

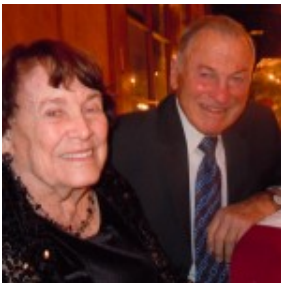
Former Valhalla owners reminisce about Tahoe estate

By Kathryn Reed

CAMP RICHARDSON – Imagine nearly a hundred people in your house eating dinner and you don't know most of them.

That was the reality Saturday night for Dee Dee and Raymond Goodrich. They used to own the Heller Estate. On Dec. 4 they were special guests for the Tahoe Tallac Association's annual gala.

It was about 10 years since they were last in Lake Tahoe. The Goodrichs, who will have been married 68 years in January, came up in the summer. On camera they told stories of what life was like when they summered on the shores of Lake Tahoe, what the house was like, how it was decorated.



Dee Dee and
Raymond
Goodrich

Sitting near the large fireplace in what is now known as the Grand Hall, members of the family chatted before the festivities began. Then they took their seat at the head table.

The couple, who reside in Santa Cruz, spoke a bit with *Lake Tahoe News* that night about their 10 years of owning what is

now considered a historic estate. They bought the property from Wilber Kuhl in 1955. He had bought it from heirs of Walter and Claire Heller who first built the estate in the 1920s.

Raymond Goodrich is quick to say he wished he'd never sold the place in 1965. At the time, the property was owned with two other couples. One of the partners died and the Goodrichs didn't have the money to buy the others out.

Each couple stayed one month during the summer. The Goodrichs said they had it best with August being their month.

Three fireplaces kept the wide-open wood and rock structure warm. Even though central heating has since been installed, the single-pane windows and drafty old doors prove spending the night at the estate would be a chilling experience.

But it was those cold winters that provided refrigeration all summer for the Goodrichs and others. Raymond Goodrich explained how part of what is now the boathouse theater was an icehouse. Ed Zeller was the caretaker who lived year-round at the estate in a building near the boathouse that no longer exists. He made sure the blocks of ice were ready for summer.

"There was enough to last all summer," Goodrich said of the ice.

The couple describes the stove they had as "monstrous."

"It had eight burners and in the middle a griddle," Dee Dee Goodrich said.

Her husband recalls many a morning watching Dee Dee making stacks and stacks of pancakes.

The expansive bottom floor where festivities are conducted is the same as it was when originally built. So is the U-shape upstairs.

Dee Dee Goodrich said besides the two suites there were three other bedrooms.

“There was a big sleeping porch, which was everyone’s favorite,” she said.

Raymond Goodrich often had to fly in for the weekends. At that time Lake Tahoe Airport’s runway was 6,000 feet. It’s 8,541 feet now. Having been a Navy pilot during World War II gave him plenty of practice landing on small strips.

The Goodrichs are pleased to see their old home being well cared for by the Tahoe Tallac Association. The association operates the summer arts festival at their old home and the boathouse. The vast lawn where croquet was once played by the Goodrich family, now is seldom used because of limitations the U.S. Forest Service has imposed on the association. The land is owned by the Forest Service, which acquired the property in 1971 from the South Tahoe Valhalla Corporation, the group the Goodrichs sold to. That group had planned to turn the area into a members-only yacht club.

While the land is now in public ownership, the Forest Service limits the access and uses. The 30-plus year prickly relationship between the arts group and Forest Service is said to be gradually softening.

‘Polar Express’ delights kids as it chugs through S. Shore

By Susan Wood and Kathryn Reed

Hear those bells? Then you are a believer.

Ty Loughlin not only believes in Santa Claus, he has lived the Polar Express story. A year ago he tied the silver bell to his backpack – but it disappeared. Because the 8-year-old boy's family owns the book and movie he knew somehow it would turn up – with or without a hole in his pocket as the main character had in the story.

He found his bell in time for the second annual Polar Express on Dec. 5 as he got dressed in the afternoon in his snowboarder pajamas. And just in case he had not found his bell from 2009, Santa had plenty of shiny new ones to hand out.



Children
surround Mrs.
Claus as she
reads "Polar
Express."
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

Hundreds of South Shore children boarded the Polar Express on Sunday to be whisked to the North Pole for a dose of Christmas magic. The signature event of the Festival of Trees and Lights wrapped up the three-day fund-raising event for the Barton Community Clinic.

Some kids admitted to having been in their PJs all day. It was the preferred outfit – even for many adults. One father of three in a purple robe getting refreshments said he wished he could dress this way for work every day.

Also aboard the Dancer train car (which closely resembled a big yellow school bus) was Ralston Johnson. The South Lake Tahoe lad, who was born weighing in at an equivalent weight (9.2 pounds) as the elevation (9,200 feet) of the significant peak on the South Shore that he is named after, knew who the star of the day would be. His eyes lit up when asked what he would ask Santa for – a Blackhawk 2 Nintendo game.

He stood up in his polar bear pajamas and said so at the urging of conductor John Marchini, who donned a train conductor uniform and gold pocket watch.

