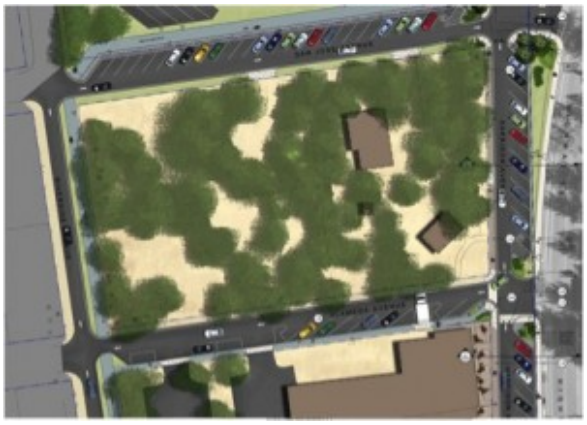
Harrison Avenue upgrades on target for summer ’13

By Kathryn Reed

A year from now motorists should know which way to drive on Harrison Avenue and how to park. This is because the multimillion dollar project that was first talked about in 1995 is expected to go out to bid in the fall, with construction beginning in May 2013.

This small stretch of roadway in South Lake Tahoe in many ways is like a frontage street. Parking and pedestrian access have long been issues. And they were exacerbated last summer when Caltrans put in curb and gutters along Highway 50 that cut into the city street.

With more than 70 percent of the property owners ready to form an assessment district, city officials on Tuesday agreed to finish the planning. By the time the project is done, the intent is to have transformed this area into a destination, to an even greater extent than what occurred with the improvements along Ski Run Boulevard.



What streets in the Harrison Avenue area could look like. Rendering/Design Workshop

It will also serve as an extension to Lakeview Commons.

“It will really beautify the whole area and make that the center of town,” Councilman Tom Davis said.

Some businesses are talking about upgrading their properties at the same time the city does its work so things are torn up once and even more visual improvements are made.

While it is a road project, that isn’t all it is. Besides increasing circulation to the entire area – not just Harrison Avenue, it will improve safety, deal with erosion concerns – so it is a water quality project, aesthetically upgrade this location, and ideally help attract new and retain current businesses.

Coleen Shade, planner with RO Anderson in South Lake Tahoe, explained to the council how some of the streets in the area are going to be one-way and in some cases one lane, diagonal parking will increase the number of spots, paving stones will be used for the sidewalks, crosswalks will be colored concrete, a multi-use Class 1 bike path will go along Riverside Avenue, light standards similar to Ski Run will be erected, and a gateway sign at the boat ramp end will be installed.

It’s possible some of the old retaining wall that was disassembled at Echo Summit last year could be turned into seating walls in this hub. Some of those stones have been incorporated into Lakeview Commons.

While all the improvements are on public property except for a few easements, property owners are paying for some of the upgrades. Their total share is nearly $800,000, which is divided among them based on a formula they agreed to.

One way this area is different than Ski Run is that the property owners are assessed the fee, not the businesses.

Mike McKeen, who owns the Pinnacle Real Estate building, and Duncan Sennott, who owns Sno-Flake Drive-In, attended the July 17 meeting. They both praised the city for its efforts and are looking forward to the changes coming to their neighborhood.

While the funding is in place for the remainder of the planning, the construction dollars are not all secured, though the city knows where it would like the $3,394,170 to come from. Besides the property owners paying $792,235, the COP bond will kick in $1.5 million, the CTC has verbally said $500,000 is available form the stormwater quality funds – but the board has not voted on this, and the CTC is being engaged regarding funds for the bike trail. If that doesn't come through, the city wants to use Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality improvement (CMAQ) dollars from 2014-15. This would require the project taking two years.

Hilary Roverud, director of Development Services, said the two properties that have not signed on are the Pine Lodge behind Sno-Flake and Pichetti Winery. She said the former supports the project, but is financially unable to participate. The latter, Roverud said, is concerned with San Jose Avenue becoming one-way headed east it will be difficult for people to access the tasting room. But Roverud said it's possible a driveway could be created off Harrison Avenue.

Parking is a concern of Councilman Hal Cole's.

"You can't force people out of cars by eliminating parking," he said.

While the project will add more than 80 spaces to what exists today, Cole and others worry that may not be enough, especially based on the popularity of Lakeview Commons.

Twenty-six spots will disappear from Harrison Avenue, while that same number is added to San Jose Avenue. This is largely done by having people park diagonally instead of parallel.

The city now owns the lot at Harrison and Modesto avenues next to the *Tahoe Daily Tribune*. That land will be parking.

More slots are also expected to be added to the triangular shaped lot where boat trailers go. El Dorado County and the California Tahoe Conservancy are being consulted about that.

Recreation opportunities on USFS land in Tahoe a concern

By Kathryn Reed

Playing in the outdoors is clearly what is important to people who live on the South Shore.

During two public meetings Tuesday at the U.S. Forest Service office in South Lake Tahoe the nearly 70 people at each session wanted to talk about and ask questions regarding recreation.

