Mom-daughter survive depths of despair with CASA's help

By Kathryn Reed

Stubbornness is what Sonja Burns call it.

Tenacity, love – those are other words that could be used to describe the fight she and her mom put toward ensuring they would be reunited.

Between 2006 and 2008 Sonja was part of the Court Appointed Special Advocates program in South Lake Tahoe. She lived with a foster family while her mom, Katrina Burns, straightened her life out so an El Dorado County judge would award her custody of her now 16-year-old daughter.



Katrina and Sonja Burns fought to be a united family. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Katrina has been clean for more than three years. She has been off cigarettes for nearly two weeks.

"Not every family ends up on the other end together. They were strong," Kelly Parker, site manager-senior case supervisor for CASA El Dorado, said of the Burns.

Sonja Burns, a sophomore at South Tahoe High School, will be the keynote speaker at the May 1 Evening of Opulence fundraiser for CASA. She's not nervous to tell her story to the more than 100 people who are expected to attend the event at Marcus Ashley Gallery.

The rocky times for mother and daughter seem to be in the past. Now it's just the normal teen-mom battles.

CASA provided both Burns an outlet that hadn't been there before. The caseworker, Linda, is considered by both to be a member of the family.

"I know how closed up my daughter was and can be. If there was a chance she could open up to somebody, I (wanted her to)," Katrina Burns said. Another female adult in her daughter's life didn't threaten her. She wanted her daughter to have the support she needed.

CASA is designed to provide a child with an advocate in court. That person can speak for the youth in court if they don't want to speak for themselves. A CASA is also a friend – someone to go to the movies with, have lunch with and share with.

The South Lake Tahoe office has been open since 1994, with the Placerville office opening two years earlier. The money raised next weekend benefits the entire county.

"Our program has consistently grown every year. With a rise in substance abuse, there will be a rise in child abuse and neglect," Parker said.

The lousy economy is taking its toll on families. Despite less money in households, she said cash for alcohol does not seem to be a problem.

From August 2008 to August 2009 more than 400 children in El Dorado County were served by CASA. The numbers indicate 500

will be part of CASA from August 2009 to August 2010.

It took some time before Sonja opened up to her CASA worker. Politeness was always there. But conversations centered on the basics, with no real depth to them.

In the end, having someone to talk to was a key benefit of CASA, according to Sonja.

“I couldn’t tell my friends how I was feeling. I thought showing sadness was a weakness,” Sonja said.

It was a struggle for Katrina and Sonja to be allowed to live under the same roof.

“The first court papers they handed me they were putting her up for adoption,” Katrina said. This is often the case when Child Protective Services has been involved with a family.

Sonja doesn’t think that would have happened. She thinks a group home is where she would have ended up.

But the determination of mother and daughter, and with the CASA worker’s help, the two are under the same roof.

For more information about CASA, click here. Call Kelly Parker at (530) 573.3072 for tickets – they are $75 – to the May 1 Evening of Opulence.

Turning 50 in grand style without leaving Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Doing nothing is a concept I would like to embrace more often.

A morning bath. That never happens at home.

Reading on the couch while the sun is out. Not a home activity.



Black Bear Inn's lodge from the Snowshoe Thompson cabin. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Ignoring phone messages and emails. More unusual things.

Having breakfast cooked and brought to me. Another rarity.

So, the truth is, I did do things – bathe, read, hot tub, eat, drink and then repeated it all.

Black Bear Inn owner Kevin Chandler called it recharging our batteries. Sue and I both needed it. She much more so because it was her 50th birthday celebration, which means she has years of recharging to catch up on, unlike some of us.

So often we go out of town to get away from Tahoe. This time we decided to stay in South Lake Tahoe to get a feel for what those millions of travelers to the basin experience each year.

Apparently the Black Bear is a popular place to celebrate milestone birthdays. A couple from Vacaville was staying in one of the rooms in the lodge – it was her 50th birthday.

As a treat for the four of us last Sunday morning, we were brought mimosas to toast the occasion.

I've stayed at the Black Bear once before (bid on the inn at silent auctions) and had eaten breakfast there another time for a food column, so I knew what I was in for when breakfast arrived.

One morning breakfast was brought to the cabin, the next we went to the lodge. It is so filling that lunch was not needed. The plate is full – and these are full-size plates. The flavors are diverse and intense, the presentation spectacular – and neither owner has a background in culinary arts.

They cater to different eating habits – like vegetarians.

