Employee accused of stealing from Incline women's center

By Kathryn Reed

An employee of Tahoe Safe Alliance has been accused of embezzling about $15,000 from the nonprofit.

The woman, whose name has not been released, was fired from the North Shore organization in December. A criminal complaint was filed Feb. 15 with the Washoe County Sheriff's Office.



The woman had worked in the Incline Village office. The 28-year-old organization also has offices in Kings Beach and Truckee to help people with domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse issues.

"None of our programs are or will be affected by this loss," Executive Director Karen Carey told *Lake Tahoe News*.

She also said based on the internal investigation that no one else is believed to be involved. The alleged theft occurred for about the last six months of 2012.

"We have a $1.4 million budget. Even one dollar stolen from us we take very seriously," Carey said.

The goal is to get the stolen money repaid by the woman who had been a longtime employee.

"It was fundraising and donor dollars. We respect them and value them. That is one of the reasons why we are going to make every effort to get the money back," Carey said. No grant money was taken.

A letter has been sent to donors explaining the situation and Carey has met individually with more than two dozen people to answer questions.

“A positive outcome of these events is that we know that our current financial safeguards worked – allowing us to uncover this theft. With that said, a forensic accounting team will review our financial records to gain deeper understanding of the situation. We commit to review and strengthen our internal policies, procedures and processes as needed,” the letter says.

While Tahoe Safe Alliance thought it had enough protocols in place for something like this not to happen, the holes that were uncovered have been sealed.

When the matter is behind the group, Carey hopes to be able to share Tahoe Safe Alliance’s experience with other nonprofits in hopes they don’t have to go through the same thing.

Ex-department head sues South Lake Tahoe

South Lake Tahoe’s former Community Services director has filed a lawsuit against the city.

Stan Sherer worked for the city from January 2011 to July 2012. He was hired by then City Manager Tony O’Rourke and fired by City Manager Nancy Kerry.

Five allegations are in the suit. They boil down to wrongful termination and age discrimination. Department heads are at

will employees and do not have contracts with the city, nor are they part of an employee bargaining unit.



Stan Sherer

Sherer told *Lake Tahoe News* he is not able to comment on the suit at this time.

Nira Feeley, deputy city attorney, said the item would be on closed session March 5 for the City Council to discuss.

In the next week it should be decided if the matter will be handled in house or if outside counsel will be hired. City Attorney Patrick Enright leaves in May and Feeley is expected to go out on maternity leave in the summer for a short while.

The city was notified of the lawsuit on Feb. 11. There is a 30-day window to respond to the initial filing. The suit did not come as a surprise because Sherer had filed a claim against the city last year, which the council denied. This is the normal precursor to a lawsuit.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

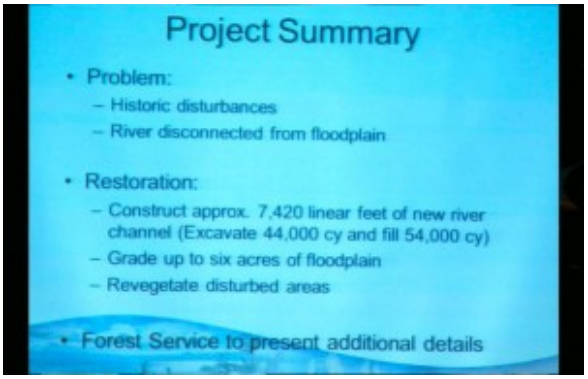
Upper Truckee River restoration to resume in June

By Kathryn Reed

A four-year project to restore a section of the Upper Truckee River is expected to start in June.

A major hurdle to make the U.S. Forest Service project a reality was overcome Thursday when the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board unanimously gave its approval.

Because there will be disturbance to stream environment zones and projections are the turbidity of the river will exceed normal levels, the board needed to grant these allowances to occur during construction.



The U.S. Forest Service will begin restoring a section of the Upper Truckee River this summer. Photo/LTN

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board must sign off on the project. That approval is needed because more than 100 trees greater than 14 inches in diameter will be taken out because they encroach on the meadow. It may be on the April agenda.

“The project is necessary to help rewater the meadow system,”

Nancy Gibson, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit forest supervisor, told the Lahontan board Feb. 14. “It’s one of the primary reasons we are pursuing this project.”

