Opinion: The gender of leadership

By Scott A. Lukas

When I was asked to write my reflections on leadership to commemorate Women's History Month, I had thought, at first, of the many creative and innovative women leaders who have made a difference in South Lake Tahoe.

Lake Tahoe Community College has Kindred Murillo, who has helped steer the college in some exciting new directions in what are challenging economic times. Norma Santiago was elected and then ran unopposed as District 5 supervisor for El Dorado Country. She has brought much attention to issues of social justice within our region. Nancy Kerry, South Lake Tahoe city manager; Patty Kouyoumdjian, executive director of the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board; Nancy Gibson, U.S. Forest Service supervisor; Darcie Goodman Collins, executive director of the League to Save Lake Tahoe; Sandy Evans Hall, executive director of the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association; Carol Chaplin, executive director of Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority; Lisa Noonan, Douglas County School District superintendent; Angela Swanson, JoAnn Connor and Brooke Laine, all councilmembers for South Lake Tahoe (and many others) have all, in their own unique ways, illustrated the value that women bring to local and regional leadership.



But for all of their important and unique contributions, there is perhaps more that we can learn from their leadership lessons. This is the gender of leadership.

Some years back I participated in a planning session in the region. One of the guest speakers was asked to comment on the issue of leadership in South Lake Tahoe or, more specifically, the topic of how to move the city in new directions in challenging, if not turbulent, economic and social times. The speaker's response was quite puzzling. Here, paraphrasing, "Back in the day, we had more 'men in the mountains.' What we need now is more 'phallic thrust' in Tahoe." The phrase "phallic thrust" was, not surprisingly, greeted with some shock by the many attendees at the event.

During one of the coffee breaks, I overheard a number of them comment on how offensive the speaker was, yet no one challenged the speaker on any of these points. Presumably, the person was making a claim that Tahoe had gone somewhat downhill due to a lack of "macho" or masculinist leadership and the solution was to return to the days of old.

We might use the cases of national leadership to reflect on the problems with this line of thinking. Consider how the "phallic thrust" exhibited by the George W. Bush administration impacted the United States – including its role in the world, its perception among other nations, and its ability to deal with the imminent crises of economy, terrorism, and political instability.

These two spheres of leadership are quite different, but it might behoove us to consider the ways in which masculinist leadership has impacted people and culture in negative ways and then ask some serious questions about what sort of leadership we envision for the future of South Lake Tahoe. Surely, it will not be a form dominated by the "phallic

thrust" philosophy mentioned by this speaker and, at the same time, it may not completely benefit from female leadership. We would be mistaken to assume that women leaders are immune from the "phallic thrust" syndrome. In fact, theorists of gender would remind us of the many examples in which women have enacted the gendered ills more common to masculinity and patriarchy. Consider the complicity of Lynndie England in the Abu Ghraib prison-torture scandal as one example. The point may be to focus on the gender of leadership and not the fact of whether the leader is a man or a woman.

My colleague Scott Valentine, geology professor at Lake Tahoe Community College, recently raised a number of important issues about what he perceives to be a lack of effective local leadership. Valentine was unsuccessful in his bid to secure a seat on the City Council. In a number of columns that he has written, he has spoken of the many problems faced by South Lake Tahoe's residents – a lack of stable economic base, a lack of concern with sustainability, an "old economy" mentality, few opportunities for younger people, and a general "old boys" philosophy when it comes to planning and strategic decision-making. Valentine's call for new leadership and new vision for South Lake Tahoe reminds us that men and women have important roles to play in questioning our local leaders and the decisions they make.

We should certainly celebrate the many women who have brought positive change to our local culture and we should tell the story of local men who have taken a stand against the "old boys"/ "phallic thrust" philosophy of leadership that is rarely positive for anyone (except the old boys). But the important lesson here is to emphasize the gender of leadership. Generally, this requires that we look critically at the decisions made by local leaders and that we hold them accountable for their actions. We often forget that leaders should not be understood as being the final authorities in any matter – what George W. Bush touted as his "decider" role –

but “leaders” in the etymological sense imply the “meaning to begin a discussion or debate.”

More specifically this meaning of leadership might encourage us to:

• Create coalitions of people who are willing to work on new visions and directions for the community – especially ones that challenge the “old boys” mentality of the community.