“Doesn’t he look like Tom Hanks?” Ralston’s grandmother Louise Mitchell whispered. The actor played the lead role in the 2004 movie. Marchini had the role down to a science as he kept the bus entertained.

Buses with famous names like Vixen, Dasher, Prancer and Dancer left the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Complex at 3pm and 6pm, with a stop at the Red Hut Café on Ski Run where elves brought hot cocoa on board for all to sip.

Jude Stackpole, 7, sat with 5-year-old brother Jake for the second year in a row. Jude’s favorite part is the hot cocoa. Last year the Stateline family (dad Patrick was sitting in front of them) boarded the buses in Nevada.

An only-in-ski-country line was overheard describing the Tumbleweed Gymnastics performance in the parking lot of the Red Hut – “the aerialists” is the phrase that was used – much like what these girls see in terrain parks.

Continuing along Highway 50 the bus didn’t go the most direct route to the North Pole. It kept with the storyline by skirting the lake. (An exciting scene in the movie shows the train riding its tracks over a large body of water.)

Despite it being his first time, Ralston looked quite at home at the North Pole’s Festival of Trees at MontBleu in

Stateline. His school, Sierra House Elementary, won first place for the best decorated tree with the Peace Tree, which included a peace sign at the tree topper.

Paul Kushner and his Tahoe Belles choir kept the holiday mood going with songs that young and old could sing along to.

As Mrs. Claus read the “Polar Express,” children clamored onto the stage to be close to her in an impromptu way only children can get away with.

Her “husband” was certainly the star of the event – especially because he ordered each child get a silver bell. The significance of which is revealed in the book.

Although the event was designed for the young, there were moments when it was hard to tell who was having more fun – the children or adults.

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Tahoe docs teach intricate orthopedic surgery techniques

By Jessie Marchesseau

ROUND HILL – Seven doctors, nurses and assistants, two monitors, multiple trays of surgical tools and two large adjustable spotlights fill the cadaver lab Dec. 3 at Tahoe Orthopedic & Sports Medicine in Round Hill.

The things that resemble raw turkeys on metal stands – those were the cadavers. They were not full bodies, just shoulders. There were two of them set up at separate surgical stations;

one for each of the two doctors participating in the Lake Tahoe Sports Medicine Fellowship.



Dr. Brian Duggan, left, prepares to operate on a shoulder as Dr. Kyle Swanson observes.

Photos/Jessie Marchesseau

The doctors, known as fellows, will take part in four of these cadaver surgeries during their year in the program. Sometimes they use knees, other times hips, this day it is shoulders.

“It’s a way to give the fellows the most realistic way to practice a surgical technique and to learn new ones,” said Dr. Keith Swanson, program director for the Lake Tahoe Sports Medicine Fellowship and one of its founders. “You can try things, new things that you wouldn’t try on someone if you haven’t done it before.”

This was exactly why Dr. Brian Duggan, one of the fellows, was so excited about Friday’s cadaver lab. He was looking forward to performing suprascapular nerve decompression on a shoulder. It is a relatively rare surgery that he has only encountered once.

“This is something that most surgeons have never done,” he

said. "It's one of the most complicated surgeries."

Duggan, originally from Detroit, did his residency in Maryland before moving to Lake Tahoe in July for the fellowship program. He says his goal is to have a general orthopedic practice specializing in sports-related injuries.

The fellows are not medical students. They are fully trained orthopedic surgeons when they arrive. They choose to participate in the fellowship as a way to acquire more in-depth training specifically in the field of sports medicine.

Duggan applied for the fellowship because he says he knew it would give him the opportunity to see a variety of cases, get a wealth of hands-on experience and work with experts in the field of sports medicine. He has already seen an improvement in his surgical skills since starting the fellowship four months ago.

"Because of the complexity of orthopedics, the more training you can get in your specialty, the better," Swanson said.

When it comes to additional training in the field of sports medicine, doctors' options are relatively limited. The Lake Tahoe Sports Medicine Fellowship is one of 95 across the country and the only one in Nevada. What's even more unique about the program is that it is not located in a big city or associated with a large metropolitan hospital or medical school.

"The only reason we can do a sports medicine fellowship in a small town like this is because of the high volume of sports injuries here," Swanson said.

Swanson and six other local doctors make up the fellowship faculty. Drs. Steve Bannar, Jeffrey Cummings, Roger Rogalski, Kyle Swanson, Robert Rupp, and Daniel Robertson all donate time to the program. However, the fellowship benefits these doctors almost as much as it does the fellows, giving the

seasoned surgeons an opportunity to work with doctors who have just finished training in the latest techniques and assist them with research projects.

“If you want to really get good at something, you need to become a teacher at it,” Swanson said. “I think they teach me almost as much as I teach them.”

Swanson credits the program with keeping the orthopedic care here on the South Shore some of the best available.

This was evident as Duggan and Kyle Swanson performed the rare decompression surgery. It is an arthroscopic procedure, meaning the doctors use a tiny camera to do the surgery rather than cutting the flesh open, and one that is currently a hot topic among the medical community.

