Placerville winery transports guests to Italy

By Kathryn Reed

PLACERVILLE – Pam is back in Tuscany. Sue is in heaven. And I don't want to leave.

Wine glasses keep being filled and plates of divine food are continually placed in front of us.

To set the mood even more, our sommelier, Orietta Gianjorio, has an Italian accent. It was only five years ago that she moved to the States from Rome. She educates us about the wines we are drinking and how they are bound to complement the food.

Our chef for the day comes across more of a free spirit who could be at home in Tahoe. After all, he spent some time as a ski bum in Breckenridge. But Damon Barham's cooking pedigree is more prestigious, having attended the California Culinary Academy Le Cordon Bleu. He is now an instructor at the San Francisco school and chef at their Technique Restaurant.



Miraflores Winery allows guests to dine among the vines on summer weekends. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Pam was our tablemate last Saturday afternoon at Miraflores

Winery. She came up from the Bay Area for this four-course lunch and wine pairing.

Sitting outside on the terrace with the vineyards a stone's throw away reminds Pam of her recent trip to Tuscany where the villa she stayed at was on a working winery.

This is the third summer the Placerville winery has put together a chef and sommelier to plan a weekend lunch. The duo does the lunch Saturday and Sunday, with each weekend through October being a different pair.

"It's becoming a bit of a competition," Miraflores General Manager Matricia Haigood says in how she goes about selecting the chefs. "We let them cook anything they want."

With each weekend being a new event, Haigood said it's common for people to attend more than one lunch throughout the summer.

It's up to the sommelier to pick whatever Miraflores wine she wants to go with each course.

"My first and main inspiration is what is in season," Barham tells *Lake Tahoe News*.

He sent Gianjorio his menu and from there she decided what to pour.

"Damon is a young chef and likes to try things. I wanted the attention to last to the last bite," Gianjorio explained. "That is why I try to keep the wines light."

This was the menu on June 22:

• First Course:

2012 Barbera Rosé

Asparagus soup shot with dry jack puff

• Second Course:

2012 Pinot Grigio

Miraflores estate “smoked” trout salad with arugula, brioche, cherries and almonds

• Third Course:

2007 Syrah

Late spring lamb stew with artichokes, polenta fries and caponata

• Fourth Course:

2009 Botricelli

Strawberry-rhubarb and frangipane tartlet with lavender-white chocolate mousse.

Vegetarians are welcome with advance notice. I was served the salad without the trout – which Pam and Sue said was a shame because it was the highlight of the salad.

Pam said the cherry dressing brought out the flavor of the trout.

The chef said he made his own brine to make it taste like it was smoked.

I was still wishing the soup had been more than a shot. A big bowl – not even a cup – would have been more to my liking.

But the presentation made it fun and whimsical. Barham comes out of the kitchen to each table with a pitcher full of the chilled soup that he pours into tall shot glasses that each have two asparagus tips in them. It’s served with a cheese stick that can be used as a spoon or dipping utensil before one throws back the soup like a shot.

One of the things Miraflores owner Victor Alvarez likes about these lunches is the chefs “talk to the people. They don’t hide in the kitchen.”

The caponata with the entrée has the three of us in search of yet another superlative.

The chef tells us he used a pressure cooker for the tomatoes. It is their natural sweetness that makes this relish of sorts that is dominated by eggplant have such a sweet flavor.

The Syrah is a fabulous choice for this dish. Pam and Sue agree – especially with the lamb.

While I’m not one to usually like sweet wines, the Botricelli has me thinking otherwise. Some of the strawberries used in the dessert were soaked in the wine.

There is no rush to eat or drink. We have the table for the afternoon if we want. Miraflores has learned a second seating isn’t possible because some people make the lunch a daylong event.

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Notes:

• More info about the pairings may be found online.

• Lunches go through Oct. 27.

• Cost is $40.

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Lukins, STPUD reach deal on TJ Maxx building

By Kathryn Reed

A deal between two South Lake Tahoe water companies has been reached. All that is needed is approval by the state Public Utilities Commission. And that could come this week.

The CPUC must approve the expense of the connections that will provide fire suppression, if needed, to the building that houses TJ Maxx at the Y.

Lukins Brothers Water Company has agreed to buy a fire-only connection from South Tahoe Public Utility District for $147,566.52.

When TJ Maxx moved in last fall a temporary agreement was worked out between the water companies. The new agreement is the permanent solution.