This is one of many projects along the river. Some are completed, others are in the planning stages, and others are just being talked about.

With the Upper Truckee River being the largest tributary to Lake Tahoe, it carries the most amount of sediment. The goal is to make the waterway flow more naturally like it did before it was disturbed for ranching, building the airport and other needs. This in turn will mean less sediment reaching Lake Tahoe because the banks of the river will be more contoured, thus allowing the water to go over the banks and flood the meadow. The fine particles in the future will be deposited in the meadow.

The Forest Service will be repairing what’s called reaches 5 and 6, for a total of 13,000 feet of channel. The project starting this summer and what has the regulatory approval is for Reach 5, also known as the Sunset Stables Reach. The Forest Service and California Tahoe Conservancy own the land that runs parallel to and directly east of Lake Tahoe Airport.

Sunset Stables will be the staging area. By not having it at Elks Club it allows the annual summer flea market to remain open.

What is planned:

• Year 1: New channel construction, approximately 4,000 feet.

• Year 2: Remaining new channel construction, approximately 3,300 feet; utility line relocation. South Tahoe Public Utility District’s backup treated effluent export line and water line will be relocated and buried.

• Year 3: Irrigation and seasoning; no active construction.

• Year 4: Construct channel tie-ins, floodplain grading area, and connect new channel to Upper Truckee River flows.

Extra dirt that is needed will come from a South Lake Tahoe erosion control project.

During construction it's likely areas will be off-limits to the public for safety reasons. The whole project is expected be done in October 2016.

In other action:

• The Lahontan board approved amendments to the Lake Tahoe Basin Plan.

Poland pleads not guilty to federal charges

South Lake Tahoe police Officer Johnny Poland pleaded not guilty Thursday to four counts of witness and evidence tampering.



Johnny Poland

The 44-year-old was arraigned Feb. 14. He was arrested on the

federal charges in January, with an indictment being handed down earlier this month.

At the hearing in Sacramento, Poland asked for a jury trial.

“The government asked for modifications to the terms of his release because there are several firearms unaccounted for and there are rumors that he has had contact with a witness,” Lauren Horwood with the Department of Justice told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The magistrate judge felt there was not enough evidence to modify conditions and admonished Poland to account for his guns.”

Poland’s next scheduled court date is at the end of March. For now he is out on bail. He is on unpaid leave from the police department.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Experts: California housing market gaining momentum

By Alejandro Lazo, Los Angeles Times

New foreclosures in California fell sharply in January as state rules for banks took effect, signaling that repossessions may finally settle in at levels not seen since before the housing bust.

The resulting decline in bank-owned properties listed for sale on the market – as well as record numbers of investors prowling for bargains – should give the state’s housing recovery momentum this year, experts said.



In the Southland, the new year kicked off with a sharp annual gain in sales, the highest volume for a January in six years. The region's median home price notched a sharp 23.5 percent gain over the same month last year. And new foreclosure actions plummeted statewide.

"The recovery is for real, that is what I think is happening," said Esmael Adibi, director of Chapman University's A. Gary Anderson Center for Economic Research. "It is being driven by real demand, and fundamentals are favorable."

The price gains reflect a shift in the market away from foreclosures and toward regular sales, indicating a recovery on solid ground, said Christopher Thornberg, founding principal at Beacon Economics.

"The question is, is it the real deal?" Thornberg said. "Sure it is. It is driven of course by a very tight market … about as tight as it gets, and ultimately inventory drives prices."

Although prices may be gaining, the healthiest contributors to housing strength – employment gains and consumer confidence – appear to be playing less of a factor than investor activity and low mortgage interest rates. That's cause for some concern, but the housing market still has a long way to go to recover from its peak summer 2007 levels, DataQuick President John Walsh said.

"This fledgling housing recovery has momentum," Walsh said in a statement. "Already, price hikes have caused some to question whether it's sustainable, whether it's a 'bubble.' Let's not forget, though, that we're still climbing out of a deep hole from the housing downturn."

The home price and sales gains came as foreclosure starts in

California took a massive tumble last month as new state laws aimed at prohibiting certain aggressive bank repossession practices went into effect. The real estate website ForeclosureRadar.com reported a 60.5 percent decline in California default notices in January from December.