The food is so incredibly good that I still say it's the best breakfast in town. The problem is you have to stay overnight to experience it. It's not a bad problem to have, though.

The Snowshoe Thompson cabin exceeded Sue's expectations. It's spacious, without being pretentious. The gas fireplace is visible from the bedroom and living area. TVs are in both rooms. A Jacuzzi tub for two and separate shower occupy the roomy bathroom.

A nice twist in the kitchen is the fresh coffee in the fridge – none of that prepackaged coffee found in most lodging establishments. A full size refrigerator is great. We had snacks that turned into dinner one night. A microwave is the only apparatus for cooking – which satisfied our needs.

Dinner the first night was at Café Fiore – our favorite restaurant in town. The menu is perfect for meat/seafood eaters like Sue, and the veggie connoisseur like me. Sue loved her lobster pasta dish and my pasta dish was superb.

Besides the entrees, the garlic bread is a must-have. The wine list is one of the most extensive I've seen in the area. And

don’t leave without having the white chocolate ice cream. Ours came with a candle in it.

There are many things to like about the Black Bear – one is that it’s on Ski Run Boulevard. This means it is within walking distance to several really good restaurants. Heavenly Mountain Resort is just up the road and Ski Run Marina, with the Tahoe Queen paddle-wheeler, is down the road.

Another thing about the inn is that it makes you feel like you are in Tahoe. Pine trees are everywhere. The woodwork in the buildings is stunning. The décor of each room is different, with many items originating in Texas where the owners came from before opening the inn 11 years ago.

I’ve been massaging Black Bear Inn guests for years – long before co-owner Jerry Birdwell was elected to the City Council – which means I’ve been in every room (five in the lodge) and cabin (three, with one a duplex).

This time I wanted to be on the table. My colleague and friend Dawn came to the room to give us each an hour massage. My muscles are still thanking her.

From the table to the lodge we went. It was time for wine and cheese. At 5pm every day it’s a bit of a happy hour. It’s a great way to meet the other guests, enjoy the large fireplace and ultra comfortable couches.

This area also beckons during other hours of the day because it is so relaxing. Doors lead to the patio. The sun was shining enough last Saturday to bask outside and read while Sue got her massage.

In the summer the grounds are a spectacular array of color with all the flowers. I remember a couple years ago needing to close the blinds in a room where I was giving a massage because the inn was on either a garden or home tour.

The Black Bear Inn is truly an experience in getting away, even though the drive is only three miles.

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City dwellers embracing return to ag roots

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

The refrain about young people and agriculture used to be, “How ya gonna keep ’em down on the farm?”

City attractions were deemed too strong for the simple life to compete for the attention of young rural adults.

That longtime story is reversing.

Cities and suburbs now supply young recruits to agriculture, primarily to small and organic farms, and the trend is playing out in El Dorado County.

Read the whole story

Douglas County introduces Reverse 911

Douglas County 911 Emergency Services has established a self-registration portal (SRP) for the Reverse 911 emergency

notification system.

This will provide the department a proactive means for gathering contact information from the community-at-large, ultimately improving communications during all types of emergencies.

The SRP is a simple-to-access web tool that allows residents of Douglas and Alpine counties to sign up to receive alerts issued by Douglas County 911 Emergency Services. Click here. Click the “911” link on the left column of the page, then the “On the Alert” link that connects you to the SRP; read the terms and conditions and follow the instructions for registration.

The latitude and longitude of the individual’s address are calculated, with the location quickly appearing on a digital, street-level display. If the position is incorrect, perhaps due to a typographical error, simply move a pin to correct it. Participants may also update their personal contact information, physical address and other items as often as necessary in order to keep the data current.

This information is seamlessly geo-coded into the address database utilized by the Reverse 911 emergency notification system on a scheduled basis.

Do not register your traditional land line telephone as that number is already in the database.

You may register three cell phones or VOIP phones per address.

The opt-out date can be any future date you no longer want to receive alerts for the address you are registering; this can be changed at any time by logging into your account.

Questions should be directed to 911 Manager Ron Sagen at (775) 782-9977 or Operations Supervisor Maggie Jensen at (775) 782-9978.

Multi-million dollar estate full of history, innovative design



Eccentric billionaire George Whittell is most famous in the Lake Tahoe area for his eclectic Whittell Estate along Tahoe's East Shore. What many people don't know is Whittell also pioneered the first neighborhood at Incline Village – a neighborhood that predates the community. This tucked-away part of Incline is on the lakeshore along the historic Pine Cone Circle.