• Open up new forms of dialogue with members of the community who have rarely been invited to the “old boys” events – these include members of ethnic and gender minorities.

• Foster greater awareness of the ways in which political, economic, and social forms of special interest continue to damage our decision-making processes.

• Develop new plans and strategies that effectively envision community outreach and involvement and that avoid the elitist and often cynical assumption that the “leaders know best” for the community.

• Effectively balance economic interests with social justice concerns.

• Participate, vote, and co-create change.

Scott A. Lukas is a cultural anthropologist who has written widely on the subject of gender, including contributions to The Routledge International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities, Gendered Perspectives on Community Colleges, and Handbook for Achieving Gender Equity through Education. He is the founder of the Gender Ads Project, former gender adviser of Dads & Daughters, and been interviewed on his perspectives on gender for the Czech feminist magazine FEMA and Huffington Post UK. He is an instructor at Lake Tahoe Community College.

MV Transportation woes go beyond Tahoe

Publisher's note: ***MV Transportation is the company that used to run BlueGo on the South Shore. MV has sued STATA, the organization that ran BlueGo before it filed for bankruptcy. All parties are working on finding a mediator to help find a resolution to their differences.***

By Zusha Elinson, California Watch

Cash-strapped cities embracing private contractors as saviors of their public transportation systems may find a cautionary tale in Fairfield.

The suburban city halfway between Sacramento and San Francisco was the headquarters of MV Transportation, a rising star in public transit outsourcing. But the company failed to deliver the bus service it promised its hometown, emails, documents and interviews show.



Between 2008 and 2010, the company was fined 295 times by local transit officials for poor performance, including too many accidents, missed bus runs and late buses.

The use of private contractors has grown dramatically in California. Contractors ran 223 million miles of bus and train service in the state in 2011, a 42 percent increase in a decade, according to the National Transit Database. Last year,

they picked up 166 million riders in California, up 29 percent. Government-run public transit systems still carried far more riders last year with 1.2 billion, a slight dip from a decade ago.

Even in the Bay Area, a stronghold of public employee unions, officials are more eagerly considering outsourcing public transit to save money. Alameda County is mulling contracting out bus routes in the growing suburbs of Fremont and Newark, managed for decades by AC Transit. Last summer, Marin County officials considered outsourcing bus service to a private company, deciding against it only when the public agency cut its price to compete.

But the arrangements are not all unmitigated successes. Some fall short of heralded savings. Others bring lower wages and less bus service. In Fairfield, then-Transit Manager George Fink said he couldn't hold politically connected MV Transportation to the contract, calling it a wake-up call to transit agencies thinking about outsourcing.

Riders like retiree Albert Sanchez are the collateral damage. One sunny afternoon, Sanchez and his wife waited for a bus from the mall in Fairfield to their home a few miles away, in Suisun City. Sanchez said the outsourced Fairfield and Suisun Transit – known as FAST – has failed to live up to its optimistic acronym.

"The bus is always late. It's always late," said Sanchez, an inveterate public transit user who moved from San Francisco eight years ago.

Sanchez said that the previous week, he'd waited at the stop for two hours. One Friday, he walked four miles home because buses stop running at 8:30pm.

Documents and interviews reinforce Fink's allegations that the Fairfield City Council and his bosses frequently intervened. Once, Fink said, he clocked the time between his criticism of

MV Transportation and a call from his boss, Assistant Public Works Director Wayne Lewis, at 32 minutes.

Lewis, who now leads FAST, said Fink was a rigid manager who always stuck to the "letter of the law." Lewis added, however, that he understood the frustration city employees feel when contractors "have access to elected officials and staff doesn't."

MV Transportation has been a generous donor to local charities and pumped tens of thousands into low-dollar Fairfield City Council races.

"Anything that was critical, 89 percent of the time, it would circle back to us," Fink said. "They would engage the City Council, and they would call the city manager and then he would talk to me and tell me to back off."

During Fink's five-year tenure in Fairfield, which ended in 2010, records and interviews show he was ordered not to issue an audit critical of MV Transportation and to stop penalizing the company for poor performance, and his staff was ordered to halt regular bus inspections.

Chuck Timm, a city councilman until 2011, said the company gained no special access to city leaders and praised its performance.