The number of default notices — the first formal step in the state's foreclosure process — fell 77.7 percent from January 2012. A total of 4,500 such filings were logged last month — the lowest number of default no-

tices since at least September 2006, when the website's records begin.

The website noted that the foreclosure drop came in January, when a package of tough new laws protecting California homeowners went into effect. Most notably, the Homeowner Bill of Rights bans the practice of "dual tracking," in which a lender seizes a home while the owner is negotiating to lower mortgage payments.

The laws also outlawed so-called robo-signing — the improper or faulty processing of foreclosure documents — and would allow state agencies and private citizens to sue financial institutions, under limited conditions, for economic compensation and for additional civil damages of up to $50,000. Passed last year, the legislative package was sponsored by California Atty. Gen. Kamala D. Harris and written by 10 Democratic lawmakers.

While dramatic, the drop is part of a general decline in foreclosure actions over the last year as banks look toward short sales and loan modifications as alternatives to seizing homes.

"You will see a continued decline in defaults from regulator activity, new laws and from the economy," said Dustin Hobbs, a spokesman for the California Mortgage Bankers Assn. "As long as the economy, and especially the housing market, continues

to slowly heal itself, you will see fewer and fewer defaults."

Katherine Porter, a UC Irvine law professor who is monitoring the state's accord with the nation's five largest mortgage servicers over foreclosure abuses, said that it was not clear to her whether the dramatic drop in foreclosures resulted directly from new laws. The decrease could be temporary, she said, as mortgage servicers adjust their foreclosure processing systems.

Madeline Schnapp, director of economic research for ForeclosureRadar, believes the low levels of foreclosures will continue.

"The plethora of anti-foreclosure laws have been very effective in reducing foreclosure activity to what you are seeing today," she said.

Foreclosed homes made up just 15 percent of the Southern California resale market last month, down dramatically from the worst of the crash, when they hit a high of 56.7 percent in February 2009, according to DataQuick. Short sales made up an estimated 25.9 percent of January's resale market.

Fewer foreclosures will probably lead to more gains in home prices, because foreclosures have been the main supply of cheap housing. But rising prices also will lift more underwater homeowners out of a negative equity position, helping them sell their homes, which could also loosen up supply.

Buyers paid a median $321,000 last month in Southern California, a reflection of rising prices and a shift in the buying mix from lower-end starter homes to pricier digs.

Sales of homes in the region's move-up market have continued to gain. Sales of homes priced from $300,000 to $800,000 soared 49.6% year-over-year in January, while sales of homes costing more than $500,000 jumped 74 percent from a year

earlier.

Meanwhile, sales of homes costing less than $200,000 fell 23.5 percent from the previous January, an indication of tight inventory levels in those markets as investors look to snap up houses and rent them out.

Meyers concentrates on what residents want

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – Get rid of the bug station, put in a crosswalk on Highway 50 and have a welcome sign.

Those are just the basics that people in Meyers want.

But when it came to free form discussion Wednesday night of what else they want, the ideas ranged from the immediate – create an app that includes all things Meyers – to the more ambitious – build a direct link to the Pacific Crest Trail.



Adam Lewandowski with TRPA explains the area plan

process Feb. 13 to Meyers residents and business owners. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Some of the other ideas include restoring the Meyers Creek which once ran through town, erect wayfinding signs, establish a recreation hub, build a sign that involves recreation like bouldering and/or a slide, have parking lots that connect to trails, make the Old Meyers Grade more welcoming, have Tahoe Paradise Park be more prominent, provide public transit that goes to Reno, put a bridge across the Upper Truckee River.

This South Shore enclave at the base of Echo Summit embarked on a path starting last April to capitalize on assets instead of reinventing itself. An advisory panel of seven (three representing recreation, two residents, two business people) has been meeting since August to fine-tune elements from community meetings.

Facilitator and Meyers resident Michael Ward said locals, not tourists have been the focus – which he said is the way planning should be done.

The priorities of this group were outlined Feb. 13:

• Maintain Meyers' unique character – this in part means focusing on what locals want, not how to attract tourists; as well as embracing heritage.

• On the ground improvements – do things, don't just talk.