One of the original properties on Pine Cone Circle has been put on the market. Though the original character of the home still exists on this private lakefront property, the home has been completely renovated and decorated by renowned interior designer Catherine MacFee.

MacFee's attention to detail has created the feel of a well-loved family vacation compound. The home's complete renovation included the restoration of the original log ceiling and an authentic granite stone fireplace. However, the custom crafted curved staircase, built-in cabinetry, luxuriously appointed double master suites, separate bunk house and gourmet kitchen are modern upgrades.



MacFee pulled together all the elements of a home, from cushioned window seats filled to the brim with interesting throw pillows to a hand painted linen cabinet to a one-of-a-kind antique carved wooden sink vanity.

According to a *California Home + Design* article, MacFee studied cabins as far as the Adirondacks to develop a sense of old lodge style, and then updated the look with sophistication. From tribal rugs to exposed beam ceilings, the cabin is a study in that combination of elegance and rusticity that has defined Tahoe interiors for more than a century.

The home was originally constructed to take full advantage of its lakefront setting, with windows positioned for lake views in every room. MacFee took further advantage of the home's setting by adding a number of outdoor living spaces to the home. There is an expansive outdoor dining and entertaining area that links to a quartzite stone path that meanders down to the boulder-strewn shoreline. Another deck with a fire pit and meditation circle sits steps from the water's edge.



Low stonewalls that line walkways and pine needle covered grounds provide a Carmel-like feel to the well-kept enclave.

It was built in 1951, with an extensive remodel and expansion in 1992. Dubbed Villa Lake Tahoe, the 3,400-square-foot home is situated on nearly a half an acre and includes 100 feet of lake frontage. Two buoys are included with the property as well as access to an adjacent pier. A private sandy beach for use by Pine Cone Circle residents only is just steps away from the property. The home at 1655 Pine Cone Circle is listed at $8.79 million.

For more information, contact Karin Baker or Kerry Donovan at

866.831.8999 or email kbaker@chaseinternational.com or kdonovan@chaseinternational.com.

South Shore teens take charge of issues facing them

By Kathryn Reed

So many groups on the South Shore are dedicated to providing services to youth. It's adults identifying problems or noting successes; it's adults finding solutions. Seldom, though, are the youths asked what they think.

In a twist seldom seen, the adults in the room Wednesday night deferred to high school students. Daniel Reyes, chairman that night for the South Lake Tahoe Youth Commission Focus Group, told Boys & Girls Club Executive Director Karen Houser she could speak further when the "open forum" part of the agenda came up.



South Lake Tahoe Youth Commission Focus Group

Houser was fine with that.

Reyes sounded like he had been running a meeting for more years than he's been alive. He didn't let people ramble on too much. He kept to the agenda. He asked for motions to be made, votes to be cast.

The chairman duties rotate each meeting, as does operations officer and clerk. Elsa Garcia was operations officer for the night, while Ashni Patel was tasked with taking minutes on a laptop.

This group of young people fluctuates between seven and 12 at a meeting. They've been meeting since October.

"This is more about governance and not activities," Houser said. "They are focusing on issues of South Lake Tahoe (that youths care about) – gangs, transportation, lack of employment, the environment."

For now the local Boys & Girls Club oversees the group, with Shawn Tonozzi and Mary Cook the adult leaders. They work for the Boys & Girls Club. Neither appears to be much older than the teens in the room.

Tonozzi acts like an executive director would.

The goal is the group will become an official commission with teens from both sides of the state line involved. Talks are under way with South Lake Tahoe Parks and Recreation Commission for the youth to be under their auspices because the city is not creating any more standalone commissions that report to the City Council. The parks group will likely take this up a meeting later this spring.

It could be that after the Youth Commission becomes official, a commissioner may be a liaison to other city commissions. Parks and Rec is a natural because it deals with youth activities.

With the number of Latinos in the community, it's possible a

student could be a rep to the Latino Commission. The environment is of clear importance to this group based on the conversation, so the Sustainability Commission may be another route they will pursue.

One of the tasks this week was to give input for Tonozzi and Cook as they create an application for perspective Youth Commission members. Tonozzi gave them the option to let the adults create the form. The youths unequivocally wanted input.

A minimum 2.5gpa was suggested, they agreed the form should only be in English, they want to ask about community service, to allow ninth-graders and older be voting members, and younger members to have a non-voting status.

