

# SLT city clerk texts with colleague 'real petty'

By Kathryn Reed

"I thought they were real petty" – that's how South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Tom Davis described the text messages that City Clerk Suzie Alessi released to *Lake Tahoe News* on July 30.

This is just a fraction of the texts that *LTN* requested earlier this year. The ones released are just between Alessi and Tina Shannon, who works in the city manager's office. The two have quite the friendship, saying "love you," logging into each other's email, telling each other who was in talking to the now former city manager, praising the now weekly newspaper and trashing *LTN* with profanity.



Suzie Alessi

Interim City Attorney Nira Doherty has promised the rest of the texts will be released by next Monday at the latest. This will come after Alessi quits her elected position effective this Friday.

*LTN* asked all the councilmembers for their views on the texts. Only Davis responded. "Any texts between city staff need to be professional in nature and not personal. Perhaps we need to go redefine city policy," Davis told *LTN*.

The correspondence between Alessi and Shannon is juvenile at best. The two women are catty in their dialogue and don't hesitate to use profanity. Most of the exchanges are while they are on the clock, getting paid with taxpayer dollars. Here are the **Alessi-Shannon texts**.

They were redacted by Doherty. The messages were from both women's personal phones.

"Redactions are only if they were personal in nature. There were a lot that were personal in nature. I wouldn't redact those on a city device," Doherty told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Alessi has not explained why she took so long to release the documents and then why she is choosing to hand them out incrementally. Ten days is the normal time limit to produce public records.

There is no love lost between Alessi and Shannon and former City Manager Nancy Kerry. Shannon gets pissy that Kerry opted to get food from someplace other than her restaurant at the airport, which could have been seen as a conflict. They both seem to mock Kerry during her final days as she is trying to keep her job; and this is from people Kerry thought were at least quasi friends.

On Feb. 5 Alessi messaged Shannon, "Omg l Yes, she Is freaking out! It is so freaking crazy it just needs to be done. I cannot believe how she and Brooke are attacking Nira. just pisses me off. I am so pissed off at her. God do your will. And thanks for sharing the info with me. It's really good for me to have the info so that I can keep the pulse on what's going on. Thanks!" The "her" is Nancy Kerry; "Brooke" is Councilwoman Brooke Laine.

They accuse Davis of violating the Brown Act. Davis told *LTN* on Monday night that he has not violated the open meeting law, that he forwarded an email to a former councilmember that was a public record, and that he has told district attorney

investigators everything he's done.

Alessi, even though she is an elected official, has no legal obligation to report a suspected Brown Act violation, but ethically she does. Instead she chose to gossip about the alleged infraction with a city employee who would not have been privileged to the supposed private information.

There are "conversations" involving former communications manager Tracy Sheldon when she had issues that spilled into the workplace and involved a phone call she made to Davis; as well as issues with now former Deputy City Clerk Ellen Palazzo.

There is a lot of interaction between the two when Alessi was in rehab; all redacted.

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## **South Lake Tahoe fires communications chief**

South Lake Tahoe no longer has a communications manager.

Tracy Sheldon was put on leave last week after it came to light that on her own accord she threatened legal action against *Lake Tahoe News* and the news site's publisher, Kathryn Reed.

Interim City Manager Dirk Brazil confirmed that she was sent home last week and fired on July 30. He would not state the reason why.

The comment was posted on *Lake Tahoe News'* Facebook page. It has since been taken down by the city.

Last week the city clerk said Sheldon had no text messages as were requested by *LTN* in a Public Records Act filing. On July 30 the clerk released them. The few that were provided were not all that interesting. Why they were originally withheld has not been disclosed.

As for the future of this city position, Brazil said he's not sure.

"I want to look at the position and description of the position. It's somewhat unusual for a town of 20,000 to have a standalone communications director," Brazil told *LTN*.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

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## Lakeside gambling on workers for future success

By Kathryn Reed

Lakeside Inn has long been the favorite casino for locals. Now it wants to be the preferred employer.

The hotel-casino **a couple years ago** had designs of re-creating itself so it would be a focal point when driving in from the east. Those plans have been shelved and instead the owners are focusing on the locals and not just the tourists.

Yes, physical improvements are under way that are designed to modernize the property and appeal to the guests, but there is also a renewed emphasis on the employees.

"We want to be the preferred employer," Stacy Noyes, president of Lakeside, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We want a happy staff who

feels supported and are given the tools to do their job. Then the guests are rewarded and it's profitable for the business. When you forget about the staff no one wins."

She sent out a memo to workers at the start of the summer season outlining Lakeside's goals. In part it said, "In the past we have explored the possibility of redeveloping our site to a newer hotel and casino, but last year, turned our energy and focus toward growing our business. We spent many years saving our way to success after the economic downturn. Now it is time to invest and improve."