• Simplify permitting – potentially streamlining how special events can take place.

• Recreation – connect trails, make Washoe Meadows State Park more integral.

• Bike-pedestrian friendly – have businesses along routes so people can easily stop.

• Clustered parking – so people don’t have to drive from one business to the next.

• Decrease Caltrans right of way – so the frontage paralleling Highway 50 is put to better use.

All of the information is being gathered to be put into an area plan that will eventually have to be approved by the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board. It then becomes the planning bible for Meyers. Area plans replaced community plans in the new Regional Plan. (Despite a lawsuit filed this week, the Regional Plan passed in December is the law of the land today.)

The draft area plan for Meyers will be developed between now and May. Another community meeting will be called in May to go over it. The final area plan should be done in June.

STHS seniors singled out for distinction



South Tahoe High School Young Women of Distinction: Morgan Kaufer, Liana Novak, Tammi Tu, and Christine Larrance.

Publisher's note: ***Soroptimist International South Lake Tahoe on Feb. 13 recognized four Young Women of Distinction from South Tahoe High School. The following are comments Assistant Principal Marilyn Pawling said at the noon lunch at Harveys*.**

By Marilyn Pawling

Liana Novak

This young woman has had two unique experiences: She went on a Panama mission trip to help orphans, and a Japan youth exchange and stayed with a host family for six weeks. This experience earned her an award for being an ambassador for the United States. Liana Novak is an AP honor scholar, and a member of the National Honor Society, receiving an award for the National Honor Society for high school scholars.

She has participated in cross country running, Nordic skiing, and swimming. She has served on the South Tahoe Youth Commission and been president for the past two years. She is a member of Generation Green, S-Club, and is currently vice president of National Honor Society.

Influential people in her life are her family, from her grandparents who immigrated to the United States, to her parents who have pushed and encouraged her throughout her life.

In her spare time she enjoys baking, cooking, and dancing. She is a well-rounded young woman for sure.

Liana applied to schools in and out of California, but would love to go to UC Berkeley. Though no career plans are set, she

is committed to excel in her major and future career.

She says, “All I hope is that I feel accomplished and happy.”

She carries a 4.33 gpa and enjoys history because she likes to learn about people’s decisions, and how their way of thinking has influenced the world.

Deb Johnston described Liana this way, “Despite her exemplary academic accomplishments, I feel that Liana Kovak’s most stellar attribute is her virtuousness. That is not a description to be taken lightly, nor is it a term that is used often. What makes Liana truly standout from her peers is her sense of righteousness – she is very true to herself and her values without waiver. I do not know how someone Liana’s age can have such a sense of purpose and compassion and selflessness, but her trip to Panama to serve is an example of such. Furthermore, I observed these qualities in my classroom everyday in her interactions with other students and with me. Liana is truly remarkable in that manner, and I am absolutely certain these qualities will assure a life of noteworthiness.”

Morgan Kaufer

Being a state volleyball champ last fall will no doubt be a highlight of her high school experience. Another highlight is being a member of S Club, serving as president last year. This has provided Morgan Kaufer with lots of opportunities for community service and she is proud that S Club has reached out globally, providing bikes to girls in third world countries who need a way to get to school, getting solar cookers to women to help keep them safe, donating to the Heifer project, and bringing the Invisible Children crew to South Tahoe High School to speak to our students. She has been in the National Honor Society and Key Club and joined ASB this year.

Morgan has a weighted 4.42 gpa, is an AP scholar, received the Violet Richardson Award, and selected for Girls State. She would love to do something to help humanity, the animal world,

or the environment. She has applied to multiple colleges across the country hoping to play volleyball for them.

Besides loving volleyball, she boasts she “loves all things musical: like dancing, singing, and playing the piano.” She also enjoys being outside in beautiful Lake Tahoe: skiing in the winter; and boating, kayaking, paddle boarding, and playing beach volleyball in the summer. When asked where she sees herself in 10 years, she answered, “All I can hope for is to be happy, healthy, having fun, and surrounded by loving people and people I love. If I accomplish that, I will be successful.”

