Suspect in 1980 S. Lake Tahoe murder case behind bars

By Kathryn Reed

A nearly 32-year-old South Lake Tahoe murder case may have been solved with the arrest of a 50-year-old Carmichael man.

Andrew Sanford was booked into the Sacramento County Jail in the death of Richard Swanson on March 28. Sanford, who would haven been 19 at the time, was a resident of South Lake Tahoe then.

Swanson was a 16-year-old South Tahoe boy working at the Shell station that used to be at the corner of highways 50 and 89 at the Y. The station was robbed and Swanson left for dead.



Richard Swanson was 16 in 1980 when he was killed at the now defunct Shell station at the Y in South Lake Tahoe.

For years the case went nowhere. That changed in 2006.

Ron and Sharon Swanson made a heartfelt plea to the City

Council at the time asking them to allocate more resources to the police department so the person responsible for their son's Aug. 14, 1980, death would be caught and justice served.

Then Police Chief Terry Daniels and Mayor Kathay Lovell met with the Swansons to talk about what could be done. The council approved additional resources.

When Chuck Owens retired from the department he was hired by Daniels to work the Swanson case, with money allocated by the council.

Even though today's council stopped the allocation, current Police Chief Brian Uhler saw the need to keep the investigation going. Tips were coming in.

The El Dorado County District Attorney's Office in Placerville will be handling the case. Most likely that is where the case will be tried, much like the Jaycee Lee Dugard case, even though both crimes were committed in the basin.

Trish Kelliher with the DA's office did not return a phone call.

Assisting with the case was the FBI. They have been working it more diligently since the Swansons, who now live in Tuolumne County, pleaded for officers to reopen the case.

"It's good to have a milestone here with an arrest," FBI agent Chris Campion told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Neither Uhler nor police Lt. David Stevenson had details on what the suspect has been doing with his life for the past 30-plus years. It's also not known if they knew each other.

"We don't want to really get into any details that might be discussed as part of the trial because of our desire to have a successful prosecution," Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*.

From this killing the local Secret Witness program was formed.

The seed money was always to go to the person who helped solve the Swanson murder.

“This case and the Jaycee case were really the two cases that shook this community to the core. It really changed how we thought about this community. They were just two kids,” Lovell told *Lake Tahoe News*. She has been on the Secret Witness board for the past 15 years.

The Shell station also has a history for her family. Her brother owned it before the killing took place and had worked there as a teenager, much like Swanson did.

“It was very eerie for us to have it happen,” Lovell said.

Campion said for now details about what led to the arrest are not being released.

Late-season powder day provides fun on the slopes

By Kathryn Reed

Mother Nature played a bit of a joke on Lake Tahoe with April Fools’ Day being one of the best ski days of the season. She must be laughing, knowing that it will be in the 50s for the next two days.

Ski season in Tahoe has been spastic at best.



Sue Wood makes fresh tracks April 1 at Heavenly. Photos/Kathryn Reed

For Dan Barker, his first day on skis this season was Sunday.

“I drove through in January to Vegas and the skis never came out of the truck,” Barker said as he rode up the Sky chairlift at Heavenly Mountain Resort.

He and his son, Sean (who worked at Heavenly two seasons ago), came down from Poulsbo, Wash., to get more than a week of skiing in.

With Heavenly receiving between 1 and 1½ feet of snow, there was plenty for the duo to schuss through. Most resorts in the greater Lake Tahoe area sent out alerts Sunday morning about having received nearly 18 inches of white stuff overnight.

But it wasn’t all fun Sunday. Kirkwood Mountain Resort had an inbounds avalanche on the back side of Vista. No one was injured, but the lifts closed in the afternoon in order to secure the mountain.

“(Sunday) was challenging with rising temps and the new snow,” the resort posted on its Facebook page.

Even the resort's website says, "Kirkwood is a Class A (most dangerous) avalanche area. Our Ski Patrol Team works tirelessly to ensure the resort is safe to ski. Please observe and respect our ski area and avalanche closure boundaries."

A March 17 inbound avi at Kirkwood sent one person to Barton Memorial Hospital.

With the fluctuating temperatures and more snow forecast for the end of the week, slopes will be unstable. The Sierra Avalanche Center rates the danger each day.