For the employees it means rewarding them with things that are meaningful to them. While wages were increased in 2015-16, that did not bring in more applicants. It is doing things like resurrecting the "blue bucks" program that had been disbanded in 2008 that workers like. This gives them money on each check that can be spent at the casino. This in turn is increasing the camaraderie among coworkers as they hang out together in their off time.

Studies show that happy employees are more productive employees. *Harvard Business Review* says, "Close work friendships boost employee satisfaction by 50 percent." Multiple studies show that people want autonomy at work, to be respected and to have an employer with a social conscience.

Noyes said her managers meet regularly to talk about employees' environment, what they value and what is important to them.

Still, many positions go unfilled. Lakeside is not alone in having difficulty filling job openings. Practically every employer in the Tahoe basin-Truckee area is having a hard time finding workers. Lakeside, Harrah's and Harveys no longer test for marijuana, which was a concession to realizing so many people today are inhaling. Today's worker doesn't want to work nights or weekends. When there is a powder day they opt for

the slopes and call in sick or are a no-show. Lack of affordable housing is another hurdle.

While workers may be different today, in many ways the work is the same as it has been for decades. The benefits are what can change.

At Lakeside there are 50 employees in food and beverage with J1 visas, and more in housekeeping. These are people from other countries.

“They are a Band-Aid. They don’t replace the full-time, local who lives here,” Noyes said.

As she works to hire more locals, the owners are also investing in the physical aspects of the business. Consultants have been hired to “make our casino floor more modern and attractive and our marketing promotion more contemporary and fun for our guests.” Technology had been improved, heating and cooling systems upgraded, new carpet installed. The parking lot will be resealed; a new roof is on the to-do list.

Noyes isn’t releasing the dollar figure being invested.

Her memo said, “The goal with the investment in our buildings, property and technology is to improve our cash flow. As we being operating at a higher level, we will then be able to reward you, the staff for supporting Lakeside thought the challenging years.”

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**Sierra Club, other groups**

# **oppose Nev. energy measure**

**By Colton Lochhead, Las Vegas Review-Journal**

CARSON CITY – Four major clean energy advocacy groups announced Thursday that they oppose Question 3, the ballot initiative that would break up NV Energy’s monopoly and create an open energy market in Nevada.

The Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, Southwest Energy Efficiency Project and Western Resource Advocates each cited concerns over market uncertainty, and what that could do to renewable energy projects underway in the state, saying the measure could “disrupt the state’s progress toward a clean energy future.”

**Read the whole story**

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# **Calif.’s longer, hotter summers spark deadly, destructive fire season**

**By Cheri Carlson, Ventura County Star**

California wildfires tore through mountains and foothills and into neighborhoods this week as record-breaking heat combined with increasingly dry conditions in the Golden State.

On Friday, fires burned out of control, stretching resources thin in areas and forcing thousands to leave their homes.

“We have a number of big destructive wildfires burning in very

different parts of the state,” said Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at UCLA. “There’s a lot going on right now in a very active fire season.”

**Read the whole story**

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## **Verizon wanting to upgrade service in S. Tahoe**

The South Lake Tahoe Planning Commission on Aug. 9 will consider allowing Verizon Wireless to at upgrade cell service in the area.

The company wants to install 12 small cell antennas to existing utility poles and supporting equipment within the city’s right of way.

The proposed locations are at 3551 Ralph Drive, 1020 Wildwood Ave., 3857 Pentagon Road, 3565 Needle Peak Road, 1200 Wildwood Ave., 791 Modesto Ave., 1091 Aspenwald Ave., 3663 Needle Peak Road, 3674 Woodbine Road, 783 Roger Drive, 2180 Lake Tahoe Blvd., and 2265 Idaho Ave.

The meeting starts at 3pm at Lake Tahoe Airport.

*– Lake Tahoe News staff report*

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# Caltrans to work on Highway 50 in EDC

Caltrans has begun work to improve 41 lane miles of Highway 50 from the Sawmill Road undercrossing to the South Fork American River Bridge in El Dorado County.

Money to pay for it comes from Senate Bill 1, the Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017. The \$7.1 million pavement project was awarded to Lamon Construction of Yuba City. Crews will be working weeknights from 9pm to 6am. Plan for delays.

The project involves overlaying the existing roadway with rubberized hot mix asphalt, which will provide a quieter ride and improve traction.

“Highway 50 endures a lot of wear and tear due to the weather elements in the upper elevations,” Caltrans Director Laurie Berman said in a press release. “It’s critical that we preserve the drivability of the highway.”

On average more than 21,000 motorists and 700 truckers per day use this section of Highway 50.