(There are two more meetings today in Kings Beach.)

The Forest Service is taking public comments until Aug. 30 on the draft Forest Plan that is expected to be a working document for up to 15 years. (The current plan is from 1988.) A final plan with a preferred alternative could be released in early 2013, with a record of decision expected in fall 2013.

Four alternatives are in the plan, with B being what the Forest Service is favoring. Plan A keeps the status quo, while plans C and D create new wilderness areas. It’s possible the final environmental document could meld various alternatives

as well as include new items based on public input.



Deputy Forest Supervisor Jeff Marsolais talks July 17 about the draft Forest Plan. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Jeff Marsolais, deputy forest supervisor for Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, told *Lake Tahoe News*, "Alternative B really reflects a balanced approach to all aspects of managing public lands in the basin."

He said this alternative is consistent with how the Forest Service currently manages its thousands of acres, but provides more flexibility and new thinking.

Between the two sessions the Sierra Club, Sierra Forest Legacy, Sierra Nevada Alliance, California Wilderness Coalition, Defenders of Wildlife, Friends of the River-California Wilderness Project, and Snowlands Network issued a joint press release. Collectively they would like stronger protections for the forest and watersheds. The groups support additional wilderness designations.

Alternatives C and D would do just that. The former includes the Dardanelles-Meiss Meadows area and the latter would also have Freel Peak as wilderness.

When land is designated wilderness it means mechanical

recreation is forbidden – this includes bicycles.

Several people at the evening session wore T-shirts that said “Say No to Alternative D”. These people are concerned snowmobiling opportunities are going to be eliminated. And they would be with alternatives C and D. Even if the Forest Service wants a wilderness area, Congress must make that designation.

Then there were the people with stickers that read, “Protect our forests”.

Water enthusiasts were represented by guys who just arrived on dry land based on being dressed in wetsuits.

In addition to the recreation group, the breakout sessions included watersheds, biological resources and forest vegetation-fuels management.

Alternative B allows for more terrain to use managed fire – meaning letting a fire that was started naturally (lightning) be allowed to burn. This technique would only be used if there would be environmental benefits and no safety issues.

For instance, when the Showers Fire occurred 10 years ago, is was suppressed based on policy that is still in effect today. If plan B were the law, that fire would have been allowed to burn naturally – the way Mother Nature intended.

However, Randy Striplin with the Forest Service stressed that a fire would be monitored daily, so if conditions change, suppression may be the ultimate answer.

Alternative D would eliminate the wildland urban interface as an area to be treated for fuels reduction after 10 years.

Any project currently on the books will proceed no matter what alternative is chosen. This includes the South Shore fuels reduction project that just started and will take about eight years to complete, as well as restoration to the Upper Truckee

River.

Assumptions were made in creating the alternatives – like money from Washington isn't going to increase, visitors to the Lake Tahoe Basin would increase 1.4 percent a year, and climate change will impact the ecosystem in the forest.

___

Notes:

• Today's sessions are at the North Tahoe Conference Center, 8318 North Lake Blvd., Kings Beach, from 2-4pm and 6-8pm.

• An online session will be July 19 from 1-3pm. More information on how to participate in the webinar is available at the USFS website.

• The draft EIS is online. It includes an executive summary. It is near the bottom, middle of the page.

South Lake Tahoe is close to having just 1 pot shop

By Kathryn Reed

The clarity of where medical marijuana in South Lake Tahoe stands is like walking into a room of pot smokers. Something smells funny and the air is murky.

Accusations flew Tuesday during the City Council meeting, with it clear the electeds are fed up with what they consider is illegal activity occurring at some of the dispensaries.

Most of the anger was leveled at Patient2Patient, which had its permit revoked July 11. Unless the collective wins the Aug. 7 appeal before the council, the dispensary will have to close its doors that day or another date specified by the council.



Patient2Patient would have to close if the owners lose their Aug. 7 appeal before the South Lake Tahoe City Council. Photo/LTN

City Manager Nancy Kerry was looking for direction from the council to make sure the four who were there (Councilwoman Angela Swanson was absent for most of the meeting) wanted the medical marijuana ordinance enforced. To this, the four said “yes” without any reservation.

The ordinance was passed in September 2011.

At the July 3 meeting staff was directed to look into whether Patient2Patient and Tahoe Wellness Collective were in compliance with the ordinance. Both had already been sent a letter June 1 saying they had 10 days to comply or face permit revocation. Though they did nothing to come into compliance, then City Manager Tony O’Rourke allowed the two establishments to keep their doors open.

But Gino DiMatteo, who owns City of Angels 2, at the July 3 meeting told the council his colleagues at the other two collectives were still not in compliance and asked why when he had a valid permit and all the paperwork signed off he was being treated differently.

While DiMatteo never mentioned the 14th Amendment, that is in fact what he was invoking – that he be treated equally.