At Homewood Mountain Resort a power outage was the issue. It meant no skiing. But think of all that untracked powder that will be available today.

While at lake level people were shoveling upwards of a foot of snow in the morning, by the afternoon it was hard to know there were blizzard conditions 24 hours earlier.

Despite all the freshies, the lift lines mid-morning and into the afternoon at Heavenly were minimal. The line for fries at Tamarack Lodge about 1pm was non-existent.

People seem to have moved onto other activities just as the snow on the slopes has become so inviting.

While last year it was "the winter that would never end", this year it's "the winter that never quite was".

Another phrase often used in the basin, "If you don't like the weather, wait five minutes, it will change" seems so appropriate. Part of Sunday was like a blizzard at Heavenly Mountain Resort, while later in the day the sunscreen needed to be applied.

Conditions on the mountain are all over the board. Awesome powder off the Galaxy chairlift had everyone in the trees whooping it up. The sketchy conditions on Liz's provoked four-letter words. Slick spots were disconcerting, especially as it

continued to snow. Later in the day slushy spots slowed everyone down.

It’s been that kind of season for skiers and snowboarders in Lake Tahoe – from one extreme to the other, with little consistency.

All the resorts finally have plenty of coverage – but only a few weeks are left before the lifts stop spinning until next season. Mid-April is the normal closing time. But plenty of events still fill the calendar – just check out your resort of choice to see what will be taking place in the coming weeks.

And while the ski season is just about over, the season for deals on next year’s season pass is well under way. This is the time of year to lock in the best rate on next year’s pass.

But, really, maybe it’s time to admit it’s the season to see if there is air in the bike tires.

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Natural beauty of Sedona radiates with wonder

By Kathryn Reed

SEDONA, Ariz. – It’s as though the rocks are evolving before my eyes. Shadows come and go. The sun is setting. A little more vibrant red; now a little more pink. Sky changing colors.

Mesmerizing. Breathtaking. Captivating.

Sedona, while well known for its vortexes – or spiraling energy, is a feast for the eyes. Everywhere one looks red rock creations sprout from the landscape. It doesn't matter if one feels the energy; taking in the beauty is a moving experience.



Exquisite rock formations are everywhere in Sedona, including outside the condo where we stayed. Photos/Kathryn Reed

While much of the area is in the Coconino National Forest, it's hard to think of it as a forest coming from Lake Tahoe. But it is an outdoor paradise.

We spend the first of three nights watching the sunset from the airport. Throngs of people are there before we arrive. The temperature is dropping as the sun fades behind the mountains.

Mother Nature's show deserves a standing ovation.

We are here for a few days after being at spring training and in Scottsdale the first part of this mid-March week. My sister, Pam, has secured us a condo at her Sedona Summit timeshare. This is her first time Sedona, while mom had stayed in this Arizona town before, and Sue and I had made day trips in the past.

Nothing is on our agenda except to hang out and look at red rocks. A little pool time, reading, relaxing, mixed with those rocks fill our days.

One morning we head to the old mining town of Jerome. At one time it was the fourth largest town in Arizona – that was in 1899. By 1929, the population was 15,000. Today a few hundred people call it home.

Copper is the main mineral pulled from the hillside land. A scar remains on one side of the mountain. At the Jerome State Historic Park it's possible to look down a shaft that is about 1,900 feet deep. The Audrey Shaft is lined with concrete for fire protection.

Once a mansion, the focal point of the state park is now a museum below the main part of town.

Jerome is built into a hillside. Streets are narrow. A tiny visitor center on Hull Avenue is a good first stop for getting a map that designates historic buildings and businesses.

We take a different route back to Sedona that leads us past some of the more recognizable rock formations like Bell Rock, Courthouse Butte, Cathedral Rock and Chapel of the Holy Cross.

It's easy to make this a driving a tour, hiking expedition, or leisurely stroll. The church that in 1956 was built into the rocks is worth getting out to explore – no matter your beliefs.

And make sure your battery is charged. Kodak moments are everywhere.

One morning Sue and I venture off on the Centennial and Girdner trails that are walking distance from the condo.

Sedona turned 100 in 2002. It got its name from the first postmaster's wife – Sedona was her first name.