Water dripped from the shoulder as Duggan maneuvered the long metal tool equipped with the camera through tissue to the suprascapular nerve. The doctors intently watched the monitor in front of them, pointing out the rotator cuff and different types of tissue they were passing through.

On the other side of the room, fellow Dr. Cecelia Pascual Garrida watched a different monitor as she performed an arthroscopic rotator cuff surgery on her shoulder with Robertson assisting.

“I think the bottom line of all this for the public is because of this program, it keeps the orthopedic care very high in this community,” Keith Swanson said. “It’s the very highest care available.”

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Tree lighting makes it official – holiday season has arrived

By Kathryn Reed

It's definitely the holiday season in South Lake Tahoe now that Santa has turned on the lights on the community tree and the menorah has been lighted.

With nearly 200 people gathered in the center of town by the Lake Tahoe Visitors Center satellite office, student choir groups sang carols. Paul Kushner led the ensemble, with some participation from the crowd gathered in the chilly night air Dec. 3.



Dillon Breckenridge, 5, of South Lake Tahoe tells Santa his Christmas wish.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

Breaking with tradition just a bit, Dwight Borges led his two Belgian draft horses to the front of the building to drop off Santa. This led the younger ones in the crowd to cheer and ask

for hugs from the man in red and white. He obliged a bit before being escorted to his duties to light the tree.

Sydney Morris was standing out back waiting for Santa's arrival. The sixth-grader has been coming out for the festivities since she was in third grade. Her favorite part of the night is the tree lighting.

New LED lights eliminated the threat of a strand not lighting – like last year. Oversized wreaths, candy canes and balls adorn the large pine.

Santa made his way inside the center where Ethan Niven was his helper – handing out little items to all those who spoke to Santa.

One of the first to sit on the big guy's lap was Dillon Breckenridge. The 5-year-old is hoping his stocking is filled with a Woody doll from "Toy Story."

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South Tahoe police chief looks to overhaul department

By Kathryn Reed

Honeymoons are supposed to last longer than eight days for department heads. No so for South Lake Tahoe's police chief.

Brian Uhler has been tasked with handling a reorganization of the department because Lt. Marty Hale has announced he is retiring Dec. 30.

"We're considering a restructure. It could possibly mean more boots on the ground at the line level," Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I'm not prepared to say we need more or less officers."



Brian Uhler

Hale said his retirement has nothing to do with not being given the chief's job. When he got the notice the city manager was going outside the department he looked at the two-year service credit as incentive for early retirement and filled out the paperwork.

Hale, who is in his 50s, has been with the department a little more than 24 years. He worked for 2½ years for the Utah County Sheriff's Department near Provo after graduating from Brigham Young University.

"It's been a great place to work and a good community," Hale said of South Tahoe.

He won't be leaving for good right away. He will work on a part-time basis through June, but at retired stats. This gives Uhler, who has been on the job less than a month, time to figure out how to structure the department, as well as allows Hale to be on the job when Lt. David Stevenson attends the FBI Academy in April.

But Hale doesn't know what he will do when summer comes along.

"I can pick and choose what my next career will be," Hale said. He isn't committed to staying a resident of the Carson Valley either.

Learning the ropes

Uhler has been busy meeting with groups in the department and scheduling one-on-one sessions with sworn and non-sworn personnel. He's asking what they want.

Officers are saying they want more training. The current City Council has wiped most training off the books for financial reasons without much analysis to know what the training might have been for.

El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury has told Uhler he needs officers who are trained to be expert witnesses in gang cases in order for suspects to be put behind bars.

Uhler is contemplating an officer exchange with a department well versed in this regard.

He was able to get in on the last part of a meeting Thursday with the South Lake El Dorado Narcotics Enforcement Team members.

The police associations will meet Dec. 6, with the reorg on the agenda.

On Dec. 8 a department-wide meeting is scheduled to discuss ideas everyone has for what the future of the department looks like.

"I hope we come to some consensus with what to do in the future, or at least a clear understanding of where we are going," Uhler said.

Staffing issues

With Hale's departure, it leaves one lieutenant and one captain right under Uhler. That would be an unusual hierarchy if it were left that way.

"I don't like administrative duties to fall on the sergeants," Uhler said. "They oversee the officers in the field. If we take the sergeants out of the field, we undermine ourselves."

Capt. Martin Hewlett, who was interim chief after Terry Daniels left nearly a year ago, never wanted to be top cop. But he has said retirement isn't that far off. That prospect allows Uhler to envision longer term at what the department may look like.

Uhler is quick to say he has made no decisions about what changes are forthcoming. He knows officers are interested in working four 10-hour shifts, some want to work 12-hour stints.

In the department's 45-year history there have been a dozen reorganizations. There are those who remember when the department was more flush with personnel. Today three sworn and one non-sworn positions are frozen.

On the community survey City Manager Tony O'Rourke is developing will be questions about what the residents want from the police department. Uhler believes too many programs are in place because the resources to carry them out don't exist. He wants citizens to help prioritize what the department should be doing besides the expected patrol.