It was at the meeting earlier this month that the council reversed course and denied DiMatteo the ability to move. He has to move because his landlord wants him out this month because of threats from the U.S. Attorney General's Office, not because of any infraction with the city.

At the July 17 meeting, DiMatteo refused to talk to *Lake Tahoe News*.

"We haven't canceled escrow, but it's on the market," listing agent Claudette Miles of Coldwell Banker-McKinney told *Lake Tahoe News* in reference to the building DiMatteo was planning to purchase. She says DiMatteo still wants to buy the property and the sellers are interested in selling, but "it's a complicated situation."

Tahoe Wellness Collective came into compliance July 6.

City building inspector Dave Walker went to Patient2Patient July 9 and July 10 to check on construction of the firewall. No work had been performed.

The next day Kerry issues the notice revoking the collective's permit. Later on July 11, Kerry and Walker are asked to look again. What they find on July 13 is the firewall work was done wrong by an unlicensed contractor.

On top of that, Patient2Patient was growing marijuana upstairs in an area not permitted for that activity. This is being done with grow lights and no firewall. If a fire were to occur, it

could wipe out a swath of Lake Tahoe Boulevard.

Despite all of this, the collective is allowed to operate until the Aug. 7 appeal.

Nine people spoke at the July 17 meeting – all saying the collectives are necessary.

While the council supports medical marijuana, it does not like what is going on. In fact, Councilman Hal Cole said the collectives are potentially hurting their clients.

“You are putting people in this town in danger of losing their medicine. You are putting their health in jeopardy,” Cole said.

He was the most vocal and heated. But all four expressed frustration with the drug task force report that came out at the July 3 meeting regarding increased pot activity because of the collectives, the need for the post office to hire a specialist because of the reported drug activity, and then the police report involving Patient2Patient owner Matt Triglia that was made known Tuesday.

The report from December 2011 says Triglia was in Missouri in a rented RV that had specialized Nevada plates when he was pulled over for a traffic infraction. Subsequently the report says $85,000 in cash was seized. The officer wrote, “I observed several bundles of money in rubber bands that had been heat sealed in a plastic bag. The packaging method was very commonly associated with that of currency and narcotic smugglers.”

In some states, like Missouri, it’s not uncommon for goods to be seized and no charges to be filed, which happened in the Triglia case.

While Triglia confirmed the date of birth and Social Security number on the report were his, he told the council he was not

in Missouri and this report was not about him. The report also describes his wife’s tattoos.

After the meeting he told Kerry and others who were listening that he would be calling his attorney.

It’s possible that in three weeks South Lake Tahoe will have only one medical marijuana collective.

Advocates lobby for second boat wash at Fallen Leaf Lake, agencies in basin cry poor

By Jessie Marchesseau

Fallen Leaf Lake is clean. That is, it is still free of aquatic invasive species.

The Fallen Leaf Protection Association would like to keep it that way. Members of the Lake Tahoe Aquatic Invasive Species Program, made up of dozens of organizations including the TRPA, TRCD and USFS, would also like to keep it that way. However, coming to an agreement on the best way to go about it has proven to be a daunting task.

Aquatic invasive species, including Eurasian watermilfoil and Asian clams, have already been identified in Lake Tahoe and

Donner Lake. Spooner, Martis, Bucks and Lilly Lake have also fallen victim to the watermilfoil. But other area lakes including Echo, Boca, Stampede, Prosser and Fallen Leaf have all managed to keep their free and clean status.



Some people would like it mandatory for non-motorized watercraft to be inspected before entering Fallen Leaf Lake. Photos/Jessie Marchesseau

Once infected, these species are nearly impossible to eradicate and are costly to control. The communities surrounding Lake Mead spend more than $20 million a year in an effort to control one of the worst AIS infestations in the U.S. These invasive creatures can affect water clarity, native plant and animal life, clog water intake pipes and, if the infestation is bad enough, even affect water potability.

In 2011, the roving non-motorized watercraft inspector at Fallen Leaf Lake logged 428 inspections. Of those, 18 were not clean, drained and dry (the most effective method for

preventing transport of AIS). However, more than half came from infested waters or waters whose AIS status was unknown. Each one of these watercraft poses a threat to the waters of Fallen Leaf Lake. For this reason, members of the FLPA do not believe the current system of prevention is good enough.

Under the present plan, boat inspections are mandatory for motorized boats entering Lake Tahoe, Echo Lake and Fallen Leaf. Fallen Leaf also has a mandatory boat wash at its marina where every watercraft, motorized or not, is thoroughly washed with hot water by trained personnel.

“Everyone is real cooperative,” Jerry Giese, weekend harbor master at the Fallen Leaf Lake Marina, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Nobody wants to be the one to put something in the lake.”

In addition to the boat wash at the south end of the lake, USFS personnel screen everyone entering the campground at the north end of the lake with any type of watercraft. They ask how long it’s been since it was in the water, how long it has been dry and what water it has been in within the last month. The personnel write all this down, along with the license plate of the vehicle and check their list of infected waters. If the boat came from infected water, they call the AIS hotline set up by Tahoe Resource Conservation District and send the guest to the boat inspection station in Meyers.