Along the red dirt trail are magnificent vistas, with rock outcroppings in the distance. More immediate are blooming cacti, gangly pines and shrub brush. We share the trail with a mountain biker and hikers. The hikers tell us if we descend into the canyon, come out the wash, and hit a road we will make it back to the condo in several hours.

We opt to turn around. The pool is calling.

Another afternoon is spent meandering through the shops at Tlaquepaque. Artwork of all kinds fills the adobe buildings.

Nearby is Ken’s Creekside Café, where we have an early dinner. While no water is running in the creek, the view is still peaceful and relaxing. We all enjoy our meals and fun cocktails.

Sedona is one of those places that is good for all ages. It’s about a two-hour drive from Phoenix. Spend a day, or spend several, there is plenty to do.

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South Tahoe businesses fined for not clearing sidewalks

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe’s reputation for not enforcing its laws is changing. Twenty-three letters went out this month alerting property owners they are violating the city’s sidewalk snow removal ordinance.

The city will have enforcers out this weekend to see if more letters need to be written when this storm is over. Fines will keep going up.



Snow in late February covers the sidewalk along Highway 50. Photos/LTN

“We get complaints from people who know about the ordinance and want to know why businesses are not complying. They are tired of walking in the road and slipping in icy, snowy conditions,” City Manager Tony O’Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The city delayed implementation of the ordinance for a year so businesses could put a plan of action together for this winter. Even with the mild winter, property owners have let the snow accumulate, which at times forces pedestrians into the travel lane along Highway 50.

Even though this is the first year for South Tahoe’s sidewalk snow removal ordinance, it has been state law for years. The problem is no one has enforced it.

The problem with leaving the snow is it becomes a health and safety issue.

The city ordinance says, “It shall be the duty of all owners, and their tenants, of real property within the city whose property borders, or is an easement, any improved sidewalk or

walkway to maintain the sidewalk or walkway in a safe condition for its use by pedestrians and other members of the public. The duty created by the ordinance shall include the duty to keep the sidewalk or walkway free and clear of all dirt, sand, gravel, filth, rubbish, ice and snow."

In addition to the year delay, Explorer cadets with the city hand-delivered – before the white stuff started coming done – to each business on Highway 50 information about the policy.

After the first significant storm, warning letters went out.

Repeat offenders received a letter dated March 19 that said, "A significant effort was made to make you aware of your above stated responsibility prior to this winter season. As of [time], March 19, 2012, the sidewalk/walkway adjacent to your property/business had not been adequately cleared. Twenty-four hours had elapsed since the end of the most recent snow event and no action had been taken to remove the snow/ice from the sidewalk/walkway adjacent to your property. You are, therefore, assessed a fine of $50 …."

That payment is due April 20. As of March 30, one business paid the fine, three are appealing it and one has been dismissed.

The entities receiving a letter and fine are:

• Ski Run Liquor Market

• Bank of America

• South Lake Tahoe Senior Center

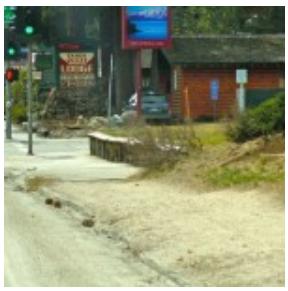
• Lake Tahoe Unified School District

• American Gasoline

• Chapel of the Bells

• Whiskey Dicks

- Trout Creek Motel
- Sky Lake Lodge
- Tahoe Mountain Wedding Chapel
- Re/Max Realty Tahoe
- Nickelodeon Motel
- Tahoe Retreat
- Head Shop
- 76 Conoco Phillips
- Coldwell Banker
- Tahoe Nails and Spa
- Staple
- Church of Christ Scientist
- Thrans Florist



Dirt and concrete walks in front of Chase realty offices have not been adequately cleared.

• Chase International

• Star Tahoe Offices

• Speed Trac.

El Dorado County owns the senior center.

The issue with the school district was confusion over whether the city was taking responsibility of snow removal in front of South Tahoe Middle School this year or starting next year. The city will be responsible going forward and the district's fine has been waived.

Besides businesses, the city has had to figure out how to clear walkways it's responsible for.

