

LTCC reorg being mapped out in wake of state budget fiasco

By Kathryn Reed

“She has a very strong fiscal background, which is what we need.”

That’s what college board member Fritz Wenck told *Lake Tahoe News* in May when Kindred Murillo was hired to be president of Lake Tahoe Community College. When it comes to numbers, she keeps being tested.



Gov. Jerry Brown’s budget that banks on voters agreeing to raise taxes that are estimated to generate \$6.8 billion in November has the South Lake Tahoe two-year college and every entity in the K-14 spectrum scrambling to figure out what to do.

Midyear budget cuts are a reality. That’s the immediate problem that needs to be addressed.

The LTCC and Lake Tahoe Unified School District boards tonight will be discussing their respective budgets and what the actions in Sacramento mean locally.

In addition to a presentation on the budget, an item Murillo will bring forward to get on the Feb. 14 agenda is reorganizing key positions at the college.

“The college cannot afford to not have a vice president of Business Services with the current situation,” Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News*. “One thing I’ve learned over my 16 years with community colleges is community colleges fail for a couple of reasons. The first reason is finances of the organization. You

have got to have someone running that area.”

(The title of VP of Business Services will change to VP of Administrative Services when the new person is hired to reflect the job duties.)

The last person to officially have the Business Services job on a full time, permanent basis was Sue Niehoff. She was sent packing by the interim president the board hired for last school year. Niehoff has filed a wrongful termination claim against the college. She did not return a phone call.

After getting rid of Niehoff, then-President Steve Maradian expanded the job of Marc Sabella ,director of fiscal services.

With Murillo’s background in business services for 11 years, she knows the ins and outs of finance. Since her arrival she has been doing the heavy lifting, while Sabella has been responsible for lower level financial work.

As a college president, she has a slew of other responsibilities, thus one of the reasons the board agreed late last year to hire a VP of Administrative Services. Resumes are coming in. But by the time interviews are conducted, someone is selected, that person gives notice and eventually starts at LTCC, it could be late spring-early summer. With the fiscal mess California continues to be mired in – which trickles down to local bodies – Murillo said the status quo can no longer continue.

That is why in the interim before a VP is hired, she is recommending moving Aaron McVean from director of Institutional Research and Planning to interim VP of Administrative Services; putting Bill King, director of Technology, into a position focused on research, report writing and Datatel support; and creating an associate dean of Information Technology for Cheri Jones who now spends half her time on Datatel implementation and half as Admissions and Records director. The last piece would be to hire a dean of

Student Services on a full time basis.

Changing jobs for the three employees mentioned above would not affect the bottom line. This is because the college is saving \$13,229 per month without the Business VP. Salary upgrades would leave a savings of \$8,000, which could be used for clerical support for IT.

Murillo presented the reorg plan to College Council last week. That body is expected to vote on it Feb. 9. The Academic Senate will hear the proposal Jan. 27.

Some college employees are questioning why McVean would be put in a position – even temporarily – that might appear to be out of his breadth of knowledge.

Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News* she could train anyone to do the VP job as long as they have the aptitude and desire. Since she became president July 5, she said everything she has asked McVean to do he has done at an exemplary level and has proved to her he is up to the task to do more – including being integral in forming the 2012-13 budget.

The LTCC budget update for this fiscal year and looking forward will be presented tonight to the board. The college needs to allocate \$314,000 to get through June 30 in order to bridge the gap the state has created. Having put aside more than \$430,000 divided between a rainy day fund and a contingency mid-year budget account is proving to be almost clairvoyant on the board and staff's part.

Without a crystal ball, it's hard to know what the state's economy is going to do.

But in South Lake Tahoe, the unemployment rate is dropping. Latest figures have it at 15 percent in the city – down from nearly 18 percent a year ago.

While some would say college employees should be lucky to have

a job, the truth is they could be making more elsewhere. That's something the board is going to have to contend with soon – even in these economic times. Most agendas have a closed session item for labor negotiations.