After Morgan saw a documentary on Invisible Children, an organization devoted to raise awareness about the LRA violence in central Africa, she applied and attended Fourth Estate, a four-day convention on the University of San Diego campus to learn more. She said every day was filled with so much emotion; leaving was bittersweet because she came out of the camp a whole new person.

Morgan has been influenced by her family and says, “My dad is so amazing because he has a demanding job as a firefighter, and I admire his professionalism. But at home, he has proven that you never really have to grow up: he is like a little kid and I love that about him. He is also so athletic, which is where I get my competitive drive. My mother is always instilling bits and pieces of wisdom in me, in her calm and loving way. She never fails to support me in whatever I do, keeps me healthy, and is the teacher in my life that has taught me the most valuable lessons. And lastly, my sister; I look up to her so much and we have a really close bond. She influences me because I aspire to be like her: funny, outgoing, extremely smart, driven, and always doing what is right. She is beyond amazing, and I would absolutely be nothing like the way I am without her vivacious and magnificent soul in my life.”

Janey Roeser, her S Club adviser, said of her, “Morgan is an intelligent young woman who is passionate about helping others. To this extent she has volunteered with the Invisible Children organization and brought this program to the high school so students could learn about the plight of these young children. She is determined and acts upon her beliefs to help others. Her global consciousness is to be respected and admired. Morgan is a young woman who will make a difference in our world. I look forward to seeing Morgan’s positive impact on our society and I am both thankful and grateful for all her efforts.”

Tammi Tu

Tammi Tu says her favorite subject is music because she enjoys the feeling that music brings and how it relieves a stressful day. Symphonic Band, Blue Ribbon Choir and Glee Club, which she is currently president of, keep music in her life. She is in the National Honor Society, the S Club, and Generation Green. She plays volleyball and has been in Track and Field on Varsity since 10th grade. She has participated in the Festival of Trees and Lights with the Blue Ribbon Choir, and National Honor Society for the Senior Center. She has been part of Bingo Nights, Optimist Pancake Breakfasts, Polar Express, and Community Clean-up days. Tammi was a Girls State delegate, nominated for the Rotary Youth Leadership Camp, and a Golden Star Student for El Dorado County.

This multi-talented girl plays flute, some guitar, speaks Chinese fluently, sings, and loves music, art, and photography. She also likes writing, hiking, yoga, and paddleboarding.

She has a 4.09 gpa. She hopes to attend UC San Diego, and her plans for the future are to pursue a career in acupuncture/medicine or psychology/social sciences.

The person who has influenced Tammi the most is her sister

because she is the reason she continues to strive for success. She also says SHE has influenced herself because she is the reason why she doesn't give up and always challenges herself to work hard. She says, "I am my own competition and I always want to do my personal best in order to achieve happiness within myself."

Tammi says, "The first time I sang in front of an audience in 3rd grade, I knew that I would never want to stop singing. It helped me discover aspects about myself that I would have never thought I would obtain. Singing always makes me feel relief, happiness, serenity, excitement, and so many more feelings. It brought me out of my shell and made me the person I am today."

Carla Zezula, her science teacher says, "Tammi Tu is a very bright, hard working student. She has very high expectations for herself; this trait runs in her family. She likes to challenge herself academically, yet manages to be involved with choir, and sports also. Tammi has a great sense of humor and she will be valued wherever she studies."

Christine Larrance

This young woman wants to become a civil engineer. She hopes to attend San Jose State, Chico State, or Sac State to study. Christine Larrance has visions of someday working in an engineering firm to help design bridges and plan the layout of cities.

She was influenced to choose this field when her father sparked her interest while designing their house's second floor, including introducing her to house plans. Her mother has influenced her by being so supportive throughout her academic career and inspiring her to achieve. She says that her sister is the best friend she could ever have.

Christine enjoys painting on canvas, skiing and fishing. While taking a class at South Tahoe High School with Ms. Lincoln,

she has discovered a love for digital art. Christine's niche at the high school is in the orchestra where she plays viola. She says she has had a position in the front row of the orchestra since fifth grade.

Christine says, "My favorite subject is computer aided drawing because it is a fun class that makes plotting floor plans easier."

Her teacher Phil Williams describes her in this way, "Christine Larrance is an outstanding student and person. She has been a top student in both architectural design and computer aided drawing. Christine has an incredible eye for the details and a very clear vision of how to accomplish goals in drawing. She is truly a gifted young lady that has been blessed with a passion that is very obvious to all around her."