"It's so much more labor intensive to do sidewalks than streets," explained Stan Sherer, community services director. "We have made adjustments with our crews on addressing sidewalks. We can't hold the public to higher standards than ourselves."

Marnell Heinz, the city's street superintendent, will be making a presentation about snow removal to the Sustainability Commission on April 4 at 3pm at Lake Tahoe Airport. The meeting is open to the public.

Plus, there are areas in town where the walkway is dirt – which presents the conundrum of clearing vs. moving dirt.

"Dirt areas lead to inconsistencies in removal areas," Sherer said.

One of the outstanding issues is regarding the Caltrans right-of-way. Legally, those new sidewalks put in last summer by the state are their responsibility until the entire project is completed and the city takes possession.

However, Caltrans won't clear the area where it owns the

right-of-away.

“Our position throughout the region, including Truckee and Susanville, is that we do not remove snow from the sidewalks. Yes, we know we own the sidewalks until construction is complete. But at this point, Caltrans still does not maintain sidewalks,” Deanna Shoopman, Caltrans spokeswoman, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Lake Tahoe News has submitted a Public Records Request to Caltrans to secure documentation about encroachment permits from the Y to Stateline in order to assess the areas in the city Caltrans is legally responsible for. For now, the city is doing the state’s job.

Injured cub leaves Tahoe to return home to the wild

By Kathryn Reed

No. 8626 is home.

While still small at 35 pounds, this black bear left Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care at the break of dawn Thursday headed for Soda Lake near San Luis Obispo. This is the area where she was picked up in September and where California Department of Fish and Game officials released her later Thursday.

At Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care animals don’t receive names. This is because they are not pets and this is not a zoo. It’s a rehab facility for wildlife.



The last bear club rehabbed this season at Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care was returned to the wild March 29. Photos/Kathryn Reed

When this bear came in she was without a mom, was wandering around San Luis Obispo, and not eating even though she would scamper up pear and apple trees.

When Kevin Willitts, LTWC’s veterinarian, examined her he found an injury under her chin. An abscess had formed that made her unable to swallow. She was losing weight. Arriving at 16 pounds, she couldn’t afford to lose much more.

Every two days Willits would work on her until the sore healed.

He was there when DFG picked her up March 29. He took blood, looked at her chin. No evidence of any injury.

“She’s not the same bear,” Willits says. And that’s a good thing. Now she is a healthy bear ready to live in on her own.

It was a slow road to recovery. It was soft foods to begin with – like oatmeal and applesauce. She eventually graduated

to solid foods.

Still, being so small, she was never put in with the five other cubs Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care took in last year. Those animals were returned to the wild earlier this year. But based on this one's size, she was kept longer to put a little bulk on her and to give her a better chance at surviving.

Marc Kenyon, associate wildlife biologist with DFG, said a colleague this week had checked the area out where the bear was to be released.

"The rains we've gotten have really greened up the area," Kenyon said, adding there is plenty of food and water for this youngster.

Normally bears are released into a den while they are hibernating. With bears out and about, a den was not her destination.

To get her into the cage in the back of the pickup she had to be tranquilized. Mixing the Telazol, which comes in powder form, with water, Kenyon puts it in a syringe that is the attached to what looks like a long pole.

She's upstairs in the bobcat cage wondering who these people are.

It takes a few minutes for her to get woozy. When she is too out of it to harm anyone, Willits hands her to LTWC volunteer Barry Trammell. He carries what looks like an oversized stuffed animal to the scale in the garage. (LTWC is operated out of the Millhams' home on the outskirts of South Lake Tahoe.)

A monitor is hooked to her tongue to gauge her heartbeat. All her vitals are taken. Kenyon and his two assistants were to do the same when they reached their destination.

At this stage the bear can still feel, see and hear. She's not

totally out. On the table though, her eyes are covered to protect them and not have her become agitated so as to raise her heartbeat.

Kenyon put a tag in her ear – just in case she is caught again they know her history.

Cheryl Millham isn't sad to her go. It's the right thing. And it's what she and husband Tom have been doing for 34 years – rehabbing wild animals.

"They are going on to their next step of life. No animal should be kept in a cage," Cheryl Millham said.

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Student union designed to tie STHS campus together

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe is getting a conference center after all.