"As a councilmember and as a citizen, they were great community partners, and they did an excellent job," Timm said.

Timm prefaced his comments by noting that he was "friends with the boss," former MV Transportation CEO Jon Monson. Timm also received a $10,000 campaign donation from the company in 2007, according to state campaign finance filings.

Cristina Russell, an MV Transportation spokeswoman, declined to comment, saying, "A response would unnecessarily cast a negative light on a positive relationship."

Friction with transit staff

With public transportation in the suburbs, some problems are embedded in city planning, or lack thereof. Cities like Fairfield are built for cars and often are too spread out to justify extended hours or more regular service. But problems such as late buses and accidents are more closely related to management and oversight.

When Fink arrived in Fairfield in 2005, MV Transportation already was running the bus system, which carries about 1 million passengers a year. When the city put the contract out to bid again, he and other city officials added penalties for poor service. MV won an $18.2 million, four-year contract. Soon after, the fines started rolling in.

Over a two-year period beginning in 2008, the company was fined 295 times for a total of $164,000, according to a 2010 city audit, released in place of the one Fink sought to issue. MV was fined for the 14 months when the preventable accident rate exceeded the allowed 1 per 100,000 miles. FAST officials fined MV nine times for not meeting the agreed-upon 90 percent on-time arrival rate and 18 times for buses that never showed at all. The company was penalized twice for drivers using cellphones while driving, six times for drivers speeding and 13 times for drivers being out of uniform.

MV executives were furious about the fines. In meetings with the FAST staff, they complained they were “losing money” and the deal they signed was too punitive, according to meeting notes and internal memos.

As the friction between Fink and the company peaked in the summer of 2009, Monson, then MV’s board chairman, made $10,000 campaign donations to City Councilman John Mraz and City Councilwoman Catherine Moy. Those were hefty sums, even in a city with no campaign contribution limits. When contacted for comment, Mraz called Fink an expletive and hung up the phone.

Moy did not return emails or phone calls.

Fines, inspections put aside

Monson and other executives began to meet directly with the City Council instead of city transit staff. In a 2010 memo, Lewis – the assistant public works director – complained that the "city has allowed MV to circumvent the normal management chain. Often, local issues are discussed and resolved without the input of transit staff by the City Manager's office, City Council, and MV executives."

Fines against MV were halted by the city for months, and old ones weren't paid as the city manager overruled some on appeal. Bus inspections that had been yielding fines also were stopped.

In an interview, Lewis said he killed an audit of MV ordered by Fink because it was too punitive. He said that while many of the fines were valid, "there were enough of them that … would seem like they were frivolous," such as one for a bus driver's untucked shirttail.

Lewis added that Fairfield and Suisun Transit and MV Transportation are "in a good place now."

But problems persisted after Fink left in 2010. The bus service performance "exhibited mostly negative trends in all areas" related to efficiency and productivity, according to a 2010 audit by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, which oversees transit funding in the Bay Area. An MV spokeswoman declined to comment, and Lewis did not return calls seeking comment on the audit.

And in June 2011, an MV Transportation bus operator was involved in a fatal collision. The bus driver, identified as Dale Lee Karuza in multiple lawsuits, was turning left across a Suisun City street when he collided with an oncoming car, killing a passenger. Police cited the primary cause of the

collision as the bus failing to yield right of way, according to the California Highway Patrol's summary. Investigators also concluded that the car was speeding.

Fink now works at the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission in Stockton. Reflecting back on his time in Fairfield, he said it taught him a lesson about outsourcing public transit.

"If you had a contractor that wanted to run the business and not maximize their profit at every turn, then it would be fine," Fink said. "As it tends to work out, you're spending 85 percent of the time making sure that they're doing everything in the contract instead of doing the things you need to be doing, like getting grant money doing transit planning."

Tahoe drug agents busy with heroin, pot

By Kathryn Reed

Bad guys don't like to commit too many crimes in the winter. Not the obvious ones, any way. Still, narcotics officers on the South Shore are plenty busy.

Indoor grows is one activity that increases in winter. And it's not for medicinal purposes. People are shipping marijuana back and forth from Tahoe.

