Convention center creditor trying to find developer

By Kathryn Reed

While nine of the 29 properties involved with the would-be convention center still have not been foreclosed upon, nothing can happen at the South Lake Tahoe site until they are all foreclosed on.

Owens Financial, the largest creditor, is still holding out.

“He is trying to work out something with another developer where it would protect more of his investments,” City Attorney Patrick Enright said of Bill Owens, principal of Owens Financial. “As far as Mr. Owens, we will know in the next two to four weeks if he is successful in bringing someone in.”



The future of this rebar and concrete remains uncertain. Photo/LTN file

Enright would not elaborate about whom Owens is talking to in regards to taking over the development rights on the 11-plus acre site.

Lake Tahoe Development Company filed bankruptcy in October

2009. In December 2010 the creditors decided to begin the foreclosure process.

LTDC had planned to build two hotels, a convention center, retail space and open areas on the land near Stateline.

The city allowed construction to begin without a consolidated parcel map, thus creating one of the delays getting the project out of bankruptcy.

The city believes whoever ends up owning the various parcels will also own the tourist accommodation units and commercial floor area associated with it. Those are items the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency has limited the number of in the Lake Tahoe Basin and thus put a dollar value on.

However, TRPA spokesman Jeff Cowen said, “Everything will stay with the site until permits are executed or expired.”

There are 562 TAUs associated with the property and 26,422-square-feet of CFA.

Woman denied access to affordable senior apartment

By Kathryn Reed

Carol Stiles wants out of her hotel room and into Kelly Ridge.

American Baptist Homes of the West, which runs the affordable senior housing complex in South Lake Tahoe, isn’t letting her in even though she had a signed agreement.

Now both parties are in court.



El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Steve Bailey on Wednesday granted a restraining order that in effect says the vacant unit – not the one she was to originally live in – must not be rented to someone else until the next court hearing on April 15.

With occupancy of the 30 one-bedroom and two two-bedroom apartments usually at capacity, getting into Kelly Ridge is difficult under normal circumstances.

Stiles left Jackson, Miss., in mid-January after she found out a unit was available. She had been on a waiting list since summer 2009.

During the drive to California with a family member, Stiles was notified by ABHOW she needed to provide more paperwork. She provided it. And kept providing what was requested.

“Despite the overwhelming evidence and their prior approval, on February 1, 2011, Respondent denied Ms. Stiles application on the grounds that her ‘Income exceeds the income limits established by the program.’ Ms. Stiles was given a handwritten sheet that was purportedly the basis for Respondent’s new calculations,” court documents read. “This sheet contained numerous errors including consideration as income a category which Respondent called ‘earnings/income.’ They derived this title from a category on Ms. Stiles’ financial statement which included both appreciation, and dividends. However, the denial letter indicated that Ms. Stiles could appeal, and she timely filed an appeal on February 2, 2011. It appeared to Ms. Stiles that Respondent made several errors in calculating her income level. Had they done the calculations correctly and as the law requires, she would have been eligible. Since February 2, 2011, Ms. Stiles has been forced to live in hotels pending resolution of these issues.”

She is still in that hotel for at least another month.

Ancel Romero, senior vice president for ABHOW's affordable housing department, did not return a call.

Jacqueline Mittelstadt, who is representing Stiles, said, "They have not given the legal authority to justify why she is not qualified."

Mittelstadt said ABHOW approved all of the paperwork, which entails disclosure of all financial records to ensure all residents qualify.

"The reason she was denied is the amount she took out of her retirement account was over the limit," Mittelstadt said. "But the amount she took out shouldn't be looked at because regulations don't consider lump sum withdrawals."

According to Mittelstadt, ABHOW wants to regulate how residents withdraw their money. This is after the applicant's financial holdings have been scrutinized and verified to be accurate.

At the April 15 court hearing the judge is likely to determine if a restraining order should be in place until the financial issue is resolved and in doing so would determine if Stiles is likely to prevail.

The more than $9 million Kelly Ridge senior complex opened in August 2009. The bulk of the funding came from:

• California Housing Finance Agency – $4.73 million in tax-exempt bonds.

• South Lake Tahoe through the California HOME Program – $3.4 million loan.

• South Tahoe Redevelopment Agency – $906,000 loan.

EPA detects radiation in Sacramento from Japan

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

A monitor in Sacramento maintained by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today showed slight increases in radiation from sources that are likely from troubled nuclear energy reactors in Japan.

The “beta” category picks up strontium, while the “gamma” category picks up cesium and iodine. All three are constituents typically associated with nuclear energy production.

Read the whole story

Man arrested in Incline hit-and-run incident

By Reno Gazette-Journal

Update at 2:34 p.m.: The driver has been identified as 23-year-old California resident Luke Craig.

Detectives interviewed and subsequently placed Luke Craig under arrest for attempted murder, battery with a deadly weapon, and hit and run causing injury – all felony charges. Craig was transported to the Washoe County Detention Facility,

where he was booked without incident. Luke Craig’s bail is set at $88,000.