The TRCD and Fallen Leaf Lake Community Services District also share the cost of a full-time roving non-motorized watercraft inspector. She roams the campground, boat launches, and other areas inspecting watercraft and educating paddlers about AIS and the measures necessary to prevent infestation.

The FLPA has been pushing for years to install a second boat wash at the north end of the lake specifically for non-motorized watercraft. It is already mandatory for all motorized boats to be washed; they want to extend that mandate to non-motorized.

The U.S. Forest Service, which owns the campground, and other members of the non-motorized watercraft working group have been reluctant to approve the group's proposal and have denied it a number of times, including this spring.

"No one in the working group was dead set against the idea or thought it was a bad idea," said Ted Thayer, aquatic invasive species program manager for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

However, Thayer and other members of the working group stated that as a whole they believe adding the additional wash would not be the most effective use of limited public funds. They decided sticking with the current plan of education and outreach is a more effective strategy.

Mike Kraft said the community members had originally offered to foot the bill for the wash as well as provide personnel to run it when they first proposed the idea years ago. The money has since been put to other uses. But some members of the working group thought it might be just what they need to get their plan passed at this point.



Fallen Leaf Lake's boat wash is at the marina.

"It would be a great reason to revisit it, if the Protection District could provide funds, so there would be no burden to

the group," said Patrick Stone, invasive species control project manager at the TRPA.

For now, paddlers will have to clean, drain and dry their own boats before heading to Fallen Leaf or drive to the south end of the lake where marina personnel are more than happy to do it for free.

To learn more about preventing the spread of AIS and become a registered self-inspector, go online.

Clock ticking for committee to recommend field upgrades

By Anne Knowles

In the end, it may come down to the difference between wish lists and must haves.

The Fields Advisory Committee of the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority meets today for the final time before making its recommendation on how to allocate money to fix up South Lake Tahoe fields used for baseball, softball and soccer.



Dugouts are just one issue with the softball field at South Tahoe High School. Photo/LTN file

The committee meets at 4pm at Lake Tahoe Airport, where members will discuss how to spend $500,000 of Measure R funds on all or some of the fields at South Tahoe Middle School, Al Tahoe, Sierra House School, Meyers Magnet School, and the South Tahoe High School softball field. The committee's recommendation will be delivered to the JPA at its meeting on July 27.

On a public field trip to the various sites July 2, there seemed to be committee consensus that the priority should be finishing the high school softball field first, although there was a difference of opinion on how extensive the work should be there.

From $40,000 to $60,000 more is needed to complete construction of the field and to add permanent fencing, a flagpole and a public address system, said Sue Novasel, a Lake Tahoe Unified School District board member.

Those additions, Novasel believes, would bring the city into Title IX compliance.

"Those are the three things I think that are needed to put the field on par with the boys," said Novasel.

So far, construction on the field, including dugouts, has cost about $154,000, said Novasel, and the school board at its last meeting approved up $160,000.

During the field trip, committee member Marilyn Breisacher and Steve Morales, facilities director for the district, locked horns over a “wish list” of additional items for the high school softball field.

Breisacher presented a rendering of the field that included shortening the dugout to give people sitting in the bleachers better visibility of the bases as well as a plan to raise the floor in the announcers’ booth.

“I couldn’t justify it,” said Morales, referring to the changes in the dugout. “I believe we created line of sight.”

The committee also visited several other fields and discussed plans for them that included overhauling the Al Tahoe Fields with a new, full-size baseball field, upgrades to the two Little League fields, and a replacement T-ball field as well as a scorer’s booth and bleachers at the South Tahoe Middle School softball field.

The fields committee will make its final recommendation at the JPA meeting on July 27 at 9am at Lake Tahoe Airport.

Celebs ready to waltz their way down Edgewood’s greens

By Kathryn Reed

Agility, athleticism, funny clothes. Those are just some of the things dancing and golf have in common.

Jack Wagner, Donald Driver, Emmit Smith, Jerry Rice, John O'Hurley, and Jason Taylor are six other things the two activities have in common.

These six men will be at Edgewood Tahoe this week for the 23rd annual American Century Celebrity Championship Tournament in Stateline July 17-22. These six also have all participated in "Dancing with the Stars".



The American Century Championship is July 17-22 at Edgewood Tahoe. Photos/LTN file

Think about how graceful a running back can be as he runs down the sidelines, flitting seemingly effortlessly between defenders. All that incredible foot movement proved beneficial for Driver, a Pro Bowl running back with the Green Bay Packers, who won the dancing event this season. Hall of Fame running back Smith was the top dancer the year he participated.

While Lawrence Taylor won't be at this year's celebrity golf tournament, the Hall of Fame linebacker has been a dancer and a golfer since retiring from the New York Giants.