While it's on the campus of South Tahoe High School, it is a joint-use facility that is partly funded with a grant South Lake Tahoe helped secure.

It's like a mini-convention center – especially with all the high-tech features being built in. Drop down screens, smart boards, blackout privacy curtains, and Wi-Fi are included, plus dividers to make it one, two or three rooms. Maximum capacity will be about 150 people seated.



Workers are on schedule to complete the STHS student union by next school year. Photos/Kathryn Reed

With meeting rooms named Cascade, Angora and Fallen Leaf, it will be hard for people to not remember they are on the South Shore.

Natural light will flood the rooms as windows more than 30-feet high flank the south wall.

For now, while work by employees of SMC Contractors and their subs continues inside under shrink wrap, the views are only of the interior work that needs to be finished. When it’s done, the outside view will be of the courtyard area in the center of campus.

The white covering will come off in a couple months, but still, scaffolding will remain as work wraps up. The doors will open for the 2012-13 school year.

Principal Ivone Larson envisions the building, along with the other offerings the school can provide, to be attractive to outside organizations. Of course there will be a rental fee, though the city may use the meeting space for free.

With renovation of the gym complete, another source of income

could be tournaments, with the idea cash would flow into town via hotel rooms and restaurants being full.

The building under construction has real plumbing – which means flush toilets. Those will be accessible to teams using the tennis courts and softball field. Athletes will no longer be relegated to using porta-potties.

A door will limit people just to the restrooms so they can't meander through the whole building when they aren't supposed to be in it.

This is the fourth new building at South Tahoe High School – all from the $64.5 million Measure G bond that was approved by voters in 2008. Matching funds have increased the total amount closer to $100 million – all for facilities that will be built throughout Lake Tahoe Unified, with the bulk being at the high school.

The gym and boiler room have been overhauled as well. The sports medicine building should break ground this summer. It will be situated behind the Gold Gym and to the right of the student union.

"We're calling it a student union because it has the feel of a college," Larson said while giving a tour of the building Wednesday.

Student clubs are expected to use the rooms regularly. Cheerleaders are excited about the high ceilings so they can do all of their jumps.

Besides the rooms, the biggest area will be for eating. This building will literally unify the student body. Finally, everyone will be able to eat indoors at the same time in one place.

For now, there is no talk of making STHS a closed campus – just to freshmen, as is the rule today.

Larson believes with the number of students receiving a free or reduced lunch growing (it’s about 50 percent at STHS) that more people will keep staying on campus.

Shelley Giannotta, food services director, hopes they’ll be staying because of the expanded food choices she anticipates being able to deliver.

For those who want to be connected even during the lunch break, that will be possible. Much like airports, power outlets are being built in so people can multitask. With students using netbooks for much of the their school work, not to mention needing batteries charged for other devices, plugs will be built into some of the pillars where bar height tables and chairs will go in.

Specifics on the furniture are still being worked out. Steve Morales, who is in charge of district facilities, expects the school board to have a furniture bid to review at a meeting in May.

At the March 27 board meeting, is was unanimously agreed to go forward with the final Measure G bond sales of $16.7 million to allow construction to meet the time lines that are in place. Also at the meeting, the board signed off on the completion of the gym renovation.

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Here is a video from a group of educators who were in town from Sacramento last week to see what all is going on in LTUSD.

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Drug use – students learn consequences of their choices

By Kathryn Reed

> *Ten middle school students died at Lake Tahoe Community College on Tuesday as their classmates watched. Then they went to the funeral and staring back them in the coffin was a reflection of themselves.*

Gritty. Gripping. Impactful.

That's what the Drug Store Project is all about. Now in its ninth year, the program is designed to teach sixth-graders about the consequences of doing drugs. One of them being death.



It's not real here -- but the consequences of drug use and abuse could result in death. Photos/Kathryn Reed

While no one actually died March 27, the 10 groups do go through a series of vignettes that show what can happen if they become involved with drugs. Death is one of those consequences.

Lisa Huard, who was the safe schools coordinator for Lake Tahoe Unified School District when she began the program, started with seventh-graders. A few years ago it was switched to sixth-graders. With how young children are exposed to drugs, she envisions fifth-graders being part of Drug Store Project.