The Garfinkles own the TJ Maxx building, which also includes an adjacent empty retail spot. They will be footing the bill.

“I don’t want to charge my customers something they are not benefiting from and the PUC won’t allow it,” Jennifer Lukins, operations manager for Lukins Brothers, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The PUC looks at who is requesting service and who is it going to benefit. The Garfinkles are requesting service and the Garfinkles are getting the benefit.”

After the new 8-inch main is in place, the existing intertie between the two water systems at Eloise Avenue and Dunlap Street will be closed.

South Lake Tahoe Fire Department is also requiring a private fire hydrant be installed on site.

When TJ Maxx moved in they required that all utilities be separated from the adjoining building. However, the changes will benefit that side of the building as well. The Garfinkles are in negotiations with a potential tenant for that section, but nothing could move forward without the water situation being resolved.

Another factor in all of this is that the building next to the Garfinkles', which is owned by someone else, could tap into the 8-inch line. If that were to occur, the two property owners would split the cost.

"Any sprinkler system required for a new building being discussed at the location of the old AAA building could also be connected to a short extension of the 8-inch main as well," explained South Tahoe PUD General Manager Richard Solbrig.

There have been preliminary discussions of tearing down the existing building and replacing it with something else.

Supreme Court strikes down DOMA, Prop. 8



The flag outside the Live Violence Free office in

South Tahoe. Photo/LTN

The U.S. Supreme Court today on a 5-4 vote has ruled that the Defense of Marriage Act is unconstitutional, and on another 5-4 vote said California's Proposition 8 has no standing.

This means Proposition 8 is invalid and gays in California can marry. It is a California-only ruling.

The dissolution of DOMA means gay and lesbian couples who are legally married will be able to receive the same federal benefits as heterosexual married couples. This includes Social Security, disability, retirement benefits, worker's comp, family leave and filing joint federal income tax returns. There are more than 1,000 benefits that will be affected.

In California 18,000 couples married in the brief time the state allowed gays to married. Those couples will be granted federal benefits with DOMA going away.

Here is a copy of the DOMA court ruling. Here is a copy of the Proposition 8 ruling.

President Obama tweeted his approval of the ruling, saying, "Love is love."

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Intercollegiate soccer coming to LTCC

By Kathryn Reed

Leon Abravanel wonders where the two best players on his high

school team might be today if they would have had the opportunity to play soccer after graduation.

“The repercussions of something like this are huge – not just for (kids) right out of high school, but for the whole community,” Abravanel told the Lake Tahoe Community College board of education Tuesday night.

The *something* was the unanimous approval of women and men’s intercollegiate soccer programs. The first games should be played in fall 2014.



While the LTCC college board on June 25 was voting to approve an intercollegiate soccer program, an adult league used what will be the home field for the college team. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Abravanel came up from Southern California to tell his story to the board on June 25. He’s a native of South Lake Tahoe, having graduated from South Tahoe High School in 2004. He was part of the soccer team in 2003 that won the first state championship for the Vikings. That was the year they were ranked 19th in the nation. He played Division I collegiate soccer and was a professional player for four years. Now he coaches fulltime.

“There’s not a lot of opportunity here, especially for the

Hispanic community," Abravanel said of soccer. "Many had no opportunity to go farther than high school."

His two teammates he wonders about; they are in jail.

Tuesday's staff report says, "A recent (California Community College Athletics Association) study on student-athlete academic performance, moreover, showed that athletes transferred at higher rates to four-year postsecondary institutions, achieved higher GPAs and were about twice as likely to earn a degree or certificate than there non-athletic counterparts. This same study indicated that athletes graduate at higher percentages than the general population – 77 percent to 61 percent – and earn higher salaries than their non-athlete peers once in adult life."

One of the goals with the creation of what will be LTCC's only intercollegiate sports programs is to attract more Hispanics to the college. It is also in line with the quest to be a destination college.

To play, the athletes must take a full load of classes.

Next up is for the college to make a formal request to the Big 8 Conference, which has eight women's teams and five men's. Colleges in the conference include American River, Consumnes River, Diablo Valley, Modesto, Santa Rosa, Sierra, Sacramento City and San Joaquin Delta.

When LTCC had a soccer program years ago it was part of the Golden Valley Conference, which has schools farther north.

By October, LTCC expects to hire Tim Johnson as athletic director and finalize who will be the coaches. Johnson, who is a physical education teacher at LTCC, has been the main force behind the soccer proposal.