LTCC's full-time faculty make between 3.4 percent and 9.4 percent less than the going salary; classified are 6.1 off the average; directors make 10.1 percent less than the market.

The college board meeting is in the Aspen room at LTCC. Here is the LTCC agenda. The meeting starts tonight at 6:20.

LTUSD's meeting starts at 6pm at the district office. Here is that agenda.

Bulbs shine a light on changing industry

By Susan Skorupa, Reno Gazette-Journal

The biggest changes on home improvement and hardware store shelves for consumers in the past couple of years probably have shown up on the light bulb aisles.



And there's more change to come as the industry strives to improve energy-use standards and pricing on new light-bulb technology. There also are federal standards pending that – if enacted – will affect the sale of traditional incandescent bulbs.

Standard incandescent bulbs, the mainstay of the lighting industry for 100 years or so, are fading in popular usage and being replaced by more energy-efficient models. Some people bemoan the loss of the traditional bulb with its bright, golden light and cheap replacement costs. Proponents of new technology cite improvements to newer light sources – such as compact fluorescent lamps, or CFLs – with greater energy efficiency, longer usage lifetimes and falling prices.

“People are aware of them, and they are taking off,” John Lazarus of Bulbman in Reno said of energy-efficient light bulb choices. “Incandescent is 100-year-old technology. I tell people, would you want to go back to the old cars? ... I kind of miss my old '48 Buick, but I like my new one with all the new technology.”

Incandescents aren't going away entirely, lighting experts said. Some are being bolstered with high-energy efficiency. Some – such as appliance light bulbs – are not yet included in federal standards, but consumers should be aware that the lighting scene is changing continually with new models of light bulbs and new technology adding to the choices.

“For us, it's all about education and helping consumers find the right lighting options,” Alyssa Steele, a light bulb associate at the Home Depot, said of the wide array of light choices now available.

Read the whole story

Zephyr Cove firm expanding into commercial sector

By Northern Nevada Business Weekly

A Zephyr Cove company that's making the transition from grant-funded research and development to commercial contracts said last week it nailed down its first major partnership.

And the contract may lead to more jobs at Zephyr Photonics, the company formerly known as OptiComp.

"We think it will substantially affect our growth prospects positively, and therefore lead to increased hiring to support the growth," said Tom Steding, the company's chief executive officer.

Read the whole story

Most schools in Lake Tahoe closed because of snow

If you see more young people than usual out and about today in the Lake Tahoe Basin, they are not skipping school. Many schools are closed because of the heavy, wet snow that has fallen and is creating hazardous driving conditions.

Lake Tahoe Unified is closed; Lake Tahoe Community College will have classes starting after noon, however, the Child

Development Center is open; Douglas County schools already had the day off; Tahoe Truckee Unified is closed; Incline Schools are closed, however, all other Washoe County schools are on a two-hour delay; Sierra Nevada College is closed; and Truckee Meadows Community College in Reno is on a two-hour delay.



Snow too heavy
for the blower
Jan. 23.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

A winter storm warning remains in effect until 4 this afternoon. The heaviest snow is expected to last until 10 Monday morning. However, in South Lake Tahoe at 6:30am the white stuff had become a slight rain. About 4 inches of snow accumulated overnight in South Tahoe.

The sun is expected to return Tuesday, with a high of 55 forecast for Thursday on the South Shore.

Ski resorts are able to open more terrain with this gift from Mother Nature. Despite a weekend worth of snow, tree skiing is still not advised until another layer covers all those rocks.

The Sierra Avalanche Center says the danger in the backcountry is at high.

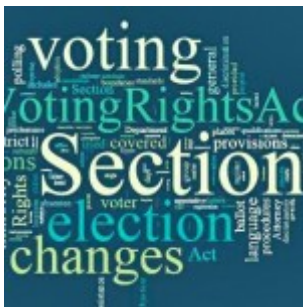
Roads are slick and mucky, with chain requirements on most highways in and out of the Tahoe basin. For all the road conditions, click on the state icons at the top of *Lake Tahoe News'* home page.