As Uhler examines how the department operates he is also analyzing patrolling patterns that create a dead zone in the middle of town while the bulk of activity is near the state line and Y.

Then there is the issue of the workload tripling on a Friday from 8pm to 2am, but not triple the staff to handle it.

It might be possible to utilize reserves more often to handle things like traffic, where guns and handcuffs aren't warranted.

Other concerns

Uhler's signature is already on the bid documents to acquire five patrol cars. He said the fleet of 28 vehicles is in sorry shape. He called it "eye-opening" to find out the percentage that need replacing – 17 of those 28.

Instead of continuing to buy vehicles outright, he wants to investigate a lease option.

To deal with the sketchy technology, Uhler met Wednesday with Lt. Les Lovell of the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department to talk about sharing a system. He is meeting with Sheriff-elect John D'Agostini today.

The radio system the police use was implemented in 1985. Now it is costing the city more than \$100,000 a year to keep putting Band-Aids on it, is how Uhler describes it. He said how reports are done via the antiquated computer system means officers are in the station and off the street for longer periods than seem reasonable.

Combining resources with the county would mean each could tap into the system to know if the other had had an encounter with a suspect. It's also possible SLTPD could handle the sheriff's dispatch instead of it being routed through Placerville.

While Uhler sorts through what needs to be done at the station, he still hasn't unpacked his house and is living among boxes.

Holiday season comes to light with Barton's Festival of

Trees

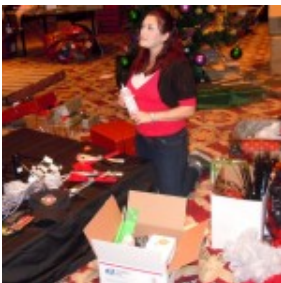
By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – It was not the traditional Santa's workshop, but a definite holiday buzz was coming from MontBleu's convention center.

By 10am the Mardis Gras tree was well assembled, as was the Party in a Box tree. Food Network star Guy Fieri sent items to Tahoe for a tree with his name on it. Hollywood is showing up with an Eat, Pray, Love tree.

All of these trees and more are part of the second annual Festival of Tree and Lights. The three-day event – Dec. 3-5 – is all about giving local youths some holiday fun, families an indoor activity, and the Barton Community Clinic a unique vehicle to raise cash.

Each designer has a 10-foot by 10-foot space to work in. Decorating the winter wonderland was supposed to be done as the clock struck midnight Wednesday. Although the public doesn't get to look at the splendor until Dec. 3, Barton employees will be treated to a special event tonight and a VIP gathering was last night.



Jessica
DeFranco is a
bit nervous
Guy Fieri may
attend the

event because
she is
decorating the
tree with his
name.

Photos/Kathryn
Reed

"Most of the growth is in mini trees and table tops," Kindle Craig, executive director of the Barton Foundation, told *Lake Tahoe News* as she walked among the clutter Tuesday.

Although she would like to be able to have more large trees, the space doesn't allow for it. But MontBleu is not charging for use of the space.

"I'd really like the convention center (across the street) to open so it could be bigger," Kindle said.

New this year is two trips on the Polar Express on Sunday because of the sell-out last year. A Teddy Bear Hospital is also new. A Champagne brunch fashion show had been planned, but has since been crossed off the event schedule.

The inaugural event raised almost \$28,000 for the clinic. With not having the start-up costs associated with last year, organizers are hoping to raise even more money this year. It is also hoped more people will participate. Last year 2,500 people were part of the festival.

More than a dozen trees are elaborately decorated – mostly with a theme, such as the Powder tree. Each tree has a sponsor (Barton's orthopedics are behind this one), and each has a decorator. Sponsors pay \$1,200 per tree. The designer is reimbursed up to \$600; the other \$600 goes to the clinic.

Gifts under the tree – like the goggles, skis and chairlift are donated. In this case, the chair came from Sierra-at-Tahoe.

Then, the tree and everything associated with it is auctioned off to the highest bidder. In 2009, the most expensive tree went for \$3,000 even though it had a value of about \$5,000.

That money, too, went right to the community clinic coffers.

The clinic plans an \$800,000 renovation that will begin next year. It is at capacity with 11 exam rooms, so more will be added, along with a larger waiting area. The clinic saw nearly 1,600 patients in October.

Event details:

Location: MontBleu casino in Stateline

Dec. 3:

9am-4pm Public Viewing of Designer Trees: Tickets are available for purchase only at the door; \$5 for adults, \$3 for senior citizens (55+), \$3 for children (ages 3-12), children 2 and under are free.

5-9pm Family Night: Families are welcome to attend special late night festival hours, free cocoa and cookies. Enjoy a holiday light show provided by Horizon casino. Admission is \$25 per family (up to 5 people), which includes one Santa photo. Additional Santa photos can be purchased for \$5 each.

Dec. 4:

9am Teddy Bear Breakfast: Tickets are \$20 for adults, \$15 for children (ages 3-12), children 2 and under are free, \$200 reserved table (10 Guests). One Santa photo per family is included. Additional photos can be purchased for \$5 each.