"We pick off packages full of weed or money," Jeff Catchings told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Catchings is the commander of the South Lake Tahoe El Dorado Narcotics Task Force – or SLEDNET for short.

Working on finding the big dealers is SLEDNET's goal – no matter the drug.

Heroin use is back up after declining for a spell. On the California side of the South Shore there were 26 heroin overdose deaths in an 18-month period starting in November 2010.

"Heroin deaths are higher than vehicle, homicide … it beats everything," Catchings said. "We do have a drug problem, that is obvious."

SLEDNET has been operating since 1988. It was threatened with being shutdown a little more than a year ago because of funding. And, still, the agency that is run by the state and staffed with mostly local law enforcement officers remains on unstable ground.

El Dorado County Sheriff John D'Agostini told *Lake Tahoe News* he sees value in the task force and is doing what he can to keep it going.

The state Department of Justice is weighing whether to keep the 27 task forces in California going. June is the latest a decision is expected.

South Lake Tahoe Police Department has two officers in SLEDNET, EDSO one. Catchings is with DOJ.

While the California Highway Patrol is supposed to be part of SLEDNET, it does not currently have an officer assigned to the

group. This could change as people go through upcoming academy classes.

Douglas County used to be part of SLEDNET, but with standards between the states changing, those deputies could no longer participate. Alpine County had a member in the past who was funded via a grant.

While those counties are not part of SLEDNET, the agencies still work together in other ways.

D’Agostini would like a member of probation to be part of the team. Probation can’t do forced searches, Catchings said, so some details with that agency need to be worked out.

“It’s not just narcotics. We are doing everything,” Catchings said of his workload.

SLEDNET was integral is tracking down the phone use of the girl who died following SnowGlobe, and eventually locating the last friend to see her alive.

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11 women receive special awards from Soroptimist

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Courageous, committed, tenacious, dedicated, inspirational. Those are just some of the words used to

describe the 11 women who were honored Thursday night by the two South Shore Soroptimist groups.

Soroptimist International South Lake Tahoe and Soroptimist International Tahoe Sierra recognized three distinct groups March 7 at Harrah's Lake Tahoe. With a mission of helping girls and women, the two groups come together once a year to choose who to give the Violet Richardson Ward, Women's Opportunity and Ruby awards to.



Soroptimist honor 11 women March 7. Photo/Sharon Sterling

Six South Tahoe High School students were singled out for their volunteerism. The Violet Richardson Ward Award is named after the first president of the first Soroptimist club. Girls must be between the ages of 14 and 17 to be considered.

This years winners are: Catherine Baghadikian, Grace Bronken, Rose Campion, Margaret Carlson, Stephanie Thomaselli and Carli Valney.

While some of them have exceptional grades, or are star athletes, this award goes beyond those achievements – and doesn't even have grades or sports as criteria. It's about what they are doing for others that counts.

Several of them volunteer at Bread & Broth, are involved with church groups, volunteer with the Boys and Girls Club, are in

Girl Scouts, in the National Honor Society, started a music program, planted trees post-Angora, help at Tahoe Youth & Family Services, and help at Barton's Skilled Nursing Facility.

Michelle Flury and Marisol Jimenez-Torres were there to receive the Women's Opportunity Award. They each received a check to help with their continued education.

These women have overcome the odds and obstacles, and yet know higher education is the answer to being self-sufficient and able to provide for their families. The award is not only money to help them, but recognition for their courage and determination.

For Susan Baker, Diana Hankins and Karin Holmes, the Ruby Award is bestowed on them for their work in making the lives of other women or girls be better. But none would take sole credit for her efforts, instead saying the team around them made their accomplishments become a reality.

Baker is the reason Mount Tallac High School has the Young Parents Program, and a big reason why in 1999 when it started there were 32 girls who were pregnant or young moms, and today there are three at the school.

Hankins is the woman behind the local chapter of NAMI – National Alliance of Mental Illness. Every day she is working to wipe away the stigma of mental illness and help those who have issues.

Holmes is the reason the South Tahoe Middle School track got built. She has been a coach and teacher for decades.

Lyn Landauer – 1926-2013

Lyn Landauer, one of Lake Tahoe's noted historians, died Feb. 21 in Monterey. She was 86.