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## TDFPD wants to build pier on USFS land



Tahoe Douglas Fire wants to dock its boat at a yet to be built pier at Zephyr Shoals. Photo/LTN file

**By Kathryn Reed**

A prime piece of South Shore real estate may be back in the limelight.

Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District would like to build a pier at the Dreyfus estate that would be used only by public agencies, but not the boating or recreating public. The U.S. Forest Service owns this land. No pier currently exists at the property.

“We are discussing and assessing options. We have not approved anything. We’re evaluating Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District’s request for a safety pier. We’re actively looking at locations for opportunities, considering all options at this time,” Heather Noel, spokeswoman for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) is used to disclose any environmental impacts to the public. So if we plan to do new construction on the Dreyfus site, or any site, we would scope the public.”

In other words, the public will have an opportunity to comment

on any proposal.

When the public will be brought into the discussions remains to be seen. There have already been meetings between the fire department, Forest Service and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Tahoe Douglas currently keeps its fire boat at Zephyr Cove Resort, which is operated by Aramark under a concession agreement with the USFS, which also owns that land. The Dreyfus estate sits adjacent to Zephyr Cove Resort. Zephyr Shoals is how the USFS now refers to the Dreyfus estate.

Under the shoreline plan the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board is expected to approve later this year it allows for new piers to be built, including specifically for the use of public agencies. Most law enforcement agencies, as well as some of the fire departments in the basin have boats, as do TRPA and U.S. Coast Guard.

The current plan would not allow a pier to be built at Zephyr Shoals because of fish habitat concerns. The new plan has updated science which says such concerns are unwarranted.

Still, it would take USFS, TRPA, Army Corp of Engineers and Nevada Department of Wildlife approval for the pier to be built.

Eric Guevin with Tahoe Douglas Fire said his agency is the lead, but that it will be a partnership. He told *Lake Tahoe News* the cash to pay for it will come from "grant money and donations, not tax dollars at this time. (We're) not sure of the cost, still working numbers." He said a rough minimum is \$500,000.

He said the pier will be at Zephyr Shoals or Round Hill Pines, which is also owned by the USFS. Publically, the Forest Service has not committed to either location.

"We effect and have a negative impact on the long-term

commerce. Plus, there is conflict with public use and public access. The improvements needed would be onerous," Guevin said.

Today all public agencies use docks/piers where the public recreates. Guevin contends tourists don't want to see medical emergencies at the dock. Of course they have to see trauma on ski slopes and there are car accidents every day, so trying to protect people from the reality of life would be difficult. He also said a dedicated pier would speed up the rescue efforts because the public would not be in their way.

The Forest Service hasn't done much with the Zephyr Shoals property since it acquired it in 1997.

That year the feds entered a land swap valued at \$38 million with the land-brokerage firm Olympic Group for it to acquire public land around Las Vegas in exchange for the Dreyfus estate.

The 46-acre parcel in Zephyr Cove had been owned by New York mutual fund tycoon Jack Dreyfus. Dreyfus built the 10,000-square-foot nine-bedroom estate in 1984, spending only two weeks a summer there. He had acquired the land from the Whittell estate and in that same purchase bought the Thunderbird Lodge along the East Shore.

There are reports that the Forest Service allowed the Olympic Group to sell the buildings to Park Cattle, now Edgewood Companies. Their plan was to turn it into a convention center. The price: \$300,000, two memberships to Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course, and seven weeks' exclusive use of the mansion annually for 20 years.

A special use permit was needed from the Forest Service for Park to use the buildings. The company withdrew the application when the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of the Inspector General began a criminal investigation into the financial deal. No wrong-doing was found, but Park never

used the buildings.

The Forest Service in summer 2002 had open houses to gauge what the public would like to do with the property. Those discussions didn't go anywhere. There was a time when the USFS was set on tearing down the structures. Today there are user created trails on the property and people use the beach. The Forest Service has no plans for making this property more accessible to the public.

There are some who have told *LTN* off the record that a plan for the entire site should be in place before a decision about the pier is made, especially since the original purpose for acquiring the parcel was for recreation.

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## **Overtourism – a growing global problem**

**By Claudio Milano, Joseph M. Cheer and Marina Novelli, *The Conversation***

The summer holidays are in full swing – and protests against overtourism have begun (yet again) in a number of popular European cities. Overtourism is not a new problem.

Barcelona, in particular, is at the center of these mounting concerns about the rapid growth of tourism in cities, especially during peak holiday periods. In fact, Destination Barcelona estimates that there were 30 million overnight visitors in 2017, compared to a resident population of 1,625,137.