Enjoy a holiday buffet in the convention center surrounded by all the trees and holiday lights. Every child is encouraged to bring a doll or teddy bear that will be whisked away and returned to their table adorned with holiday flair.

11am-2pm Teddy Bear Hospital/Gingerbread Junction/Public Viewing of Designer Trees: Children age 12 and under are invited to visit the Teddy Bear Hospital – an interactive place where they learn about their health and hospitals in a safe, “no pokes” environment from Barton Health’s physicians, nurses and staff. Each child will receive a free teddy bear as they are “admitted” to the hospital.

The Gingerbread Junction will have holiday coloring pages and holiday craft projects for kids.

Tickets are available for purchase only at the door. Ticket Price: \$5 for adults, \$3 for senior citizens (55+), \$3 for children (ages 3-12), children 2 and under are free.

6pm Gala: Black-tie optional. Complete with a 10-piece band, five-course meal catered by MontBleu, silent and live auctions, and more; \$150 per person, \$1,650 Patron Table (10 Guests with sponsorship benefits), \$2,000 Benefactor Table (10 Guests with sponsorship benefits).

Dec. 5:

3-5pm and 6-8pm Polar Express: Festivalgoers will ride on the Polar Express Tahoe style. Attendees will dress up in their best pajamas and grab a seat on one of our “trains” (really, they’re school buses). Carols will be sung as they make their way to the first stop to the Red Hut. From there the “trains” will continue on to the MontBleu for a reading of the Polar Express and the songs of the Belles of Christmas choir.

All days:

- The Festival will feature nonstop entertainment on the festival stage with local dance troupes, singing groups and magic shows.
- Santa Claus will be on hand. Santa photos are \$5 each.
- Silent auction of mini-trees, wreaths and décor.

- Raffle tickets are \$5 each.
- Wish Tree – Make someone’s holiday wish come true. Visit the very special “Wish Tree” and you can do just that – determine how much you would like to give, pull off an existing wish or make your own. Minimum gift is \$5.
- Mrs. Claus’ Gift Shop – The Barton Auxiliary creates a holiday store. Shop here for ornaments, décor, See’s candies and the world-famous cheese balls.
- People’s Choice Award – Vote for your favorite Designer Tree by placing your ticket in the bin located next to each Designer Tree.
- Contact: For information or to purchase tickets online or call (530) 543.5909.

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South Tahoe firefighters vote no confidence against chief

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe firefighters have taken a vote of no confidence against Fire Chief Lorenzo Gigliotti.

The lack of credibility, communication and leadership are the issues firefighters have with the chief.

Gigliotti, who will have been at the helm for six years as of January, did not know about the vote until contacted by *Lake Tahoe News*.



Lorenzo
Gigliotti

Asked if the news came as a surprise, he said, "Absolutely." He considers his relationship with the rank and file members as "pretty good."

The members, who belong to International Firefighter Association Local 4427 and the South Lake Tahoe Firefighters Association, have been disgruntled for a number of years with Gigliotti's leadership.

It wasn't until this fall that the vote of no confidence was taken to ensure it wasn't just the lousy economic situation that was influencing perceptions of how things are in the department, as well as three years of on again, off again contract negotiations.

Union President Dan Sullivan deferred comment to Kim Gillingham of Goyette and Associates, the union's labor representative based in Gold River near Rancho Cordova.

"We distributed the executive evaluation form to all of our members. We did meet with the city manager about four weeks ago. We told him the vote of no confidence was done," Gillingham said.

City Manager Tony O'Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News*, "I haven't gotten anything official. I heard grumblings, but I haven't heard anything official. I would expect a letter or some communiqué."

Gillingham said another meeting had been set up two weeks ago

with O'Rourke and Human Resources Director Janet Emmett, but O'Rourke had to cancel. It was rescheduled for a day when a storm hit. Another meeting has not been set.

"The goal is not to create more acrimony or compromise the community, but to share concerns so we can improve the department," Gillingham said. "This was not a traditional vote of no confidence. The vote of no confidence was to ensure the concern raised was a universal perception, and now what to do and how to start to create transparency."

But in paramilitary organizations like a police or fire department, a vote of no confidence is sending an unmistakable message that officers are demanding changes – whether it is personnel or behavior.

O'Rourke said he wants to talk to the union and the chief to resolve the issues. He believes critical critiques can be "a road map for improvement."

"It gives me concern, but it also gives me the opportunity to help him and the help the department to improve in those areas," O'Rourke said.

He is conducting a survey next week of all city staff – which he has wanted to do since being hired in August. He is interested to see if what the firefighters say on that survey is similar to what the union is presenting.

Issues the firefighters have are working in a culture of fear – some were even afraid to participate in the vote of no confidence, Gillingham said. Fear of being black listed or not being promoted are concerns.

"The fear runs pretty rampant," Gillingham said.

She said the union wants all parties to work together, but that hasn't happened for years.

A memorandum of understanding the union has with management is

there will be regular meetings between the two. Gigliotti has essentially eliminated those.