(Now Tahoe Youth & Family Services is the lead agency, with Huard still at the helm.)

Students in Douglas and Alpine counties also participate in the nearly all-day event.

The premise is a student, who is handpicked to do so, swipes a baggie of drugs from a table where narcotics officers are giving a lesson.

In one group it was Harmony, a sixth-grader at South Tahoe Middle School, who was cuffed and hauled off to juvi hall.

While “the hall” is clearly not the real deal, the probation officers working it are. They talk about the used underwear kids must put on. They’ve been washed. But they sure aren’t white anymore.

That isn’t just some woman in a black robe at the front of the room or some other woman acting like an attorney. That’s El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury and El Dorado County Assistant District Attorney Lisa Serafini.

That’s one of the powerful things about Drug Store Project – adults are doing their job, even if it’s in scripted form. Those are real handcuffs, real guns, people with real authority to put someone behind bars as well as to counsel

them.

Harmony is told to go to counseling at Tahoe Youth & Family Services.

But then she leaves, goes to a pharm party – where prescription drugs are handed out like candy. She doesn't leave on her own.

Paramedics wheel her out on a gurney. A California Highway Patrol officer arrests the 18-year-old who is hosting this party.

Harmony's group is now assembled in the dark college theater. She comes in on a gurney with an IV in her and breathing apparatus. CPR is not working.

The spotlight is on her.

She dies.

Not a sound comes from her classmates.

She is left there with a white sheet covering her body.

Her classmates leave to attend her funeral.

While a real minister gives the eulogy, when the students go to view Harmony's body what they see instead is themselves. A mirror is there instead of Harmony.

The point: do what Harmony did and they could wind up in a coffin.

True story

While this was make believe, the next venue wasn't.

Molly Cocking is standing behind a table full of medical devices. Those tools helped save her life.

The summer before her sophomore year at South Tahoe High

School she drank to the point of having a blood alcohol content of 0.25. In the morning, when she woke up at Barton Memorial Hospital, her BAC was 0.16 – still twice the legal limit for an adult.

Now age 26 and an emergency room nurse at Carson Tahoe Hospital, Cocking retells her night of horror – at least what she remembers of it. Her parents were told she might not make it through the night.

She credits friends with saving her life – for not letting her sleep it off, for calling for help.

Cocking was told if they had not done that, it's likely she would have died.

She didn't preach about not ingesting drugs or alcohol, but she did encourage them to not do what she did. What Cocking imparted was some of the most practical advice for the day – don't pick up a drink (even it was yours to start with) if there is any chance someone could have slipped something into it, and if you are going to drink or do drugs, be sure it's around people you trust so if something happens, there is someone there to help.

Cocking's story could be a standalone event.

All the pieces

Drug Store Project is a collaborative effort. While Huard is the organizer, more than 150 volunteers help. Harrah's donates about $8,000 worth of food. Embassy Suites offers a night of lodging to the California National Guard.

The college donates the space.

Agencies donate personnel and equipment – like the Tahoe Douglas bomb squad, Calstar, law enforcement and others.

But the $13,000 it costs in cash to put the event on seems

each year to get more difficult to find. The school district stopped doing the program several years ago. TY&FS relies on a grant.

And it’s not just this one day. TY&FS will be in classrooms Thursday to debrief the kids. This age group needs time to process things like this, thus the reason for waiting a day to go to their schools. About 350 students go through the program each year.

Surveys will be sent to parents. The hope is this triggers conversations in homes.

For more information, go online.

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South Tahoe basketball star to coach Alabama-Birmingham

By Reno Gazette-Journal

Jerod Haase, who led South Tahoe High to a state basketball championship in 1992, was named the head coach at Alabama-Birmingham on Monday night.

Haase, who was officially announced as UAB’s coach Tuesday afternoon, has worked under Roy Williams for the past 13 seasons at North Carolina and Kansas.



Jerod Haase

“I want to thank (UAB President) Dr. (Carol) Garrison and (athletic director) Mr. (Brian) Mackin for this opportunity,” Haase said in a release. “It’s a tremendous leap of faith, and I will do everything in my power to prove that this is the right hire at the right time. I will work tirelessly to ensure that this decision on your behalf is a great one.