It's expected each team would have about 20 players and play 18 to 20 games in the fall. LTCC would use the field next to

the college.

The start-up costs are estimated at just more than $10,000 for the program. The entire program is expected to cost about $100,000 each year. However, net revenue of about $40,000 is anticipated based on projected increase in enrollment.

Mammoth Mountain on quest to reinvent itself

By Aleksandra Gajewski, Mammoth Times

Mammoth Mountain Ski Area Chairman and CEO Rusty Gregory introduced the company's new executive management officials last week. With that announcement, he also launched the company's strategic plan to move forward on what he said was "Mammoth 3.0—catching the third wave."

Gregory said again that he will remain as the CEO of the company and the new leadership team will report to him.

The management team consists of Greg Dallas as chief operating officer of Mammoth and June Mountain Ski Areas; Erik Forsell as chief marketing officer; Mark Clausen as chief financial officer; and Ron Cohen as chief administrative officer.

A fifth officer, yet to be determined, will act as chief operating officer of hospitality.

With the new management team, Gregory hopes to go from a defensive attitude into an offensive one.

"We were doing the right thing playing defense," Gregory said. "But a new wave of opportunity is building."

In launching “Mammoth 3.0,” Gregory said he and his team will focus on key strategies to market the ski area as “Southern California’s Mountain Home.”

In achieving this rebranding, the executive management team and their respective departments will adopt a series of new (and some not so new) strategies.

The overall strategy will consist of five main objectives: to become the loudest and most active voice of any mountain resort community in the Southern California marketplace; to curate social experience and heighten social engagement; to focus on excellent service throughout each department; to maintain a rewarding and fun working environment; and to re-establish financial strength and stability.

Gregory said he is removing himself from day-to-day operations and will focus “exclusively on attracting investment capitol.”

He said his focus will be on finding financial strength, stability, and paying off the remaining debt.

“We actually don’t have too much debt, we just don’t have enough operating income,” he said. “This is the area I’m focusing on.”

He said he wants to find investments that pay dividends back so he can have money for more investment into the company.

“We are not selling the company,” Gregory said. “Some day, Barry [Sternlicht] will sell his interest – that’s what private equity does.

“By the way, that’s what all ownership does. Dave McCoy sold his interest in the company. Took him 60 years … and he deserved the big dollars he got out of it. Barry Sternlicht will deserve the value that we could create for him because we were able to use his investment in the company and we need to attract different investments.

“I have a proposal on my desk from a big, institutional company to give us $350 million. That would pay off all of our debt, leaving us something around $150 million to invest.

“Now, I’m not saying that I have finalized that deal, or that we want the terms of that deal, but that is what I’m doing.”

Gregory reflected on the ski area’s history and divided it up into parts (Mammoth 1.0 and 2.0). He reflected on the ups and downs in each time period, focusing on the last seven years.

After what he called Mammoth’s “best year (2005-06), the ski area, along with the town, experienced seven challenging years, each year bringing a new set (or a combined set) of unique obstacles.

“The last seven years have presented us with a series of hardships; drought, lawsuits, town bankruptcy, and global financial meltdown, and the ensuing recession have left their mark on all of us,” Gregory said.

Despite Mammoth Mountain paying off $50 million in debt, investing $70 million in capital, introducing air service (with seven flights a day at its peak), among other things, the morale of the mountain, the town of Mammoth Lakes, and the community as a whole was at an all-time low, he said.

“We feel like we hit the bottom,” Gregory said.

Why? According to Gregory, it’s because the community has been on the defense.

“This whole sentiment, this whole notion of playing defense comes from facing the challenges of shrinking resources and the hardships that we faced over the last seven years.

“It’s a natural human experience, intensified by a small, rural community that we’re in with a fragile economy, and by the politics that come from [living in a small town.]

“All of that pervades our existence.”

Record heat may replace wet Tahoe weather

By Kathryn Reed

Keep the umbrellas handy today, but have the sunscreen within reach because a record high is possible by the end of the week in Lake Tahoe.

“It’s certainly unusual for this time of year,” is how Shane Snyder, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Reno, described the rain that has been soaking the Lake Tahoe Basin and points east and west.

If it’s going to be wet, usually it’s isolated thunderstorms. Not so with this cold system that is moving in from the Pacific. It’s more reminiscent of a winter storm pattern.