Gillingham says this exacerbates the distrust employees have with the chief.

Firefighters aren't thrilled with some of the expenditures the chief has authorized either.

The duty chief response vehicle was replaced in the 2009-10 budget for about \$52,000. But fire personnel who spoke to *Lake Tahoe News* off the record, which gets back to the fear factor, said this vehicle is not needed because all the chief officers have a vehicle and one of them is retiring at the first of the year.

What bothers the men and women in the department is what they call reckless spending for an unneeded vehicle when it wasn't until March that a 1982 fire engine was taken out of service. It no longer met state emissions standards.

"It is not the practice of the fire department to require fire department employees to sign any form of waiver or 'liability form' to drive," Gigliotti said.

But that isn't what more than one firefighter told *Lake Tahoe News*. They said management asked for the form to be signed before this particular vehicle was driven.

Gigliotti said this engine has not been replaced because there has not been the funding to do so. It costs about \$70,000 to replace. So, management got a vehicle, but the firefighters have one less to use.

Funds for fire vehicles come from Proposition 172, the state safety sales tax, Gigliotti said.

"Proposed within the 2010-11 budget was the pursuit of grant funds to replace an engine, however, the 10 percent match created an impact which compromised a balanced budget so it

was determined to pursue grant opportunities and should a grant be funded, to bring the grant back to the council for consideration and possible budget amendment. The result is this activity does not appear in the current budget document," Gigliotti said.

It is the City Council that ultimately decides which vehicles to buy – so they chose the manager vehicle with all of its bells and whistles instead of an apparatus to fight fires.

Freezing would signal a warming trend in Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

If things keep going like this, those who talk about the winter of 1952 may have competition when it comes to bragging. That winter, the onslaught of snow that brought the white stuff to the second story of homes and businesses in Lake Tahoe didn't start until Jan. 11.

As the calendar flips to a new page tomorrow, with it goes a November for the record books.

The overnight low for Nov. 28 was minus 8 degrees in South Lake Tahoe. It broke the record of minus 6 degrees set in 1975. Records were also set that night in Tahoe City, Truckee, Portola, Markleeville, Bridgeport and Mammoth.



Icicles don't have a chance to melt with highs in the 30s.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

When it comes to snow totals, more records. Daggett Pass (aka the top of Kingsbury Grade at 7,334 feet) in Stateline recorded 57 inches of snow for November. November 1989 had 22 inches – now the second snowiest November on record, though totals have only been kept at that location since the winter of 1988-89.

The National Weather Service in Reno just started keeping snow totals for South Lake Tahoe last winter. More than 50 inches have been recorded this month at Lake Tahoe Airport.

Tahoe City has come in with 70.5 inches this November and still had 32 inches at the dam on Monday.

“It’s definitely in the top 5 to 10 percent of snowiest Novembers ever,” Dawn Fishler, meteorologist with the Weather Service in Reno, said of the region. “We just got in a good pattern.”

What’s next?

How this section of the Sierra Nevada sits the weather phenomena known as La Nina and El Nino don’t mean a lot. This is because the region is on the cusp of those systems. So, while the Bay Area is projected to have a dry, cold winter

because of La Nina, the same cannot be predicted for Lake Tahoe.

Only four times in recorded history for this area has a La Nina followed a strong El Nino, according to Fishler. Two were dry, two were extremely wet – so history is not helping foretell the future of this winter.

To complicate matters for forecasters “the models have been all over the place,” Fishler said.

The three main long-range models are run four times a day.

“Those are changing every single run,” Fishler said. That’s not normal.

It points to how four days ago the storm forecast for midweek looked strong, but by Monday the chance of snow for Wednesday had dwindled to 20 to 30 percent.

Those models are pointing to a wet weekend with snow down to 5,000 feet. But Fishler said with the lack of confidence in the models she wasn’t about to commit to that forecast this many days in advance.

Temperatures should be rising, even though it was only supposed to be about 4 degrees as people woke up in the basin this morning. The overnight lows should warm up to be in the 20s, with daytime highs in the 40s for the week. By the weekend it’s back to the teens overnight and highs in the 30s.

Water content is of importance with snowfall because that’s what fills the reservoirs downstream. In Tahoe City every 11 inches of snow produced 1 inch of liquid; it was a 16:1 ratio in South Lake Tahoe and 20:1 at Daggett Summit.

What it all means

For most ski resorts, this is the earliest opening since 2004-05 when runs were open in October.

"It's radically awesome," is how Kirstin Cattell of Sierra-at-Tahoe described the conditions. "I was in the trees all week. You don't usually get in the trees opening weekend. You have to use your brain. That lump is probably a rock."

She described the snow as "light and dry."

So much snow has dumped at Sierra that gates one and two of Huckleberry Canyon are open.

On the North Shore, Alpine was reporting this as the second snowiest November in the resort's history – and that was before Mother Nature unleashed more snow Saturday.

Mt. Rose is reporting the shallowest base of Tahoe area resorts – 31 to 55 inches.