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A fight early this morning in Incline Village involved about 20 people, some of whom were throwing glass bottles, the Washoe County Sheriff’s Office reports.

Read the whole story

Mother Nature about to unleash wet storm

By Kathryn Reed

Soggy could be the word to be used for much of Northern California and Northern Nevada as winter blows out and spring arrives Sunday. The Lake Tahoe Basin isn’t expected to see sun until at least the middle of next week.

The National Weather Service in Reno has bumped up the winter storm warning to noon Friday, ending 8am Saturday. Three inches of snow could come down per hour, the agency says.

One to 2 feet above 7,000 feet is being called for, with 8 to 14 inches at lake level. Winds will be from the south to southwest at 15 to 25 mph, with gusts up to 35 mph. Sierra ridge gusts may hit 90 mph.



Standing water March 17 at the corner of Modesto and Harrison avenues in South Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The high winds on Lake Tahoe forced the M.S. Dixie noon cruise to be canceled.

The Weather Service is also cautioning that creeks and rivers are prone to flooding. Ponding on highways and local road surfaces will make driving precarious.

Sump pumps throughout the South Shore have been running almost nonstop at residences in low-lying areas. Standing water became increasingly prevalent this week in the Lake Tahoe Basin with rain, snow and thawing.

South Lake Tahoe crews this week were working behind the Super 8 motel off Highway 50 to clear culverts for better drainage. That area is notorious for flooding.

Caltrans earlier this week had to close Highway 50 between Placerville and South Lake Tahoe four hours to clear a wall of snow. Highway 89 around Emerald Bay remains closed.

The transportation department expects a section of Highway 1 to be closed for a month in Monterey County after a 100-foot section of asphalt fell into the ocean. However, the

California State Parks is notifying hundreds of campers headed for the Big Sur area that all State Park campgrounds will remain open with all reservations honored.

Gov. Jerry Brown has issued emergency proclamations for Del Norte, Humboldt, San Mateo, Santa Cruz, San Luis Obispo and Mendocino counties because of damage from the tsunami that resulted from the 9.0 earthquake in Japan a week ago.

The crazy weather had the NWS calling for a tornado warning this morning in San Mateo County.

Gates at the Orville Dam spillway were opened today for the first time in five years. Other reservoirs in California have also been releasing water in anticipation of needing more storage space for the series of storms headed to the state.

Incline groundskeeper accused of stealing from property owner

By Reno Gazette-Journal

An Incline Village groundskeeper has been arrested on suspicion of stealing thousands of dollars from a property owner.

The Washoe County Sheriff’s Office said Eric James Hosmer, 43, was arrested Wednesday at a construction site on eight theft counts and taken into custody without incident.

Read the whole story

Yale lab tech admits killing Placerville grad

By Sacramento Bee

NEW HAVEN, Conn. – A former animal research technician pleaded guilty Thursday to killing a Yale University graduate student from Placerville days before her 2009 wedding.

Prosecutors revealed that Raymond Clark III left behind evidence of a sexual assault and desperately tried to cover his tracks.

Clark pleaded guilty to murder and attempted sexual assault of 24-year-old Annie Le under an agreement that calls for a 44-year prison sentence.

His plea on the attempted sexual assault charge falls under Connecticut's Alford doctrine, in which the defendant in a criminal case agrees only that the state has enough evidence against him or her to get a conviction.

The sex charge and related DNA evidence offered the first official revelation of a potential motive in the case.

Read the whole story

DA: No compassion for Nancy Garrido

By Phil Willon, Los Angeles Times

Another court delay Thursday dashed speculation of possible guilty pleas from Phillip and Nancy Garrido, the couple accused of kidnapping and sexually tormenting Jaycee Lee Dugard and holding her captive for 18 years in their backyard compound in Northern California.

After a hearing in El Dorado County Superior Court, District Attorney Vern Pierson criticized comments made by Nancy Garrido's defense attorney a few weeks ago, when he called for compassion for his client because Garrido was "like her mother" when Jaycee's children, fathered by Phillip Garrido, were born.

"Perhaps my alleged lack of compassion comes from my awareness of many disgusting facts concerning Nancy Garrido's personal involvement in this case," Pierson said in a statement.

Pierson said Nancy Garrido not only assisted her husband when he snatched Dugard off a South Tahoe street 18 years ago, but also helped imprison the girl in the couple's backyard and videotaped other young children to "provide her rapist husband with sexually perverse entertainment."

The couple confessed to the crimes last month because Phillip Garrido, 59, hopes to negotiate a reduced sentenced for his wife, according to Stephen Tapson, Nancy's Garrido's attorney.

Read the whole story

No health risk seen in radiation headed to Calif. from Japan

By Ralph Vartabedian, Los Angeles Times

Small amounts of radioactive isotopes from the crippled Japanese nuclear power plant are being blown toward North America high in the atmosphere over the Pacific Ocean and will reach California as soon as Friday, according to experts.