A 2011 "Dancing with the Stars" contestant on the Australia version – Jan Stephenson – will be playing in Thursday's

celebrity-am event. Stephenson was one of the top golfers in the 1970s and 1980s, having won the LPGA championship in 1982 and the U.S. Women's Open a year later.

Brandi Chastain, former soccer player, is returning as the lone female player of the 80-plus field of golfers.

Another noteworthy woman will be on the greens this year, but behind a microphone. Annika Sörenstam, who has a second home in Incline Village, is a guest analyst each Thursday on the Golf Channel. This week she will do commentary for the network during the tournament.

Sörenstam retired four years ago from professional golf as the best golfer of her generation, if not all time.



Tony Romo is the favored to win the tournament, not just the hearts of young women.

It's possible she will have a driver in her hand Thursday and not the mic.

Considering Sörenstam has her signature wine label with Wente, she may not be on the 17th hole with the guys when they participate in the Korbel sponsored ace contest on Friday. Participants will vie for $250,000 from 155 yards out. If they

sink it on one shot, they split the winnings with the Lake Tahoe Community College Foundation.

Quarterbacks are often a crowd favorite. Tony Romo of the Cowboys is the favored to win, according to the bookies.

First-time QBs this year include Christian Ponder with the Vikings, Ryan Fitzpatrick with the Bills and Alex Smith with the Niners.

The 49er quarterbacks are a mainstay at this event. In the past John Brodie, Steve Spurrier, Steve Young, Trent Dilfer, and Steve Bono have all participated in the ACC.

A QB with local appeal, Aaron Rodgers of Green Bay by way of Chico and Cal, will be returning.

—-

Facts:

• Practice rounds are Tuesday and Wednesday.

• Pro-am is Thursday.

• Actual tournament is Friday-Sunday.

• Tickets vary depending on the day and package. They may be bought online, at the gate or at Raley’s for a discount.

• NBC will cover it live Friday-Sunday.

• Parking is at the casinos.

Impossible to take the artist out of the art instructor

By Susan Wood

Despite being out of the public eye of college life, a longtime art instructor has remained rock solid in his commitment to sculpting.

Four years ago in June, David Foster left his post of 32 years at Lake Tahoe Community College. The fixture of the local institution began focusing much of his time on his own pieces – "steps away" from his log cabin home on Tahoe Mountain. The 1,600-square-foot studio is Foster's version of his man cave. The gallery is upstairs, but most of the action happens downstairs.

The studio is dotted with sculptures, mostly marble – his stone of choice since touring Pietra Santa, Italy, where artists go to work and follow in Michelangelo's footsteps. Foster, 69, gleams when he talks about the artists' haven, as if fantasizing about one day being one of the 90-plus-year-old sculptors who call the place home.



David Foster's attention to detail allows him to create impressive works of art.

Photos/Susan Wood

After glancing around the studio, it’s easy to see that moving seems out of the question. Marble weighs 160 pounds per cubic foot, a reality that surfaced when his wife Joanne lifted one of the pieces while fleeing their home from a racing Angora Fire a year before he retired.

“That’s true love,” Foster said, referring to her selecting irreplaceable valuables to pack. She grabbed one bronze and one marble works of art.

Foster felt helpless that day. He came out of Scotty’s Hardware and noticed a huge plume of smoke from the North Upper Truckee area moving northeast toward his house.

“The sun looked red,” he recalled. He scrambled up to a rock outcropping off Echo View Estates, but by the time he drove to Sawmill Pond, an El Dorado County sheriff’s blockade was set up and he couldn’t get home. After a quick call and a carload of valuables, the Fosters met up at his LTCC office and waited patiently for their next move. Ash and cinders fell on the campus grounds.

Foster sighed.

“If the fire would have hit the studio, this marble piece would have turned to white powder,” he said, while running his hands through a pile.

Foster grew up in eastern Iowa where his father worked in a stone quarry. Taking over the business was his father’s dream, but not David’s. He wanted to do something else with stone.

“I told him: ‘Dad, I gotta study art’,” Foster said, with the conviction of a J.D. Salinger’s “Catcher in the Rye” coming of age passion.

That he did. Then, he spent three decades teaching others –

after a brief reprieve as a driver's education instructor. For that: "I have stories," Foster said of the job.

Foster misses some components of teaching. He often filled the figure sculpting classes, employing a slew of nude models. Some of the students still keep in contact. He had an incredible knack for teaching – sometimes reminding the wannabe sculptors to carve "realism, not idealism" when it comes to working with live nude models. The students made Foster and longtime colleague Phyllis Shafer proud every year during the annual student art competition.

His teaching methods may have come across as unconventional at times. He recalled holding up an art book one might keep on a coffee table and called it a "coloring book."

"If they were having a hard time, I could tell from the book (not being highlighted and written on)," he said.

Foster has kept ties with the college by bringing President Kindred Murillo to his home for a tour. The artist was commissioned by a college patron for a piece called "Discovery." The sculpture will sit near the library and stretch 12 feet to the sky. It's being created in honor of a patron Kit Barkley's husband because of his flying background.