Still to open are Tahoe Donner Downhill and Homewood Mountain Resort – Dec. 10; Diamond Peak – Dec. 16; and Granlibakken (ski hill) – Dec. 17.

Sierra Avalanche Center is issuing a moderate warning for conditions as of Nov. 29.

Andy Chapman with the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association said this was the strongest Thanksgiving weekend in the last decade, maybe the last 15 years, in terms of visitors.

"We haven't had this type of product available in quite some time," Chapman said of the snow. "To me and many I talked to it was almost like the Christmas period, it was that busy."

The North Shore is hoping to ride the tourism momentum that started last winter. The January-March 2010 hotel tax dollars collected in Placer County were the second highest for that quarter since the county has charged the fee.

Chapman believes it's the ability to attract the drive-up market from the Bay Area and Sacramento as well as the short fly market that is boding well for businesses.

The South Shore also noticed the phone starting to ring as the snow started to fly. With Heavenly being on wind hold several days, it was fortuitous that Kirkwood and Sierra fired up their lifts to give people in the South Lake area options for riding.

Carol Chaplin, executive director of Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, said she is hearing a buzz among skiers who are excited to be able to ski Heavenly, Sierra and Northstar this season with certain season passes because Vail Resorts bought the Truckee resort last month.

Besides ski resorts, lodging, restaurants and roads being busy with the early snowfall – the cold is keeping employees with heating businesses working around the clock.

Nixon's on the South Shore and Clark Plumbing, which operates around the lake, barely had time to chat with *Lake Tahoe News* because customers kept calling. Frozen pipes and dirty furnaces are making life miserable for some people.

TJ Stewart of Clark said, "Keep the heat on to override the outside temperature." He suggested 55 to 60 degrees as the low on a thermostat.

Another tip is to open cabinet doors when leaving for several days so heat in the house reaches the pipes.

Basic winter tips

- Shovel around the gas meter and don't let snow pile up.
- Have plenty of flashlights – with working batteries.
- Stock up on canned goods before a storm just in case that semi doesn't make it to the grocery store with a fresh supply.
- Keep a good supply of candles on hand.
- Don't use propane or camping stoves indoors.

- Four-wheel drive does not mean being able to stop as though the conditions were clear and dry.
- Don't go in the backcountry alone. Carry avalanche rescue equipment.
- Check your windshield wiper fluid.
- Carry a blanket, water, food, extra clothes, and a shovel – especially crossing a summit.

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Van Sickle Bi-state Park needs money to open in 2011

By Susan Wood

STATELINE – The giant boulder that serves as a welcome sign where Montreal Avenue and Heavenly Village Way meet signals a solid decade of vision and work. But the word that may keep the nation's first bi-state park from opening is money.

The park on the California-Nevada state line is feeling the constraints of budget issues from both states.



Van Sickle Bi-
state Park

will open in
2011 if
funding comes
through.

Photos/Kathryn
Reed

Lead agency Nevada State Parks just underwent a final inspection of Burdick Construction's work on the first of four phases of the Van Sickle Bi-state Park behind Heavenly Village and the Stateline casinos.

It was the long dream of rancher Jack Van Sickle, who donated more than two-thirds of the land for the 725-acre park to the state. Nonetheless, more work is slated to be done by the California Tahoe Conservancy and Tahoe Rim Trail Association. The former agency has placed a bond allocation item on its January board meeting agenda for trailhead interpretative facilities at the park's gateway. The latter organization has pledged to pick up utility costs and other maintenance expenses as well as continued connector trail work next spring.

Then there's the question of when the park will open. The answer teeters on money.

If all goes as optimistically planned, the urban trailhead may open next summer. Lake Tahoe's Environmental Summit, which will be hosted in August by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., is usually set against a beautiful backdrop. National Trails Day scheduled in June could be another option.

Either way, Nevada Parks Deputy Administrator Steve Weaver has some doubts about the future of the park. He estimates it will cost up to \$20,000 a year to operate – beyond the \$2.8 million-plus spent on construction of the first phase. The fire hydrants alone – three in California and four in Nevada – will consume \$157 a month.

“There’s nothing in this budget to operate this park, and I don’t see anything in the foreseeable future,” Weaver warned while on an exclusive tour with *Lake Tahoe News* this month. “I think it’s very challenging. I don’t think anything (more) will be developed in this park in the next decade.”

Despite the dire forecast, Weaver is pleased with how the three-season park is shaping up. A half-mile road with a storm drainage system leads up to a 2½-acre day-use area with four picnic tables, a vaulted restroom scaled down from the flush variety, the start of the irrigation system, fencing, landscaping and a parking lot with 29 spaces. Six are designed for horse trailers. Portions of trails for equestrians, hikers and mountain bikers lead up to a ridge known for its Heavenly-style views along the gondola tower line.

Now, bears and other wildlife mix with the homeless on the park’s ridge, which is susceptible to wildland fires. A small blaze started by a homeless encampment sent fire crews out last summer. In 2002, a 673-acre fire was ignited by a cigarette along the California side of the scenic ridge.