“I also want to thank Coach Williams. Without getting into too much detail, when I left his office yesterday I told him I have to leave and not talk because I can’t do it (emotionally). He’s been great to me.”

Haase replaces Mike Davis, who was fired after six seasons. He agreed to a five-year contract worth $475,000 annually plus incentives. The contract must still be approved by the Alabama university system.

Read the whole story

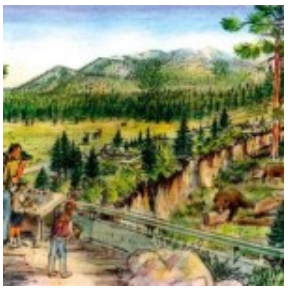
Permanent location to rehab wildlife in LTWC’s sights

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – If it’s true getting a step in the door is the hardest part to realizing a dream, then that step may have

literally been taken this month by the Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care board of directors based on where they conducted their meeting.

They met in a house at the bottom of the Old Meyers Grade in what is now a vacation rental. But that nearly 3,700-square-foot house on those 16-plus acres that back up to U.S. Forest Service property is on land zoned recreational/commercial and comes with 130,000-square-feet of coverage. That could make all the dreams of the Millhams come to fruition.



A conceptual drawing of what the bear facility at Lake Tahoe Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center could look like.

For 34 years, Tom and Cheryl Millham have been operating the animal rehabilitation center. The animals are in cages in their back yard. They function with a special use permit from El Dorado County.

They are tired. They want to enjoy their retirement by not being tied to the phone to rescue animals, care for them and then release them.

While in many ways they are a mom-and-pop operation, Cheryl

Millham’s knowledge is coveted. She is often asked to be a guest lecturer. She knows how migration patterns have changed over the decades; she knows what animals were here 30 years ago are no longer here. She is a wealth of information.

The Millhams work closely with the state Department of Fish and Game, especially with bear releases. Another cub is slated to go back into the wild this week near San Luis Obispo.

But the Millhams have had their dreams dashed before. Parcels have come and gone as possible locations. Not only do they want to move their operation, but also expand it to include a larger education center, a place to have conferences, and a sanctuary to let the animals that cannot be released call home.

The board is hoping this was the first of many meetings in a permanent home.

“This is the closest now to having a done deal,” Tom Millham told *Lake Tahoe News*. And even now the deal is far from being done.

Before the nonprofit is on the deed, the money needs to be secured for the property that is listed at $1.99 million. This is less than the $5 million the owners wanted in 2007.

“They are open to being creative,” Rene Brejc, who is listing the property, said of the trust that owns the property.

Tom Davis, who is on the LTWC board, pointed out that how the center has operated for the past 34 years is not how will be able to operate in the next 34 years. He said veterinarian officials from UC Davis have expressed an interest in having a teaching component at the center about wildlife.

Talk that night was about how perhaps a foundation or investors need to be sought and a significant fundraising drive initiated.

Beyond the payment for the property, significant improvements need to be made – from parking, to building cages, to upgrading the water system.

The property now uses a well, but with the type of facility the Millhams envision, officials would require the center serviced by South Tahoe Public Utility District. This would help it better comply with fire regulations as well.

Jumping through county and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency hoops could be problematic. Preliminary discussions with both agencies have taken place.

There have been meetings where planning officials have said they worry about how much soil a 300-pound bear will compact at the wildlife center. This, despite the fact that bears and other wildlife roam the woods everyday without any apparent degradation to Lake Tahoe's clarity. And plenty of hefty people compact soil, too, and they aren't told to stop doing that.

El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago, who was at the board meeting, said she would not let the county be a stumbling block. She is also on the TRPA Governing Board.

Julie Regan with TRPA, when contacted by *Lake Tahoe News*, said, "It's important to find a solution that works. (LTWC) is an important community asset. When El Dorado County brings forward their local area plan, I'm sure they would want to look at what land use changes would come after the adoption of the Regional Plan."

While other places have facilities like what the Millhams and the LTWC board envision, one does not exist in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Mike Dill with Aspen Environmental Services along with the Millhams has met with TRPA and county officials. Issues like needing to fence the entire property could be a stumbling

block. The fact that TRPA does not allow accessory uses for entities falling under “public health and safety” is another issue. The building permit expires this fall.