Lyn was president of the Lake Tahoe Historical Society and wrote many of the articles for the monthly newsletter. She authored "The Mountain Sea, A History of Lake Tahoe".

Born Lyndall Deane Baker on Sept. 24, 1926, in Oakland, she married Donald Landauer in 1948. Both were teachers, writers, avid sailors, folk dancers, and travelers. They lived in Pasadena for 35 years, where they raised four sons.

Lyn received her doctorate in history from UCLA in 1980. She taught history in Los Angeles secondary schools, and later was a professor of history at Los Angeles City College, Pierce College and Lake Tahoe Community College.



Lyn Landauer

She and Don retired to Lake Tahoe in 1987 and later split their time between Lake Tahoe and Kauai.

Lyn and Don wrote a book about the history of Hawaii and the U.S. Navy called "Pearl". She also wrote many non-fiction and fiction books, magazine and newspaper articles, and was a popular lecturer on a range of historical topics.

After Don died in 2006, Lyn moved to Monterey. Although challenged by physical ailments in recent years, Lyn's passion for writing, reading, and teaching never wavered. She passed away peacefully, surrounded by family.

Lyn was preceded in death by her son, Michael, in 2003 and husband, Don, in 2006.

She is survived by sons Christopher, Timothy and Douglas; daughters-in-law Deborah, JorJa, Mary Beth, and Kirstie; grandchildren Matthew, Robert, Nikolas, Shaughn, Kellie, and Benjamin; great-grandson Jordan; sister Meredith Wylie; nieces and a nephew.

Services will be private.

Donations in her honor may be made to the League to Save Lake Tahoe.

T.J. Maxx caught in middle of water issue

By Kathryn Reed

A potential $409,907 water problem is beginning to simmer and could reach boiling stage if a solution is not found by the end of the month.

When T.J. Maxx opened last fall in South Lake Tahoe it did so with a temporary agreement in place between Lukins Water District and South Tahoe Public Utility District. The building is a Lukins customer.



T.J. Maxx opened in November without a definitive source of water for fire suppression. Photo/LTN

Days before the store was to open the fire marshal said there was not adequate water pressure to suppress a fire. This had to do with the store putting in a whole new sprinkler system.

An agreement was quickly reached that if there were a fire, the intertie between the water companies would be opened so the fire could be extinguished. The agreement expires June 1 and Lukins has until April 1 to present STPUD with a permanent solution.

Jennifer Lukins, who runs the 956-customer company, was at the STPUD meeting March 7, where the board directed staff to continue working on the issue. Cass Amacker was there representing the Garfinkle family. The Garfinkles, who are from the Bay Area, are the longtime owners of the building.

As a small private water company regulated by the California Public Utilities Commission, Lukins' job is to provide domestic water, not water for fire protection. That is part of the conundrum.

This issue could have been completely avoided a handful of years ago when the Garfinkles were approached by STPUD when the district was doing a project on Highway 50. The district wanted an easement across the property and in turn offered the Garfinkles a free water connection. The Garfinkles never

responded to the district’s offer.

That water connection has a six-figure value.

One of the alternatives outlined in Thursday’s STPUD board packet is the $409,907 one-time capacity charge fee for the 8-inch intertie.

Lukins told *Lake Tahoe News* she did not know about that option and the cost until she read the agenda.

“We have an existing connection and they want to charge us,” Lukins said.

Of the six options presented by South Tahoe PUD, Lukins likes No. 5.

It says in part, “Leave the intertie open, with or without the ‘loop’ restriction, and install a pressure trip valve at the intertie which would only operate if the pressure dropped to a preselected figure in the Lukins water system. … If the board desires to entertain a fire only option for the intertie, and assume that the trip valve would only register during a fire event, the charge would be $147,566.52 for an 8-inch fire only connection.”

Lukins said her research shows that the trip valve should cost $40,000. That’s the route she would really like to go.

Lukins, even if the company wanted to, would need CPUC approval to spend money on the upgrades and the state would determine how and which ratepayers would be affected.

Ultimately, though, whatever route the water districts determine is the best course will likely be the financial responsibility of the landlord and/or tenant.

“I think what is best is for better fire protection,” Lukins said, even if that means that property ultimately ends up becoming a South Tahoe PUD customer. That is part of last

year’s agreement, that if a resolution is not found, STPUD gets the Garfinkle building as a customer without having to compensate Lukins.