A network of sensors in the U.S. and around the world is watching for the first signs of that fallout, though experts said they were confident that the amount of radiation would be well within safe limits.

Operated by the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. network known as Radnet is a system of 100 radiation monitors that work 24 hours a day, spread across the country in places such as Anaheim, Bakersfield and Eureka. In addition, a network of 63 sensors is operated by the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization, an international agency allied with the United Nations.

Atmospheric experts said the material should begin showing up on the West Coast as early as Friday, though it could take up to an additional week for the 5,000-mile trip from Japan to Southern California. Although the organization has told its member countries that the first indication of radiation would hit on Friday, the plume from a North Korean nuclear test in 2006 took about two weeks to travel to North America, U.N. officials said.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which oversees the U.S. nuclear industry, said Wednesday that it did not expect dangerous levels of radioactivity to hit the West Coast,

Hawaii, Alaska or U.S. territories in the Pacific. But whatever levels reach the U.S. initially are likely to increase in subsequent days, because radioactive emissions from the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant have grown since the disaster began Friday. The NRC sharply raised its warning to American citizens in Japan, urging them to evacuate an area within 50 miles of the Fukushima complex. Japanese authorities have ordered an evacuation within about 12 miles of the plant.

Read the whole story

STPUD board leaning toward sewer rate hike this summer

By Kathryn Reed

Although a decision is not likely until mid-May, the South Tahoe Public Utility District board this month expressed a willingness to increase sewer rates by 3 percent starting July 1, with no change to water rates except for those on meters.

Board member Mary Lou Mosbacher missed last week's budget and meter rate workshops.

A decision had to be made by the board last week regarding any potential rate increase so customers could be notified per state law. Any increase the board may institute cannot be higher than what is sent out on the notification. Public hearings will be conducted so people have ample opportunity to voice their opinions.



Paul Sciuto, assistant general manager at STPUD, talks about the proposed budget. Photo/Kathryn Reed

During the two-hour budget workshop last week, the staff report presented by Chief Financial Officer Paul Hughes and Assistant General Manager Paul Sciuto did not contain a rate hike. Hughes pointed out this did not necessarily reflect staff's recommendation.

A concern he brought up that was later echoed by the majority of the board is without increasing sewer rates, the district would have to borrow money and therefore incur debt that in the long run could cost ratepayers more.

In the handouts were quarterly sewer and water rate comparisons to others in the Lake Tahoe Basin. They include:

2011-12 quarterly sewer rates –

• STPUD – $87.24

• Incline Village – $105.09

• North Tahoe – $133.68

• Kingsbury – $161.25

• Tahoe City – $163.89.

2011-12 quarterly water rates –

• Incline Village – $102.87

• STPUD – $119.89

• Tahoe City – $183.23

• Kingsbury – $195

• North Tahoe –$195.81

• Cave Rock – $607.38.

If STPUD raises sewer rates by 3 percent, it would increase the average residential customers' bill by less than $1 a month.

The board members squabbled among themselves about whether it's better to go with an increase now and pay as they go for things, or wait to hit ratepayers later, incur debt and perhaps let the infrastructure be taxed longer without repair.

Per their regular stances, board President Dale Rise is not a strong proponent of rate increases, while board member Jim Jones never believes what is agreed to is enough.

Jones was adamant he would not vote for a budget that does not include a rate increase.

"There is never a good year to raise rates," Jones said. But he added he wouldn't stand by and let the system disintegrate.

Sciuto told the board, "We are doing a good job of managing our assets, but there is risk. I like redundancy and we don't have that."

This was in regards to the Al Tahoe main as well as the lines

services the North Upper Truckee area. If something happens to either one, he is worried it will cause problems throughout much of the system.

Board member Chris Cefalu, who will be one of the water meter customers to have uncertain future bills, said he is adamant about not raising water rates while the billing is in a state of flux.

The nearly 5,000 STPUD customers with meters represent about 34 percent of the ratepayers. The district per state law this year has to start charging them based on consumption. The goal is the rate structure will have the average consumer paying what flat rate customers pay.

However, those not using much water are likely to see rates decrease and those with lots of landscaping or families doing multiple loads of laundry a week could see the rates increase.

The budget contains no increases for salaries or benefits. However, the district's CalPERS rate is increasing 2.43 percent. It will be shared equally between the district and employees.

Besides working on the next fiscal budget that begins July 1, the district is always working on a 10-year budget. The decline in assessed property valued for this fiscal year means a $7 million hit on the 10-year forecast for property taxes.

In the next fiscal year it is anticipated the district will use the remainder of the nearly $2.3 million in the MTBE account.

South Tahoe Public Utility District won a $69 million judgment (though about half of that went to attorneys and other expenses) when it successfully sued oil companies when it proved methyl tertiary butyl ether, a fuel additive, contaminated groundwater and posed problems for bodies of water like Lake Tahoe.

The money has been used to treat the 14 wells on the South Shore contaminated with MTBE.