LTUSD, LTCC create district

boundaries, change election dates

By Kathryn Reed

A specific individual will soon represent residents in the Lake Tahoe Unified and Lake Tahoe Community College districts.

While the respective five-member boards will still be accountable to the entire community, individually a minority of the greater area will elect them. Both entities will switch to district elections in 2014. And both will have the same boundaries.



The map to the left illustrates the districts. (The yellow looking area is two districts – yellow on the left, light green on the right. Double left click on the map for a larger view.)

All of this is to meet the 2002 California Voting Rights Act regulations. The purpose of the state mandate is to ensure all ethnicities are represented and that minority groups have a realistic opportunity to be elected. Both education institutions did an analysis that determined at-large elections could open them up to a lawsuit.

LTUSD board members voted Feb. 12 for the changes, while the college board did so in January.

Another change is elections for both will be in even number years. This means all the current board members will have a year added to their terms.

For LTUSD, Wendy David and Barbara Bannar were to have their terms expire later this year. Instead, they will retain their seats until fall 2014.

David told *Lake Tahoe News* she would not be seeking re-election.

For LTCC, it means Roberta Mason, Kerry David and Molly Blann have until 2014 before their terms end.

If no candidate comes forward for a particular district, the remaining board members can appointment a person.

Before all of this becomes official, the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors and the state must approve various aspects of the plan.

In other action at the Tuesday LTUSD meeting:

• The board agreed to pursue the possibility of Tahoe Valley Elementary School becoming a Performing Arts Magnet School. A new principal will need to be hired no matter the direction the district goes because Mark Romagnolo is retiring at the end of the school year.

• The board agreed to the proposals approved in January by the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority board for about $250,000 in field improvements. The three priorities are spending about $134,000 to upgrade the field at Sierra House Elementary, $90,000 for the softball field at South Tahoe High (though LTUSD still needs to kick in more than $40,000 for the bathrooms), and $20,000 for detailed planning to revamp the Al Tahoe fields. The money comes from voter approved Measure R.

Big 5 entertaining thoughts of opening in S. Tahoe

Big 5 Sporting Goods is eyeballing South Lake Tahoe as a possibility for a store location.



The Southern California-based sporting good retailer has long been rumored to want to operate on the South Shore. In the past, they had been linked to the resurrection of the old Millers Outpost. With T.J. Maxx opening there last fall, the athletic store chain has being looking elsewhere.

Now the spot of choice is at the Factory Stores at the Y in the old Adidas location. (They also looked at the old Sports Ltd. spot near Raley's at the Y.)

An out of town sign maker contacted the city's planning staff on Feb. 12.

"It is not an application for signage, which is the official document. It is a proposal to see if the signage would work," associate planner Judy Finn told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Please be aware that we have had many inquiries similar to this for businesses that have not panned out."

Officials from Big 5 did not return a call. It is not known what Big 5 officials know about the financial troubles the owners of the Y stores are having.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Driver takes out wall of South Tahoe post office

By Kathryn Reed

Almost an entire side of the post office at the Y in South Lake Tahoe is damaged.

A 61-year-old South Lake Tahoe woman twice drove through the wall on the left side of the building on Feb. 12.

When officers arrived the 2002 Ford Explorer was still in the building. The woman was given a field sobriety test, which was negative. She was not cited.



Two gaping holes were left from one vehicle Feb. 12 at the Tahoe Valley Post

Office. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“She said the accelerator stuck, which caused her to go into building. She put it in reverse and as she was backing up she tried to put it in neutral, but she hit drive again and she went through post office again, at which time she shut the car off,” police Officer Donna Kingman told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The vehicle appeared to be totaled, with the windshield smashed and major damage sustained to the front end.

An ambulance was not called, but Kingman said the woman was spitting out glass.

While it caused quite a commotion Tuesday afternoon, it was business as usual inside the post office.

The building was to be secured, though just before 5pm the post office was wide open except for the yellow tape across the holes. People who have postal boxes in that area may obtain their mail from the front counter.

The local postmaster deferred comment to corporate PR. He was not available for comment.