At a future meeting they'll approve the application.

Ernie Claudio, an adviser to the group, brought in examples of what other youth commissions focus on. The purpose and structure of the commission are still things to be defined and refined.

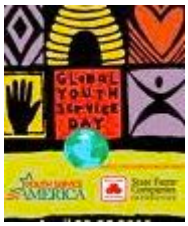
The idea is the youth will develop the answers to issues facing them and offer solutions. Several adults are already coming to them to share how they can help or might like the youth to help them.

Keith Taylor, who is doing his senior project on youth commissions, told his peers about how groups like this are found throughout the world. He talked about a youth camp going on in China now and how Mexico City is hosting a world youth conference in August.

A major endeavor the youth are undertaking is a summit on Nov. 2-3. The students will stay at Stanford Sierra Camp at Fallen Leaf Lake. It will be about team building, governance and it will have an environmental component – per the task force's request.

The next meeting is May 4 at 6:30pm at the Boys & Girls Club in the old Al Tahoe Elementary School in South Lake Tahoe. The public is welcome.

Global Youth Service Day a 3-day event in SLT



Join the Lake Tahoe Boys & Girls Club and the HOPE Club of Lake Tahoe Community College in celebrating Global Youth Service Day. South Lake Tahoe is one of thousands of communities across the country where youth will address issues facing their communities and the world.

There are three days of events starting with Unity of the Community at Bijou Community School on Friday from 4-6pm. Saturday the Rotary Club of South Lake Tahoe and the LTCC Rotaract Club will be conducting a cleanup at the school from 9am-1pm.

Also on Saturday, the community is invited for the documentary screening of “The Papers” that addresses the challenges facing many college-bound students because of documentation issues. The film begins at 6pm at LTCC.

Sunday will be celebrated by youth conducting a community service activity around their home or neighborhood, such as cleaning up their yard or a beach as examples.

For more information about Global Youth Service Day, click here. For a schedule of the events in South Lake Tahoe, contact the Boys & Girls Club at (530) 542.0838 or click here.

Truckee Tahoe Community Chorus concert

Truckee Tahoe Community Chorus concert “Welcome Spring” is May 1 at 7 pm at the Resort at Squaw Creek in Squaw Valley.

This spring the chorus has prepared a program to please most any taste in music, including Gilbert and Sullivan comedy sketches, a jazz and show tune section, and some classic and contemporary literature.

The Diablo Valley Philharmonic Orchestra and Chamber Singers from the Bay Area are also on the program.

Make a night of it with dinner (20 percent discount with your ticket at either Six Peaks Grille or Sandy’s Pub) and concert, all at the resort.

For information or to purchase tickets, click here.

Clean energy innovation talk at SNC

Green pioneer Ben Solomon moderates a discussion on clean energy innovation with Jim Croce, the president and CEO of the Nevada Institute for Renewable Energy Commercialization, on April 29 at 7pm at the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences, Room 139.

They will explore how clean energy can contribute to economic growth and diversification. Croce will discuss the interrelation of education, sustainable technology development and deployment, and Nevada's future prosperity. He will also provide insight into NIREC's role in accelerating the commercialization of clean-energy technologies.

This ongoing series is a concept that grew out of the Seniors Conversation Café and represents a partnership between Sierra Nevada College and the IVGID Senior Programs.

Prior to the talk, staffers from the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center will be offering a tour at 6:30pm that will highlight the sustainable features of the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences, the first LEED Platinum-certified building in Nevada.

A representative from Sierra Nevada College will also share news about the campus's application for Sustainable Campus Initiative funding spanning teaching, research, and certification related to renewable energy that will make SNC the only sustainable green campus in Nevada.

For more information, contact Debi Noonan at (775) 831.1314, ext. 7420 or dnoonan@sierranevada.edu.

Warming up at all-inclusive desert guest ranch



By Lisa Huard

WICKENBURG, Ariz. – About 150 years ago it was gold, the fertile soil and ranch land that drew people to this Phoenix-area town. Toiling the land is no longer necessary. The guest ranch is more about pampering than ranching.

Wickenburg is located in Arizona's Maricopa County and is approximately 12 miles square. The more than 5,000 residents live in an area full of history, things to do, and places to see. Streets are out of the Old West, and filled with shops and places to eat.