K9 officers receive 3 days of intensive training in Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

A strong police presence was seen throughout various parts of South Lake Tahoe earlier this week.

Thirteen police dogs and their handlers from about a half dozen California law enforcement agencies were in town for an advanced training course March 4-6.



K9 officers spend three days training in South Lake Tahoe. Photos/Matt Morrison

South Lake Tahoe Police Department’s two dogs participated, too. This is the first time the department has hosted an advanced training. As host, the dogs and handlers attend for

free.

The three-day class was taught by instructors from Vigilant Canine Services International.

While training is part of every day life, a course like this is more intense.

One session had the dogs at Lake Tahoe Airport working with helicopters from the CHP and Reno-Tahoe Helicopters.

“Dogs can get squeamish around loud noises and propellers,” Sgt. Josh Adler explained. “This gets them acclimated.”



SLTPD Officer Ryan Wagoner gets his dog used to the helicopter.

Dogs had to climb into the helicopter with it running.

“After that we exposed the dogs to tear gas. They aren’t affected by it, but you need to know if they are or not,” Adler told *Lake Tahoe News*. The officers all had masks on.

One scenario required the dogs to find a bad guy while tear gas was in the air.

Multiple searches were conducted throughout the training.

Dogs also had to work around firearms.

Annual certifications are required per Police Officer

Standards and Training. The dog and handler must pass as a team.

Big 5 lease may save Y Factory Stores

By Kathryn Reed

With the Factory Stores at the Y signing a multi-year lease agreement with Big 5 Sporting Goods, the South Lake Tahoe center may be able to find solid financial ground.

“I’m still in negotiations with the bank and trying to get a loan modification. Certainly the Big 5 lease helps me. But nothing has been settled yet,” Shannon Casteel told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Casteel and her sister Nancy Irmer bought the center in 2004 from their brother Gary Casteel. Since Irmer’s death her family and Shannon Casteel have operated the center.

As reported last month by *Lake Tahoe News*, the center that is located on one of the four corners of the Y, was about to be auctioned off. That did not happen. Casteel is trying to save her business.

Casteel said she has been talking to Big 5 for five years about moving in. All the hurdles were cleared and the retailer already has keys to the building. They will be taking over the old Adidas spot.

“They are hoping to open before Memorial Day,” Casteel said.

Calls to Big 5 headquarters in El Segundo were not returned. Other Big 5 stores in the area are in Minden, Carson City, Placerville, Reno and Sparks.

City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News* she got word March 6 that Big 5 is coming to town.

“It is very exciting news. I understand they will have a job fair in the next couple weeks,” she said.

How many employees will be hired is not known.

While the Adidas store was not one of the top 25 sales tax generators in South Lake Tahoe, Kerry anticipates Big 5 being able to bring in the kind of numbers that would put it in the company of Grocery Outlet, DIY, Ross and Fresh Ketch. Those are some of the top 25 sales tax producers.

Sales, property and hotel taxes are the three main revenue sources for the city.

Kerry said when she got wind Big 5 was looking seriously at South Lake Tahoe she reached out to the company to see how the city could help.

“We are definitely doing everything we can to encourage retail. We don’t want to be a roadblock to them,” Kerry said.

On the April 2 City Council agenda will be an item to waive special use permit fees. Right now a prospective business may have to pay thousands of dollars to determine if the location they want to operate at falls within the parameters of the city’s rulebook. Even if it doesn’t, the fee, per today’s

policy, must be paid.

Casteel is also in negotiations with other potential renters.

“I can’t say who because we have not signed the lease,” Casteel said. “I have another major tenant that I am negotiating with right now. They would take the area from (the Big 5) store toward where Great Outdoors was.”

She also said people are interested in renting the storefront on the corner closest to Emerald Bay Road.

The Big 5 lease is for five years, with an option for 20.

Squaw-Alpine boss goes undercover at both resorts

By Kathryn Reed

New trainees throughout the season are par for the course at a ski resort. So when the “older” ski dude with what he describes as a blonde mullet and matching Fu Manchu beard showed up, it wasn’t any big deal. At least not at that moment.

The new kid, though, was actually their boss.