Wet weather is going to stick around for another day in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The rain hasn’t been enough to wash away the D word. Last week, the U.S. Department of Agriculture designated all counties in Nevada, except for Storey County, natural drought disaster areas. All California counties along the Nevada border have been given the same designation.

According to the National Weather Service, “Near record dryness has prevailed since January. Precipitation from January to May 2013 has ranked in the lowest 10 percent on record in most of Western Nevada and Northern California.”

The West Shore has been getting most of the rain. That is expected to continue through much of Tuesday.

“We’ll start to dry out for good Tuesday night and onward for a while,” Snyder said.

The rain is doing a couple things – washing away all the pine pollen and lessening the risk of fire.

But with temps expected to soar again by the end of the week, the fire danger will return.

Snyder said temps could be 10 to 15 degrees above average starting on Friday and lasting through the weekend. Locations closer to the lake will be in the 80s, while outlying areas like Truckee are expected to be closer to 90 degrees.

The record in South Lake Tahoe for June 28 and June 29 is 87 degrees. The former was set in 2010, while the latter was set in 1972. Truckee’s record high of 92 for June 28 was set in 1915, and the June 29 record of 91 was set in 1956.

All of those, Snyder told *Lake Tahoe News*, could be broken.

And expect warmer than usual weather for July 4.

County reluctant to separate mental health from Tahoe senior center

By Kathryn Reed

While seniors and mental patients continue to co-mingle at the South Lake Tahoe Senior Center, the electeds finally have a meeting on the books to discuss who uses that site.

South Lake Tahoe Councilmembers Tom Davis and JoAnn Conner are the city's committee dealing with the situation. They will meet with El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago next week.

The only correspondence the city had received from county CAO Terri Daly as of Monday was the letter dated May 15 in which she said the city had no right to kick a county agency out of a county-owned building.

"Please be advised that the county intends to continue occupancy and use of the building in accordance with the Facility Use Agreement. However, in the spirit of cooperation and being mindful and sensitive to the concerns raised by the senior groups, the county will attempt to look at other potential sites for the Mental Health Wellness Center," Daly wrote in that letter. "Frankly, I feel that by remaining we are subjecting the clients of our wellness center to unjustified and disrespectful mistreatment."

The city and county have an agreement regarding that building that dates to 1968. It's been amended a couple times. The changes in the late 1980s say the building is for the sole use

of the seniors and if the city were to use it for anything else, the city would be in breach of contract. The county apparently doesn't have to abide by the same criteria.

Former City Manager Tony O'Rourke signed a deal in 2012 without council's approval to allow mental health to occupy part of the building. The council earlier this month refused to ratify that agreement, which essentially voided it. The county contends the council never had to approve it so therefore it is enforceable.

The problem is the two populations play together as well as the city and county. Space used by the seniors has been taken over by mental health. Items the seniors have paid for have been damaged and stolen. Seniors have repeatedly testified at council meetings and to city staff that they feel threatened and that their sanctuary is anything but that now.

Another issue is the county has not been paying its utility bills for the site. Daly didn't respond to an email about the senior center and county Auditor Joe Harn said he didn't know anything about the bill until contacted by *Lake Tahoe News* on June 24. He did say he would pay the bills as soon as the city sends him the bills directly.

The county owes more than $9,000 for utilities from 2012. The county said it shouldn't have to pay all of that so the city said it would reduce it to about $4,900. That invoice was submitted on Dec. 4, 2012. The next invoice will be for more, according to city officials, because it will include 2013 expenses.

Firefighter making history in South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Leslie Asbury didn't grow up dreaming of being a firefighter. But she became one. She didn't set out to break ground in South Lake Tahoe, but she is. She isn't saying she will be a fire chief one day, but she's on that path.

The 38-year-old South Lake Tahoe firefighter is about to earn her captain's pin. And in doing so she will be the first female captain in South Lake Tahoe Fire Department's history.

"The thing I love about this job is you never know what you are going to get when come to work," Asbury told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Unfortunately, you deal with lot of people's really bad days. We try to make it better. It takes a lot of training and education."



Leslie Asbury is South Lake Tahoe Fire Department's first woman captain. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Asbury went to college to become a magazine writer. As she was about to graduate she knew that was not the profession she wanted to pursue. She thought firefighting might interest her

so she set up a meeting with a director of an academy in San Jose. That week there was a seminar about women in fire service.