School districts struggle to comply with Voters Rights Act

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Unified School District may be in violation of the California Voters Rights Act based on how board members are elected.

While the CVRA was enacted in 2002, the 2010 Census is forcing all elected bodies to look at how people get into office and if constituents are fairly represented. The federal Voting Rights Act also plays a role.



Lake Tahoe Unified School District board members are expected to discuss the issue Feb. 14. LTUSD first broached the subject in January 2011. It's expected to be an agenda item several times this year for LTUSD and Lake Tahoe Community College as they work through the process before their next board elections in 2013.

Lake Tahoe Community College board discussed the issue in October and December.

"The first step would be for the board to determine if it is in the best interest of the district to conduct a study to ensure compliance with the California and federal Voting Rights Acts," Angie Keil, spokeswoman for LTUSD, wrote in an email to *Lake Tahoe News*.

Public hearings and approval from the county office of education are also required.

Earlier this month in a letter from attorney David Girard to El Dorado County Office of Education Superintendent Vicki Barber it says LTUSD is at-risk of violating the CVRA.

LTUSD had district elections when it first formed in 1950 until the mid-1960s. Each of the five board members represented a district. For history buffs, here is a list of LTUSD board members through the years.

South Lake Tahoe staff is aware of the CVRA, but the council has not discussed the issue in open or closed session.

"They have to make the argument we have a racially polarized electorate. I don't believe our town is racially polarized," Nancy Kerry, spokeswoman for South Lake Tahoe, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Changing from at-large elections to district could have the unintended consequence of creating polarization.

To date, no complaints have been filed with the city, LTUSD or LTCC regarding representation to their boards.

"When you go to area elections in a small community like ours, sometimes you can't get people to run. You are diluting down the voting base to an even smaller voting base. That is a concern for me," LTCC President Kindred Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News*.

As it stands now for LTCC, LTUSD and South Lake Tahoe, the five members of each board could live on the same street. Everyone in the respective jurisdictions votes for all five electeds.

Changing to district elections would mean dividing the jurisdictions into five areas and one person would be elected from each area.

With LTUSD being further along in the study process, LTCC may be able to piggyback on the research the K-12 district has done and might do. Otherwise, it could cost LTCC \$35,000 to conduct a study to determine if it should change how board members are elected.

“The board wants to make sure we are not creating racial polarization. We want to make sure everyone has a voice per the California Voting Rights Act,” Murillo said.

Besides wanting to do the right thing, districts also don’t want to be sued. CVRA lawsuits have cost school districts hundreds of thousands of dollars. Madera Unified’s bill was \$1.2 million.

Some have equated the people going after the schools to the man who goes around suing businesses for questionable ADA violations. In other words, it’s about attorneys making a buck and not the greater good of the public.

If an entity is sued under the CVRA, successful plaintiffs can recover all legal costs.

“In order to be successful, the plaintiffs must only prove that racially polarized voting exists and that the subgroup could influence elections under a different system,” Redistricting Partners of Sacramento said in its analysis that was presented to the LTCC board in December.

Paul Mitchell with Redistricting Partners at the Dec. 13 meeting told the board, “It’s not clear you have racially polarized voting.”

He said of the college district’s population of 29,839, 25 percent are Latino and 63 percent are non-Hispanic white. The bulk of the Latinos live in a concentrated area. That could be the problem under the CVRA.

With about 90 percent of districts in California having at-

large elections – like LTUSD and LTCC – many could be vulnerable to a lawsuit.

In Douglas County, the school board was presented with three redistricting options at its meeting this month. It was agreed the structure now in place that gives Lake Tahoe a representative to the seven-member board would remain. The board member has to live in the area she or he represents.

“There was some discussion if trends don’t shift, this may be the last time the board can justify an exclusive lake zone,” Superintendent Lisa Noonan told *Lake Tahoe News*.

