replaced the dirt downtown where businesses like Bar of America, Truckee Hotel and Wagon Train Cafe which have served the community for decades remain.

It was a town proud of its own achievement, and the local government rewarded it.





Northstar ski resort has grown since this map in 1972 was made.

## A pet project

The mantra was: Our people first. Dan Olsen, who works in Truckee Police Department administration, found it was animals as a close second for him.

Olsen was with the town on Day 1 as an animal control officer, moving over to the new town from Nevada County Animal Control. Now as Truckee's support services manager, he took on the often-difficult task of turning Animal Services into Truckee's "crown jewel."

With good management, the unit moved out of an old, rundown building measuring 1,200 square feet to a new 10,000-square-foot facility on Stevens Lane.



"The cool thing when the town incorporated was that we were able to do as a town what we wanted to do," Olsen said, commending Lashbrook and the first town manager, Steve Wright, for their undying support for his efforts.

Animal Services has been able to take in stray runaways through the Humane Society of Truckee Tahoe and care for the animals in a humane way. When Olsen started, they had 600 stray. Today, the figure has more than doubled.

The department tracks and manages more effectively with a computer system that makes the job more flexible. Olsen admitted the biggest change he's seen in 25 years is the use of technology.

"When I first worked here, it was pen and paper. We didn't even have a phone connection between departments. Now we're much more connected," he said, bringing up his program.

A picture of his late, beloved dog Otis popped up on the screen. The 13-year-old yellow Labrador came to work with him every day. Otis had a job in animal control too.

"He helped me catch animals because they'd come running up (to Otis)," Olsen said.

The police staffer shook his head in disbelief that he's been with the local government for 26 years.

"I'm happy here. This place has brought me nothing but joy. I like the culture. It's strange to be the last of the original (employees)," he said.



Truckee blends artwork with the practical revenue stream of paid parking. Photo/Susan Wood

## **It's all about the history**

Imagine if you're Chaun Mortier.

A former police dispatcher, the Truckee historian celebrates the town milestone with zeal, but deep down, the 25 years represents but a sliver of the past behind her beloved community.

"In the last 25 years, the biggest things to change have been the people and the infrastructure. All that happened is a government agency came into effect," Mortier said. "There was a concern through this that the town would lose its character."

She said the pioneering spirit that built the community 155 years ago exemplifies "the heart of Truckee."

Growth makes that prospect still questionable. Still, Mortier and her fellow history buffs – who took the time for a fireside-type chat with *LTN* during the Truckee-Donner

Historical Society open house recently, commended how the town's leaders have managed to ward off damaging forces.

Mortier reflects fondly on the old days.

She remembers when Truckee residents could ride horses through town. When vehicles replaced horses, people would often drive with their windows down to wave at everybody going by.

"Now I don't know anybody," she said.

Despite the new look spotting the landscape, Truckee residents – permanent and part time – opt for the town to be "a historical destination." Mortier holds onto that declaration.

She cautions the town needs "to be careful" in proceeding with growth. Since incorporating, the physical infrastructure is "a good improvement." But some things she believes are "totally ridiculous" like the many roundabouts installed.

Mortier cites the fine line between progress and preservation as reasons for concerns.

"I understand where it's coming from because people want to be a part of it," she said, agreeing that "people can infiltrate" an area.

The town fathers grappled with the issue when lumber milling declined, and they had to keep the economy buzzing.

Even as far back as the 1890s, these visionary pioneers thought about tourism. The notion held on through the last century.

"People liked coming up for the snow. Alex (Cushing) saw it standing on top of the mountain, and he knew what his dream was," Mortier said.

But unlike other development forces, "he lived here," Mortier added of the Squaw chief.



One of Truckee's attributes is that it is walkable.  
Photo/Susan Wood

### **Follow the stars**

The stars of the Winter Olympic Games may have come out of Squaw slopes, but the workers of Northstar have ties to the community of Truckee that run deep, despite being part of a Vail, Colo.-based conglomerate.

Maybe Truckee's pioneering family reputation has crossed over into Northstar's family-friendly image.

For Kipp Cooley in lift operations, his family roots come from a name. He was named after the Tahoe Truckee Lumber Company owner's dog, while dad worked there years ago.

"My father loved that dog (Kipp)," he said, while reminiscing in the Northstar Village.

The 39-year-old ski area worker remembered as a teenager how the town reacted when major department stores were knocking on the door of his quaint community.

With the Downtown Merchants Association the driving force of opposition, the town's residents "feared then the rest would come."

While some may argue a ski resort is part of big business, it also brings much-needed dollars into the region. Moreover, those tourists are more inclined to visit a ski town that's charming, Cooley said.

He's an advocate for Truckee to "gently expand."

Tourist families aren't the only ones who feel the richness of the culture. Cooley said the employees at Northstar – which can soar to 1,000 in winter – have become "a very large family." This family of workers frequents the town and loves the outdoors.

"People come here for a reason. They want mountain adventure," he said. Northstar is situated just outside the town boundaries along Highway 267.

Operating under the adage "winter brings them, summer keeps them," Truckee area employees don't necessarily move on beyond Northstar. At least 13 staffers were around during the town's incorporation.

Even when Cooley said his wife longed to return to Los Angeles for a short reprieve, and they did so, the mountain town called them back. Cooley's not budging again.

Amy Kylberg understands this level of commitment.

The 45-year-old commercial leasing agent is responsible for acquisitions in the base area and can't imagine a different life.

This is despite her friends' questioning her judgment moving from Tiburon to Truckee about the time it incorporated. She's worked at Northstar for four years.

"When I moved up here, my friends thought I was insane," she told *Lake Tahoe News*. "There hasn't been one moment I thought the grass is greener."

Now those same friends enjoy visiting.

"I love sharing this place with people," she said.

Kylberg's ties embody more than her own. She has spent many hours in Moody's in downtown Truckee. Her 17-year-old daughter Abigail just "retired" from the hot spot after three years. She started out as a utensil polisher.

"I'm so glad when our kids can appreciate what we have," Kylberg said, while a softness came over her eyes.

And what happens when you stay in a place long enough to develop roots, and your business is about relationships?

"I'm the king of 'I know a guy'," she said of getting resources on cue.

After all, there's no rest for the weary when you manage five homeowner associations and learn early on your destiny rests with your own efforts.

It helps when the people before you have faith. For Kylberg, it's her father. When she told him she's not going to college and wanted to do something outside, he asked: "What are you waiting for?"

This finding a path to one's own destiny may explain how people like Cooley and Kylberg find that Northstar points to a community like Truckee that discovers its own.

Today, Truckee is embarking on a process to update its General



Plan, the blueprint to the town's vision for future growth.

For more information on the 25th anniversary festivities, go **online**.

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# **Calif. better prepared for wildfire season**

**By Kurtis Alexander, San Francisco Chronicle**

When Anne Faught got a knock on her front gate recently, she was surprised to find two uniformed men at her rural Marin County property, one with a clipboard.

The firefighters had come to her home for an impromptu safety inspection. They were making sure she had cleared hazards like flammable brush and overgrown trees, both common in the small town of Woodacre, where houses like Faught's nestle against a landscape of picturesque but perilous fire-prone hills.

"I just did \$3,000 worth of tree work," Faught said, pointing to two compost bins stuffed with leaves and branches. "We all saw what happened last year."

In the wake of the most destructive fire season in California history, peaking with the fast-burning Wine Country blazes that killed 41 people and wiped out nearly 9,000 homes and other buildings, pressure to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire has been immense. And in many ways, the response has been proportionate.

**Read the whole story**