Andy Wirth, CEO and president of Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski resorts, changed his look and job title in January unbeknownst all but a few key members of his executive team. And it was being filmed.

On March 8 at 8pm, Wirth will be the subject of the CBS show

“Undercover Boss”. The show is all about a chief executive officer going undercover to see how his or her company is really functioning, to talk to the people doing the real work, to figure out what needs improving and what is working. The underlying theme of the show, which is in its fourth season, is bosses find out how their decisions affect others.



Andy Wirth, CEO of Squaw and Alpine, goes undercover to give a snowboarding lesson. Photo/Provided

(Wirth has not seen the final cut of the show.)

“Probably the most single compelling aspect that still resonates with me today is the depth of character, passion and how much people care about their jobs,” Wirth told *Lake Tahoe News*. “On the one hand I’m proud to say I didn’t find anything surprising. I always knew we had a hard working, dedicated staff.”

He was approached to do the show through business associates in the Midwest. At first he was hesitant, but then the producers had answers to all of his concerns.

With 2,300 employees between both resorts during peak season, it’s hard for any boss to know everything that is going on. Wirth recommends this type of undercover operation for any CEO.

He was already one of those bosses who would get in the trenches. He's worked lift maintenance, climbing to the top of lift towers.

But the show took it to a new level.

"I will look like a dork, but I am OK with that," Wirth said.



Andy Wirth – what he really looks like. Photo/LTN file

At Alpine he worked in the terrain park and as a snowboard instructor; at Squaw he was on the ski patrol.

"I haven't done a beacon search in a long, long time. That was a bit of a challenge," Wirth said.

He took over Squaw in 2010 when KSL Capital Partners bought the resort, and added the job duties at Alpine when the resorts merged in 2011.

"The reason I'm CEO and president of a ski company is because I love this business. It includes the operations," Wirth said. "To stand at the top of Squaw Peak and see the sunrise over Lake Tahoe in 30, 40 mph winds … I love that environment. It is home for me."

Vail Resorts earnings soar; making plans to increase summer activities

By Jason Blevins, Denver Post

Vail Resorts on Wednesday announced visitation was climbing at its stable of nine ski areas, with net income jumping 30 percent during its second fiscal quarter, which ended Jan. 31.

Profits rose to $60.6 million as resort revenue reached $408.3 million, up 12.1 percent from the same quarter last year. Lift-ticket revenue climbed 14.3 percent to $175.7 million for the quarter. Spending on ski lessons, dining and retail-rental also rose for the quarter.

Lodging revenue was up 2.8 percent, and with increasing room rates, the company’s lodging earnings grew 43.4 percent for the quarter.



Heavenly plans to upgrade its summer climbing wall to resemble Mt. Tallac. Photo/LTN file

The company's three California ski areas – Heavenly, Northstar and Kirkwood – saw visitation climb 56.1 percent over the same period last year, which was marred with record low snowfall. The company did not release specific skier visit information, saying only that visitation through January improved from its mid-January report showing visitation up a mere 2 percent over the same period last season.

Vail Resorts chief Rob Katz said the second-quarter results represent a strong rebound from the slow start, which saw the company warn analysts of potentially less-than-expected income for the fiscal year. But when the snow arrived in time for Christmas, the company enjoyed a boost.

Also Wednesday, the company announced the largest capital spending in Vail Resorts' history, with $130 million to $140 million in resort expenditures for fiscal 2013, including $47 million to $52 million in maintenance spending.

Vail Resorts will spend $25 million on the first phase of its Epic Discovery summer plan, which, pending federal approval, will see ziplines, ropes courses, climbing walls, alpine coasters, expanded hiking and biking trails and education centers at all four of its Colorado ski areas, and Heavenly and Northstar areas in California.

Vail will spend $10 million on improvements at its recently acquired Afton Alps ski area in Minnesota and Mt. Brighton outside Detroit. Those improvements include snowmaking upgrades and terrain parks.

Construction on the Peak 6 expansion at Breckenridge will begin this summer after five years of federal review. Vail is building a new 500-seat restaurant at Beaver Creek in preparation of the mountain’s hosting of the 2015 World Alpine Ski Championships. Vail ski area will replace its four-pack Mountain Top Express chairlift with a six-person chair, increasing capacity by 33 percent.