California’s economy showing signs of recovery

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

The evidence keeps accumulating: California’s economic recovery is gathering momentum. It’s just nowhere near a boom yet.

Unemployment in California fell two-tenths of a point last month to 11.1 percent, the lowest level in nearly three years, the Employment Development Department reported Friday. Payrolls expanded for the sixth straight month, and economists

pronounced themselves satisfied that the state is finally on the right track.

“We have sort of a nice string going,” said Howard Roth, chief economist at the state Department of Finance. “This makes me more confident that it’s not going to go away. ... I think it’s the real thing.”

The growth in payroll jobs, which is considered the most reliable barometer of the job market, was a fairly weak 10,700 in December. That was offset somewhat by news that November’s job growth was revised upward sharply.

Overall, Roth said, the results show the economy is mending but not operating at full throttle. “It’s got to get a lot faster than this,” he said. “But it looks like it has a good foundation.”

Read the whole story

Price of first class stamp increases 1 cent

By Ed O’Keefe, Washington Post

Postage rates jumped Sunday for the first time in two-and-a-half years as the U.S. Postal Service hopes to generate more revenue amid historic losses.

First-class postage stamps now cost 45 cents each, a price jump that officials anticipate will generate an additional \$888 million in annual revenue. The rate increase does not affect the use of Forever stamps purchased before Sunday.

The price hike comes as negotiations between the U.S. Postal Service and two of its labor unions reached an impasse that may eventually require a ruling by an arbitrator.

Postal and union officials announced late Friday that separate talks had collapsed between USPS and the National Association of Letter Carriers and the National Postal Mail Handlers Union. Contracts with both unions, which represent a combined 242,000 postal workers, expired in late November. Negotiations were extended twice before failing Friday.

Read the whole story

Judge hears arguments in sealing forest fire documents case

By Denny Walsh, Sacramento Bee

A Sacramento federal judge heard arguments Thursday and will rule later on The Bee's objections to sealing documents that allegedly contain evidence of misconduct and fraud on the part of U.S. Forest Service employees.

Timber giant Sierra Pacific Industries submitted the documents in partial support of its motion for summary judgment in the company's lawsuit contesting the government's refusal to let Forest Service employees testify in related state court litigation.

A bitter legal struggle between the United States and Sierra Pacific grew out of a mammoth wildfire in 2007 that devoured 65,000 acres in Plumas and Lassen counties.

Much of the damage was in two national forests, and the government sued Sierra Pacific, claiming the fire started when a bulldozer belonging to a contractor working for the company struck a rock.

Read the whole story

Liberty Energy in process of changing name, rebranding

Liberty Energy is making some changes that are cosmetic in many ways.

The electricity provider for the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin and into Alpine County is changing its name to Liberty Utilities. This is to reflect the parent company based in Canada acquiring companies throughout the United States – including hydroelectric and natural gas firms.

The roll out of the new name, website and other branding components is expected in March.

Bob Dodds has left the company. The president is now Mike Smart.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

40% of Fallen Leaf Lake's board resigns

Fallen Leaf Lake Community Services District is in need of two members to fill out the five-member board because David Stumbos and Tom Barber resigned earlier this month.

At the March board meeting the remaining three members – Wanda Kownacki, Stephanie Neidig and Tom Bacchetti – are expected to decide whether the vacancies should be filled by appointment or special election.

The board that controls what goes on in the development that surrounds the South Shore lake has come under fire regarding who is allowed to vote in elections and therefore be on the board making decisions.

While Bacchetti did not elaborate as to why these board members resigned, if either were to be convicted of voter fraud, their respective law and medical licenses could be in jeopardy. Neither Stumbos or Barber returned calls.

Bacchetti in his report to district members said, "We are pretty confident that if there are no expense surprises, the year will end well."

However, there was nothing in the report about the ongoing wrongful termination lawsuit by Tom Barnes, the former general manager of the CSD, and what it is doing to the bottom line.

– Kathryn Reed