With no development money from California, the Nevada park service fronted the costs. But the park system has lost 46 percent of its funding since 2007 and resources are tapped. With Nevada Gov.-elect Brian Sandoval’s pledge of no new taxes and fees, the donation box may be out – literally.

Nevada Parks needs help from the patrons and its state neighbors next door even though California’s budget is in far worse shape. The Legislative Analyst’s Office just announced a shortfall climbing to \$25 billion. Voters also failed to pass a measure that would have funded the Golden State’s park system through vehicle license fees.

Bruce Eisner of the CTC figures his agency would cough up about \$150,000 next year at its Jan. 11 meeting to help fund gravel roadwork at the gateway to the park where the old Van

Sickle barn and cabins sit.

“The money is slowly being freed up. We’re now in a state of catch-up (with Nevada),” Eisner said.

There are also plans for a restroom at the lower level of the park and an interpretative kiosk for visitors, who will probably wander up from the heart of the South Shore’s bed base on both sides of the state line.

The park, which will be open for spring, summer and fall visitation, is expected to bring out a host of outdoor enthusiasts – including those who have ventured into it from the famed Tahoe Rim Trail which circles the lake.

“This park and trailhead will provide an easily accessible trailhead for the residents and visitors to the South Lake Tahoe-Stateline area and may become one of our busiest trailheads,” Tahoe Rim Trail Association Executive Director Mary Bennington told *Lake Tahoe News*.

This is one reason why the association has promised its operational support to keep the park going year after year.

“We see this as a win-win, even though it is a bit outside our normal mission,” she said.

Bennington added that 100 association volunteers spent National Trails Day last summer building a half-mile of trail. To date, they have completed at least 8 miles of the work called the Daggett project, which links the park trail to the Rim Trail at Kingsbury Grade in two places. The goal is to finish the Daggett connection by the next Trails Day celebration.

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Drop in elevation provides scenic, easy hike near Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

GARDNERVILLE – Every now and then I don't know what to do in Tahoe. OK, it's more like every May and early November. Too much snow to hike, not enough to ski.

Two weeks ago was no different.

On what started as a sunny Sunday, we headed to the Carson Valley in search of new terrain where we could get our hiking boots a little dusty. The drop in elevation (4,476 feet) brought us up close to terrain we don't find in the mountains.



Expansive
views along
the Faye-
Luther trail.

Photos/Kathryn
Reed

Sagebrush is everywhere. The long spindly bitterbrush protrudes above other flora. A few of the rabbitbrush's yellow flowers are intact. A hint of fall lingers on the branches of trees lining Luther Creek.

Farther up, white alder, willow and Jeffrey pines fill the landscape.

Though we didn't see animals other than squirrels and horses, this area is home to hummingbirds, Bullock's oriole, yellow warblers and the California toad.

Dogs are allowed on leashes. The horse people weren't following this rule. Of course they also don't have to clean up after their animals even though they make bigger messes – and lots of them in this area.

Starting out from the Faye-Luther trailhead we check out the map at the entrance. Myriad loops interconnect in a relatively small area. A flyer tells us about the Carson Valley Trails Association – a 16-year-old nonprofit “working with partners to provide access to public lands through a recreational trail system for present and future generations to enjoy.”

Appropriately named, the Sandy Trail leads us from the parking area toward the mountains we just crossed. Not far in is a sign that points to California in the direction we are headed, to Nevada where we parked. I thought nothing of the sign as we went by. It made sense to me.

What I had a hard time accepting until I saw multiple maps is the sign was actually the state line. Most of our hike was in California even though most of our drive was in Nevada. It just didn't seem right. But I think the Bureau of Land Management knows which state its land is in.

An interpretive loop guides us along. We're slow as we read most of the signs. It's an education about who the trail is named after. The Faye family started a ranch near Luther Creek in 1863 and in 1905 was the first family in the area to have electricity.

Luther Creek starts its migration to the Carson Valley from Jobs Peak. Today it is used by farmers and never reaches the

Carson River.

Ira Luther, who the creek and Luther Pass are named after, settled in the area in the 1850s. He tried to get the Central Pacific Railroad to cross what is now Luther Pass.

Luther is credited with naming Douglas County after Illinois Sen. Stephen Arnold Douglas.

We venture off on the Grand View Loop – figuring out quickly how it got its name. Here on the western edge of the Great Basin and in the Carson Range views of the Carson Valley are vast, with the Pinenut Range in the distance to the east.

A grove of Jeffrey pines fills the trail by the same name.

Had we not been taking pictures and reading the signs we would have finished these three miles in no time. For the most part it's an easy hike. The trail gradually climbs at the start. Grand View is a bit steeper. But for anyone used to Tahoe, this is easy.

Next time, which is likely to be in the spring for wildflowers and butterflies, we'll start at the Jobs Peak Ranch trailhead to add a little mileage – assuming it's not too hot then.

Getting there:

From the South Shore, take Kingsbury Grade to the Carson Valley.

Turn right at bottom of the hill on Foothill Road.

We parked at the second trailhead on the right. This has shorter loops. The first trailhead (Jobs Peak Ranch) gives you a longer trek.

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