"It's a wonderful opportunity for the college to have a lasting piece of (Foster's) work publicly shown," said Melonie Guttry, who works for the LTCC Foundation.

The piece that has consumed him "for too long" he says represents a cross between a woman and cello. The aptly named "Donnacello" dominates the art studio as the centerpiece. Small shards of grinding rocks and other tools lay under the piece. After hours of "sanding," the shards take on the shape of the sculpture because the stone is usually harder.

He admits one must be in shape to take on this hobby. Foster is also a regular fixture at Sierra Athletic Club. His

patience is satisfied by moving from one piece to another. The heavy pieces get moved around by a 1-ton crane he bought for $200 and later retrofitted for his own use for $800. There’s a hatch between the two studio floors where a pulley system transports the pieces from one floor to another.

The studio came about in 2005 after his carving dropped white dust that floated into the house from the garage and settled on the grand piano. His wife’s hands on her hips let it be known the art needed a new home.

Before Foster selects what to sculpt, he surveys the stone yards like a true shopper. Then he studies how the stone may be situated in such a way to give the piece motion – for example, balancing on a corner. The trick teaches the appreciative art eye to stare in an attempt to catch the piece moving. Think of the Mona Lisa.

He draws it then makes mini versions of the sculpture called “maquettes.”

“I try to find something that’s never been done before,” he said.

With its Portugal marble crystals glowing in the light, the Donnacello serves as an ideal example.

“I wanted the relationship of the figure and cello to unite,” he said, while lightly stroking the smooth figure.

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)

NVFSC plan for fixing financial mess due to USFS

By Anne Knowles

In the next two weeks, the beleaguered Nevada Fire Safe Council is scheduled to deliver to the U.S. Forest Service an action plan for cleaning up its books for good.

The NVFSC was told by the USFS on June 22 that it had 30 days to produce a roadmap for untangling its financial mess and instituting controls to ensure it properly handles its money going forward.



NVFSC still owes payment for work like this fuels reduction project done at Lake

Christopher in
April 2011.
Photo/LTN file

The plan could be the first step in getting long-overdue restitution for private contractors, fire departments and homeowners in the Lake Tahoe Basin, who have been waiting for more than $360,000 NVFSC owes them for fuels reduction work going back several years.

The action plan comes a full year after *Lake Tahoe News* first reported NVFSC was undergoing an internal audit triggered by a complaint from a private contractor. That same complaint led to an investigation by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of Inspector General, which in February sent a report to the USFS recommending it recoup $2.7 million in funds and withhold any remaining grant money from NVFSC until the group produced federally-mandated audits and fixed problems found by the OIG investigation.

The OIG found that NVFSC violated several federal regulations, including commingling federal grant money with other funds, allowing one person to be in charge of all aspects of managing the grant money and not conducting annual audits. The OIG also said it had no evidence of criminality, but didn't rule it out.

In the five months since then, NVFSC has been working with the USFS and the Bureau of Land Management, the two agencies that provided the bulk of its grant money, to try to untangle the bookkeeping thicket.

"When you deal with federal entities, especially under a cloud of suspicion, they double check everything," said Larry Burton, an NVFSC board member and former volunteer fire chief of Ruby Valley in Nevada, who has become a de facto spokesperson for the group. "We are doing the best we can."

Burton said the group will meet its deadline and hopes the USFS and BLM soon release grant funds they have frozen so NVFSC can send checks to everyone. He said those funds will cover what NVFSC owes.

“I get calls from disgruntled homeowners every day,” said Burton, whose personal cell phone is now the contact number for NVFSC after the group closed its doors in Carson City in April when it could no longer pay the rent. The group’s eight-member board is still intact, but they meet via phone and email now, and one or two employees still do work out of their homes on a volunteer basis, said Burton.

“We realize it’s been a year. We’re trying to pay them. And we’re doing everything we can not to declare bankruptcy because no one would get paid then,” he said.



Andrew List, former executive director, left NVFSC soon after problems were found. Photo/LTN file

Burton maintains that the cause of the problems was mismanagement and not embezzlement.

“It was the commingling Andrew did,” said Burton, referring to Andrew List, the group’s former executive director who left NVFSC soon after the troubles first came to light.

“The BLM very pointedly looked and found that nobody took anything home,” said Burton. “No one can find any misappropriation. The rub came when all the money went into one bank account. You can’t do that.”

The USFS said it found in its audit that funds were combined in one pool and that the forest service was incorrectly billed by NVFSC. The USFS is billing the NVFSC for $1.7 million, according to Lisa Herron, a spokeswoman in the USFS Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

The NVFSC has requested $1 million in grant funds, a request the USFS will review once it is satisfied with the NVFSC action plan.

Meanwhile, NVSFC’s creditors keep waiting.

Susan Swift, for example, is owed $1,700 for tree removal to create defensible space on two properties she owns in South Lake Tahoe. She completed the paperwork to get reimbursed and was told in October 2011 she would receive a check within eight weeks.