This is the gateway to a wonderful vacation destination such as a guest ranch. If you're looking for an all inclusive cruise on land, if you'd like the enjoyment of being pampered without the fear that your kids or significant other might fall over board, if you enjoy the unique beauty of the desert, if you need a break from shoveling snow, then Arizona is the place to head.

Wickenburg is a special place.

In 1862, the discovery of gold in Arizona brought many pioneers who were eager to strike it rich. One such individual was Henry Wickenburg. Here he realized his dream and established the lucrative Vulture Mine. The fertile soils of the Hassayampa drew farmers and ranchers who joined with Wickenburg along with settlers from Sonora, Mexico, and founded the town of Wickenburg.

The young town faced many challenges – Indian wars, mine closures and a disastrous flood in 1890 – but prosperity came to the area in 1895 with the arrival of the railroad.

Since the 1920s Wickenburg has been a destination guest ranch area for tourists looking to get out of the cold and into the warmer winter climate of the desert. In fact, the population of Wickenburg doubled from 1920 to 1940.

Two successful businessmen, Charles Maguire and Belford Howard, spent many years in the area admiring the landscape. They decided it would be an excellent location for a lucrative investment – a guest ranch.

The prime area of their interest hugged the Hassayampa River valley and had a highway that connected Wickenburg with Phoenix and California. The two men, albeit both successful in business, knew they lacked the knowledge and experience of running a guest ranch. They invited Dallas C. Gant to join them in their business venture. Gant began working in the guest ranch business as a youth. With his hospitality experience, the Rancho de los Caballeros (loosely translated as the Gentlemen's Ranch) was destined for success.

The three gentlemen turned to John Gem Meem for his architectural expertise in the Pueblo Revival and Spanish Colonial Revival styles. His vision for this oasis in the desert would include materials from Arizona. Striking flagstone was used for flooring and peeled aspen limbs used for the ceilings added to the southwest charm and appeal.

The main building, which hosts the lobby's check-in, says, "welcome" with its décor and incredible guest service personnel. The masonry construction reflects the colors of the desert and the "portales", porch covers, keep visitors cool and comfortable from the hot desert sun. The many common areas offer comfortable and handsome places to put up your boots, rest a spell, read a good book, have a conversation, or gaze out the window.

Their hard work and dream came to fruition Thanksgiving 1948. Rancho de los Caballeros opened the ranch for a few days so

Wickenburg residents and dignitaries could get a good look a place. The Wickenburg Sun reported that then California Rep. Richard M. Nixon visited the ranch and was quite taken by it. Word spread and in mid-December the ranch received its first guests.

With the success of Rancho de los Caballeros, the number of guest ranches in the region grew to eight. Wickenburg became the “Dude Ranch Capital of the World” for those that wanted to have an authentic Western experience.

Rancho de los Caballeros has continued to develop along with the idea of the perfect vacation. If you’re looking for a relaxing and beautiful place to take the family or for a getaway, make this site one that you check out. There’s something to please everyone.

Rancho de los Caballeros offers amenities galore: 18 holes of golf, swimming, birding, trap and skeet shooting, nature trails, conference meeting rooms, tennis, horseback riding, and spa. And for those of you who can’t leave the office at home, there’s WiFi.

Their “Full American Plan” provides all your meals by a crack culinary team that can be enjoyed in the several community spaces or poolside. The ranch also has a great children’s program to keep the young ranch hands engaged while the parental units breathe in the beauty of their surroundings.

Rancho de los Caballeros continues to attract guests from all over the world. Their tradition of hospitality remains strong and is something you’ll appreciate even as soon as you arrive on the property. The ranch is among the more than 200 quality hotels on the National Trust Historic Hotels of America program, which is a part of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Recognition only goes to those hotels that have faithfully maintained their historic architecture and ambience.

The ranch is just a short jaunt from downtown Wickenburg, which is filled with history, shops and a fabulous museum. I visited the Desert Caballeros Western Museum. On display until May 2 is the Cowgirl Up exhibition – it is fantastic. The art includes paintings, sculptures, and the most amazing charcoal work I've seen. Harriet "Rox" Corbett does such incredible work that it looks like a photograph. The entire museum is something to see.

Wickenburg is one hour from the Phoenix area. Transportation from Sky Harbor Airport is one of the easiest and most organized airports I've seen. One could easily holiday here for an extended period of time.

Let me help to get you started. Click here for tourism information for the Wickenburg area; Rancho de los Caballeros and here is the museum's website.