“I fell in love with it,” Asbury said. “The biggest thing is helping people; trying to make a difference in their situation.”

She started with CalFire seasonally in 1998 in Santa Clara.

Asbury took a break to go to paramedic school. Then she went back to CalFire in the Indian Wells area.

She started with South Lake Tahoe in November 2002 as a firefighter-paramedic. A handful of years ago she was promoted to engineer. In May she found out she would be captain.

It’s not a matter of having a higher up promote an individual to captain. A written test, tactical simulation exercise, public presentation, an exercise involving managing a crew and writing a staff report for the chief were some of the criteria to be considered for the promotion to captain.

Plus, there were the prerequisites to apply – the necessary state fire training and education.

“The folks I have worked with, men and women, they want to be identified as firefighters first,” Fire Chief Bruce Martin told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Women in fire is something I have seen all my career.”

Martin started in business in 1978. Today, across the U.S. the fire service is still is male-dominated profession, with about 10 percent of the work force being women, Martin said.

He said about five years ago he was at a women’s firefighting conference where the group was celebrating the first retirees – showing that a generation of women firefighters have gone through the ranks.

“It brings a necessary diversity to our departments that help us relate better to our communities,” Martin said of having women on staff.

Asbury said being a woman has never been an issue for her at this department. And she doesn’t foresee her promotion changing that.

What she sees changing is having to do more paperwork.

One of the main responsibilities of a captain is being in charge at the scene of an emergency.

“(I will be) making decisions how to mitigate that emergency. Along with that comes the responsibility of making sure your crew is safe and goes home safely,” Asbury said

For Asbury, the hardest calls are the ones that involve children.

Being on the ground June 27, 2007, was hard too. She fought to save homes, but 254 were destroyed in the Angora Fire.

“It was hard to see friends’ houses burned down,” Asbury said.

One of the more memorable calls was when a guy died in front of the crew, but using a defibrillator the paramedics revived him. He was transported to the hospital and lived.

Running and cycling are ways for Asbury to clear her mind of the day’s events – especially the unpleasant ones. She also skis and does triathlons – the half Ironmans.

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Note:

• Pinning ceremony is June 28, 4pm, Lake Tahoe Airport.

• Tyler Jack will also receive his captain’s pin.

Colo. fires have officials thinking how to pay for future ones

By Jenny Deam, Los Angeles Times

JEFFERSON COUNTY, Colo. – As five major wildfires rage at the onset of a fire season far from over, many in this state are saying the time has come to consider toughening building regulations and shifting some fire protection costs to those who live in danger zones.

After the deadly 2012 Waldo Fire – at the time the most damaging in state history, with 346 homes lost and two deaths – Gov. John Hickenlooper convened a task force to begin to look at ways to restrict or at least rethink how to build on forestland.

Then the 2013 fire season arrived. The Black Forest Fire ignited on June 11, eclipsing the Waldo Fire in its devastation: 509 homes destroyed, 16,000 acres scorched, two dead – a new "worst in history" record.

"This has become the new normal for Colorado," said a weary Skip Smith, head of the Department of Forest, Rangeland and Watershed Stewardship at Colorado State University, about the worsening toll of wildfires.

A renewed sense of urgency has enveloped the task force members, who are intent on presenting their final recommendations to Hickenlooper, a Democrat, by the end of the

summer.

In nature-loving Colorado – where residents relish their mountain views and have built dream homes and moved to subdivisions deep in the woodlands – many worry that firefighters may not be able to protect forest communities in the new age of heat and drought.

Some recommendations under consideration are unprecedented in Colorado, including assessing additional fire protection fees on residents in high-risk areas, changing insurance rates and enacting brush and tree clearance regulations and stricter building codes that require more fire-resistant materials.

One measure calls for mandatory disclosure of wildfire risks to homeowners. Many people in suburban subdivisions have told authorities they had no idea they lived in danger areas.

“It is not a question of preventing wildfires. There will always be wildfires. But how do you mitigate the risk and reduce the danger?” asked Barbara Kelley, director of the Colorado Department of Regulatory Affairs, who heads the task force.

“We really need to get moving,” she said, “I don’t want to be having this same conversation next summer.”

The task force includes a broad representation of public and private interests – fire officials, home developers, the insurance industry and politicians. More than 1.1 million people in Colorado live in “red zones,” areas at high risk for fire, according to Census data analyzed by I-News Network, a public service journalism organization. That represents roughly 1 in 4 Colorado homes.