When the check never arrived, NVFSC gave Swift different excuses on several different occasions, until she read about the OIG report.

“I told (NVFSC) I had read about their commingling problems in *Lake Tahoe News*, and I told him I just wished they had been honest with me about this from the beginning,” said Swift.

Veteran Lake Tahoe showroom workers ensure a good time

By Susan Wood

STATELINE – In the diva world of entertainment, the "d" in maitre d' could stand for David McClure with a capital D.

That's because much like a shining star can carry a show's performance, this host extraordinaire standing at the door in the dapper tuxedo can make an experience at the MontBleu's showroom in Stateline.

After three decades on the job in September, McClure has seen it all over the years – including his casino change names, owners, management and budgets.

This modest local is the rock of the entertainment facility, where he caters to customers from high roller guests to visitors camping out around Lake Tahoe for the weekend.



David McClure talks about the performers who have been in MontBleu's showroom. Photos/Kathryn Reed

And this summer, McClure and company take the act out in the parking lot for the casino's new outside concert series that

expands the concert venue from seating for 1,600 in the showroom to 6,000 outdoors. The concerts are designed to complement Harveys Lake Tahoe's longtime version across the street. A night of reggae led the series. In keeping with its youthful image, the next one features members of the Sublime group.

The 62-year-old host would be the first to admit he doesn't personally follow the hip, new music of the day. McClure preferred acts over the years involve the old-time entertainers. His favorite involved his mother. When his father died, he took her to see the late slapstick comic Red Skelton.

"I've still got the picture," he said.

McClure also enjoyed a show in the early years of Lionel Ritchie's career. Ritchie danced a lot, and his band played several instruments on stage. There was even a player piano carted in.

But it's the guests who bring McClure to work with a smile on his face.

"My job is to change people's experiences. You never know who will be standing in front of you," he said of the people waiting to be seated. "People plan their whole vacations around who they can see and when they can see them."

As an example, many women have asked to sit to see certain band members of the Moody Blues up close and personal.

"Women are the most vocal," he said.



Connie Bowland demonstrates working in the showroom isn't just greeting guests.

And many of the men seem to go along with seeing the shows to please their mates.

McClure’s job involves customer service, entertainment and a little psychology. He’s also a bit of a historian. For instance, he learned long ago that if Kenny Loggins ended up playing in Tahoe over a holiday weekend he would refrain from performing on the actual holiday back when he played here.

“He likes to relax (that day),” he said.

McClure knows all about that. He unwinds with his two cats and loves driving around Tahoe in the wee morning hours.

“You have the road to yourself. It’s an amazing time in Tahoe before people get up,” he said of his night shift.

Opposite schedules – such is the world of entertainment.

McClure’s brush with the industry started early when he grew up in Marin County, home to some huge celebrities from the San Francisco Bay Area. He would skip school to see the original Jefferson Airplane group, which spawned the careers of Grace

Slick and Mickey Thomas.

“I wrote off Thursday classes to see them,” he said.

He liked Lake Tahoe and would visit occasionally from the Bay Area. He took on odd jobs, including a construction stint at Squaw Valley in 1970 where he “could pound a nail.”

After graduating from a San Francisco hotel and restaurant management school in 1977, McClure never looked back from the hospitality world. It’s been a whirlwind – especially with the number of shows Caesars Tahoe once scheduled.



Anthony Whalen is assisted with his uniform by David McClure.

The showroom wait staff used to see each other about every night. Now they’ll go weeks apart – with the exception of the busy summertime. On the night of Bob Saget’s show over Memorial Day weekend, the staffers enjoyed a reunion of sorts with longtime usher Artie Farokhpar and McClure’s assistant, Connie Bowland, excited to get back to steady work. Before that show, Bowland breezed in to the main wait staff room from her other job, a common practice for hospitality types in

Tahoe trying to make a living, Farokhpar pointed out.

At age 75, Farokhpar had worked for years with Horizon's Carnival Cabaret show before retiring, semi-retiring and coming on board with the MontBleu staff recently. He and his wife see it as a way of getting him out of the house, he joked with his coworkers.

The crew chats enthusiastically like a group of old friends while trying to get the pre-show work done. All this is done crammed into the small office space that resembles more of an oversized closet. McClure prepared 2009 South Tahoe High School graduate Anthony Whalen as his newest member of the staff on his first night. This meant getting him suited in proper dress attire. Meanwhile, Farokhpar needed a bow tie. McClure quickly came through and handed him one.

The staff has been forced to improvise as in replacing their own suits, having fewer steak-dinner-like perks and dealing with the loss of a wardrobe room. The latter was the result of remodeling at the casino, which the staff calls "the poor stepchild of Las Vegas."

In their one small space, signed photos of celebrities such as comedian Joan Rivers, country singer George Strait, rock guitarist Carlos Santana and pop singer Olivia Newton John line the walls. Six photos were missing as someone broke in years ago and stole them. Still, the loss goes unnoticed as the staff is focused on the job at hand.