But across southern Europe protests and social movements are

growing in number. This has led to the formation of organizations such as the Assembly of Neighborhoods for Sustainable Tourism (ABTS) and the Network of Southern European Cities against tourism (SET). They are at the forefront of the fight against overtourism and the impact it has on local residents.

While many tourists want to “live like a local” and have an authentic and immersive experience during their visit, the residents of many tourism-dependent destinations are seeing the unique sense of place that characterized their home towns vanish beneath a wave of souvenir shops, crowds, tour buses and rowdy bars. They are also suffering as local amenities and infrastructure are put under enormous strain.

It is a truly global issue. Other destinations where overtourism has reached disruptive proportions include Palma de Mallorca, Paris, Dubrovnik, Kyoto, Berlin, Bali and Reykjavik. Recently, Thai authorities were forced to act when the number of tourists visiting Maya Bay, the beach made famous by Danny Boyle’s film “The Beach,” led to shocking environmental damage.

### **What does overtourism look like?**

We define overtourism “as the excessive growth of visitors leading to overcrowding in areas where residents suffer the consequences of temporary and seasonal tourism peaks, which have enforced permanent changes to their lifestyles, access to amenities and general well-being.” The claim is that overtourism is harming the landscape, damaging beaches, putting infrastructure under enormous strain, and pricing residents out of the property market. It is a hugely complex issue that is often oversimplified.

It can have an impact in multiple ways. The international cruise industry, for example, delivers thousands of passengers daily to destination ports. While comparatively little is

returned to communities, cruise activity creates physical and visual pollution.

City residents also bear the cost of tourism growth. As cities transform to cater for tourists, the global travel supply chain prospers. This coincides with increasing property speculation and rising costs of living for local communities. AirBnB, for example, has been accused of reducing housing affordability and displacing residents.

Amsterdam wants to take direct action to prevent this by banning short-term rentals and directing cruise passengers away from the city center. AirBnB is also making efforts to address the problems they are accused of creating.

Things are made worse by the fact that key destinations are mostly unprepared to deal with overtourism. According to the Italian sociologist Marco d'Eramo, in 1950 just 15 destinations were visited by 98 percent of international tourists, while in 2007 this had decreased to 57 percent. This indicates the rapid expansion of global tourism beyond established destinations.

Overcrowding and the establishment of typical tourism-focused businesses, such as clubs, bars and souvenir shops, overwhelm local businesses – and rowdy and unmanageable tourist behavior is common. This diminishes the unique ambience of destinations and leads to crowd and waste management pressures.

Clearly, tourism brings jobs, investment and economic benefits to destinations. But overtourism occurs when tourism expansion fails to acknowledge that there are limits. Local government and planning authorities have so far been powerless to deal with the overwhelming influence of the global tourism supply chain. This has led to widespread “tourist-phobia” – first described by Manuel Delgado more than a decade ago as a mixture of repudiation, mistrust and contempt for tourists.

## **Dealing with overtourism**

Dealing with overtourism must now be a priority. But despite the mounting howls of protest, tourism promotion endures – and unsustainable hordes of tourists continue to descend on cities, beaches and other natural wonders.

Managing the flow of tourists seems an improbable and unwelcome task. But some cities have taken drastic measures to limit the effects of overtourism, including the introduction of new or revised taxation arrangements, fines linked to new local laws, and “demarketing”, whereby destinations focus on attracting fewer, high-spending and low impact tourists, rather than large groups.

But it’s a fine line to tread. If tourist arrivals to a destination decline suddenly and dramatically it would likely have considerable economic repercussions for those who rely on them.

Overtourism is a shared responsibility. City administrators and destination managers must acknowledge that there are definite limits to growth. Prioritizing the welfare of local residents above the needs of the global tourism supply chain is vital. Prime consideration must be given to ensuring that the level of visitation fits within a destination’s capacity.

The global tourism supply chain also bears a major responsibility. It must ensure that product development achieves a balance between the optimal tourist experience and a commensurate local benefit. Tourists must also play their part by making travel choices that are sensitive to the places they visit and those who live in and around them.

Tourism should be part of the wider destination management system, which must also consider transport and mobility, the preservation of public spaces, the local economy and housing, among other aspects of daily life. Research, planning and a close and ongoing dialogue between city administrators, the tourism industry, civil society groups and local residents are



essential.

Perhaps overtourism is a symptom of the present era of unprecedented affluence and hyper mobility, a consequence of late capitalism. We need to urgently rethink the way cities are evolving to uphold the rights of their residents.

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## **Missing woman found safe, unharmed**



Jessica Youssi

A Modesto woman who left last weekend for Lake Tahoe and then went missing has been found.

El Dorado County sheriff's deputies said, "Jessica (Youssi) has been located safely."

No further details were released.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*