If development continues at the current pace, the number of acres of new residential land in forested areas is expected to more than double to 2.1 million by 2030, said Joe Duda, deputy state forester.

“Years ago there were fires, but there were less people in the fire area so it was less critical,” he said, “If we don’t get our arms around this now, it is going to get away from us.”

As he spoke with the *Times* on Thursday night, Duda was packing for mandatory evacuation from the town of South Fork as the massive West Fork Complex wildfire was bearing down. On Friday, the town’s entire population of about 600 was ordered out, and officials worried it might not be saved. By Saturday, however, the blaze had slowed its course, easing fears.

Kelly says people who live in fire areas do not typically cause fires or increase their severity, but the resources needed to protect them is extraordinarily high.

She sees the fire protection recommendation as a question of paying your fair share: With the scenery comes responsibility.

Under the current system, there is no disincentive for residents to live in a fire zone, Duda said.

City and county governments often welcome plans for new development and have generally not considered the cost of protecting those homes against fire, he said.

The insurance industry often does not assess higher premiums for homes in fire danger areas, so all homeowners are subsidizing those in high-risk areas, according to testimony at a recent task force meeting.

As development creeps into forested land, thinning of trees and controlled burns also become less palatable to residents. A 2008 assessment of Colorado forests showed millions of acres of trees that were considered unhealthy but allowed to stand.

There is little doubt wildfire protection is getting more expensive, said Ray Rasker, executive director of Headwaters Economics, a nonprofit research group based in Bozeman, Mont., that studies environmental issues in the West.

Nationally, $3 billion is allocated to federal agencies to fight wildfires – three times the amount a decade ago, Rasker said. Of that, at least a third is going to defend homes.

During the same decade, the number of acres burned across the country doubled, mostly in the West, Rasker said.

Supporters of tougher regulations predict homeowners and some elected officials will push back on the task force's upcoming recommendations.

There is a long-standing tradition in Colorado and other Rocky Mountain states of local governments being reluctant to interfere with something as personal as where people should live. The joke is that "code" is a fighting word.

Rasker says one solution might be to shift some of the burden of protecting homes in forested lands – much of which now is borne by the federal government – to the local level. He said the staggering costs alone might be enough to put some teeth into building restrictions.

"Governments and people have to have the intestinal fortitude to do the right thing, and the right thing is not the easy thing," Duda said. "We're going to have to think differently."

Nevada tries to make tourism website more engaging

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

The Nevada Tourism Commission was feeling a little better about TravelNevada.com 2.0 after its brand consultant told members they'll be tweaking the state's tourism website after

a lukewarm response to its mid-April debut.

Representatives of Burson-Marsteller, the New York-based consultant the state is paying $3.2 million over two years, told commissioners Wednesday they are working on fixes to the website that should be completed by the end of July.

“I must say it’s a dramatic improvement,” said Commissioner Christopher Baum, who heads the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority, after getting a preview of the changes.

“It’s a dramatic improvement in terms of navigation, in terms of visuals, in terms of intuitive ability to find things that are of interest to travelers,” Baum said. “In a perfect world, it would have been the first version we launched, but I’m delighted that we’re getting to a version now that we can all be happy with. It’s dramatically better on virtually every level.”

Tourism leaders statewide complained that a portion of editorial content that had previously been accessible on the website was gone or difficult to find. Burston-Marsteller’s contracted website designer said one of the fixes planned is to restore some of the previously available content.

“We went too far in trip planning than rich narratives and other editorial content,” said Louis Hernandez in his presentation to the commission.

Some critics have complained that information about events was outdated and that the site’s functionality declined. Others were concerned about whether an out-of-state vendor was best qualified to develop the website. The website revisions also came at a time when the state unveiled its new brand, “A World Within. A State Apart,” which also was panned.

Tourism Commission Director Claudia Vecchio defended the brand, saying there would always be detractors and that it just needed more time for the public to appreciate it.

While commissioners were satisfied that improvements were under way, they were delighted by early reports of site metrics showing that visits to the page and increases in the number of requests for more information were on the rise, thanks primarily to the state's strong social media presence.

Michelle Stevenson told the commission that Facebook posts about the state more than tripled in the last year and the dwell time on Nevada's page was well above industry averages. The state agency focused on social media, spending minimally on more expensive television and traditional media advertisements.