Bowland reviewed messages from management regarding who would be attending the show that night. A newsletter called "Bleu notes" laid on her desk. She admits special seating instructions may come in at the very last minute. She commended their "ringleader" – McClure – for pulling it all together when attendees surprise the staff with added guests at the door. And sometimes fewer employees for the night means jumping in to sell or take tickets.

There is essentially no room for divas – “except on stage,” a staffer belted out.

“We’re like a second family, but we haven’t worked that often all together, so we have to catch up,” Bowland said.

She enjoys the whole environment – meaning the staff and the work. She believes taking the shows outside will be good for the Lake Tahoe market.

“Anything new is going to be good,” said Bowland, who came on board at the casino in 1979 as a cocktail waitress before settling into the showroom under McClure.

“I like meeting people from all over. Everybody’s in a good mood. They can ask us anything, and we do it,” she said.

She especially relishes working for McClure because he demonstrates grace under pressure in tough situations.

Ditto was the sentiment from Farokhpar about working under McClure’s supervision.

“He is a nice guy, helpful and part of the old school where you help each other,” the usher said.

Farokhpar sees his job as giving their customers a “warm feeling” about being in the showroom set up to make them feel special.

He and Bowland agreed genuine customer service is a lost art at times – especially in Tahoe’s revolving door of businesses and transient employees.

“I just tell them a little smile and a little thank you won’t hurt you,” Farokhpar said.

Preston retiring from LTCC after 20 years

By Anne Knowles

Cynthea Preston, long-time Lake Tahoe Community College faculty member and administrator, is retiring.



Cynthea Preston is retiring after 20 years with LTCC. Photo/courtesy LTCC

Preston, who has been with LTCC for 20 years, first as a professor of English then as dean of instruction for the last dozen years, is taking an early retirement package offered by the school and leaving LTCC Sept. 21.

“I will miss the students the most and the programs I love,” Preston told *Lake Tahoe News*. “There are so many areas I’ve been intimately involved with.”

That includes the school’s burgeoning culinary arts program,

which has grown from 30 students to more than 300 students a year, and its 5-year-old jail program that teaches inmates how to cook and helps them secure jobs on release.

“It’s an amazing program,” said Preston. “We have a very vibrant culinary arts program.”

Preston was also instrumental in developing LTCC’s 7-year-old fire academy, which last year graduated 28 cadets, and the school’s wilderness education program as well as its business and math programs, although she is quick not to take too much credit.

“A lot of people worked on these things,” she said.

And Preston worked with a lot of those people over the years, including many students she taught before becoming an administrator.

“Before becoming dean of instruction, Cynthea was a terrific English instructor. Her classes were thought-provoking, fun and inspiring,” said Frances Brady, former student and administrative assistant to the vice president of administrative services.



"I can't describe how much I'll miss her," said Tom Greene, LTCC vice president,

academic affairs and student services.

“It’s hard to describe how much I am going to miss her,” said Tom Greene, vice president, academic affairs and student services at LTCC, after the LTCC Board of Trustees meeting on Tuesday. “She has deep roots in this institution and institutional history.”

In her 20 years with the school, Preston did witness a lot of change.

“I’ve seen growth in and the expansion of college,” she said. “And the declining budget and its effects on growth and our community and courses.”

‘Ultimate people person’

“Cynthea is the ultimate people person,” former LTCC President Guy Lease told *Lake Tahoe News*. “She really cares about the faculty and staff and the students. She’s been there for them.”

She was also there for Lease, who was president of the school when Preston was hired and encouraged her to take on the role of Rotary Club president, which she just completed.

“When I’d get too focused on something that needed to happen now, or with the budget,” said Lease, “she was always there as sort of a counsel and advisor to keep balance between money and people.”

“She’s been a big part of the success of LTCC,” he said.

Preston said the school has been more than a professional home to her.

“I have four children who went through this college and all

have doctorates or law degrees or are teaching," she said.

Preston says she's looking forward to a "permanent vacation," and plans to travel and spend more time with her children and grandchildren, all of whom live in Southern California and visit Lake Tahoe often.



Ten employees of LTCC have accepted early retirement packages. Photo/LTN file

"My plans are to continue to be involved with the school and community," she said, "and to spend time with my family and travel."

Preston is part of a group who accepted an early retirement package as part of the school's efforts to shave $500,000 off its 2013 budget. The other retirements accepted at Tuesday's LTCC Board of Trustees board meeting were Gary Brusco, a full-time custodian; Craig Gasteit, interim maintenance director; Ginger Janssen, graphics arts specialist; Peggy Meyer, library technician II; Bob Roseblade, purchasing technician; and Juan Veneros, accounting assistant. A total of 10 LTCC employees have taken the early retirement package.

During the meeting, several board members expressed their

sadness at Preston’s leaving.

“There will a lot of holes on this campus,” said long-time board member Roberta Mason.