It has been agreed a bridge that would hold the weight of a golf cart could be built across Echo Creek.

Despite the hurdles, the Millhams, board members, the consultant, the county supervisor and the real estate agent agreed on two things – Lake Tahoe Wild Care would not close and a solution would be found.

LTUSD on verge of creating winter sports academy

By Kathryn Reed

Prom, football games, hanging with friends, a diploma. In part, that’s what high school is all about.

But in Lake Tahoe, where some of the world’s best skiers and snowboarders call home, they don’t have those high school memories because they were on the slopes more than they were in the classroom. And some leave town to be able to get the training and education they want. That all might change for

the next generation of Olympians and X Games competitors who hail from the South Shore.

On Tuesday night, the Lake Tahoe Unified School District board of education will have a one-hour study session about creating the South Lake Tahoe Mountain Sports Academy, with a vote to be taken later that night.

LTUSD expects to partner with Sierra-at-Tahoe, and Tahoe Sports and Entertainment, owners of the South Lake Tahoe Ice Rink.

(Board member Judy Cefalu won't be able to vote because her son, Chris Cefalu, is president of Tahoe Sports and Entertainment.)

The idea would be to create a schedule for students where they are at South Tahoe High School in the morning and on the slopes or ice in the afternoon.

"We have had to send a few of our alpine racers to Sugar Bowl to balance their education," John Rice, general manager at Sierra, told *Lake Tahoe News*. This program would keep them on the South Shore.

Sugar Bowl is the closest academy, with one near Vail and others on the East Coast.

Sierra has a proven history of turning out world-class athletes – Travis Cabral, Travis Ramos, and Jamie and Joanie Anderson, to name a few.

Moving, ditching classes or home schooling are the choices skiers and snowboarders have today.

Maddie Bowman, who will lead the Pledge of Alliance at the March 27 meeting, is the rare exception of being a world-class athlete (silver in the superpipe at this year's Winter X Games

and second overall in the Dew Tour rankings) and skiing for the high school team.

LTUSD Superintendent Jim Tarwater said parents and students for years have been asking for an academy.

“The timing is right. We have the strong educational facilities,” Tarwater said in reference to the infrastructure and associated programs that have come with the 2008-voter approved Measure G.

The academy, which could be running by the start of the 2012-13 school year, would come under the district’s alternative education program. Amy Jackson would likely be the counselor for the students. Between 20 and 30 kids are expected to enroll initially, with it growing from there.

It’s anticipated students from the West Slope and Sacramento area may also be initial registrants. The district does not foresee getting into the business of housing academy kids.

While the cost of the programs is not finalized, the district will neither make money nor incur additional costs. But it will realize average daily attendance dollars – the way California schools receive money from the state.

Rice expects the ski-snowboard program to cost less than $10,000 per year. Tarwater said the hockey academy will be closer to $15,000. (Neither Chris Cefalu nor Van Oleson of TSE returned a phone call.)

Incorporated into the fee will be the cost of busing students to their training locations and back.

Rice provided the following rough schedule for student-athletes:

Fall: September-November (first quarter)

Conditioning begins school calendar year

Baseline physical condition test (possibly tie into sports medicine component that will open at STHS in fall 2013)

Winter: December-January (second quarter)

Daily on mountain training

Events as qualified and registered

Spring: January-March (third quarter)

Daily on mountain training

Events, competition

Summer: March-June (fourth quarter) (resort closes mid-April)

School sports medicine lab, media

End of season progress report, summer training plan

Voluntary participation: social events, soccer, volleyball, beach days.

Tarwater said by breaking the academy into quarters it will mean being able to compress some of the academics during the time when the slopes are bare.

Another component could be to integrate various aspects of the high school curriculum into the academy – for instance having students interested in digital media film the racers and tying in sports medicine classes.

Rice envisions working with Lake Tahoe Community College on backcountry awareness for academy students. He also anticipates this type of academy helping athletes secure scholarships to compete at the college level.

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Meeting info: Study session about the proposed academy begins at 5pm March 27. A vote on the proposal is farther down on the

agenda. The meeting is at the district office on Al Tahoe Boulevard in South Lake Tahoe.