LTCC takes hard look at creating goals to improve

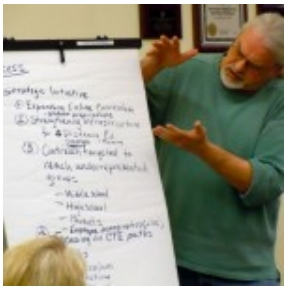
By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Community College knows what it needs to work on, but how to get there is another matter.

“We want to develop a shared understanding of opportunities and challenges,” Tom Greene, vice president of Academic Affairs and Student Services, explained as the five tables of eight people chatted among themselves. “This is critical because everyone looks at data and interprets it differently. When everyone is on the same page you move forward together.”

By the time the stakeholders of the two-year college finished the five-hour session, to some degree a shared vision emerged. From the reams of information gathered Friday, specific goals will be developed, with the board of trustees ultimately signing off on everything after the other necessary leadership groups have given their input.

Greene led most of the 9am-2pm planning session, with the help of Aaron McVean, director of Institutional Research and Planning.



LTCC instructor Jon Kingsbury goes over his

group's ideas.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

The master plan is something the college does every six years. The strategic planning session is usually an annual event in the fall, but was delayed this year to accommodate a slew of changes at the college. Plus, the institution is in the middle of the self-study process of the six-year accreditation cycle.

Most tables had students, administrators, faculty, classified and a trustee at them so all sectors of the campus were heard. They spent the better part of Feb. 11 brainstorming how to put substance to the four strategic goals that will be part of the college's Education Master Plan for 2011-17. Those goals are Student Access; Student Learning, Success and Achievement; Community Engagement; and College Sustainability.

When it comes to student access, data reveals the college population does not mirror the community or Lake Tahoe Unified School District. The college has more Caucasians.

"By and large we are white people over 40," Virginia Boyar, director of Career and Technical Education, said of the group. "We cannot just assume what they want and need. We need to get them at the table and listen. We can't listen if they are not here."

It's the Latino population she was speaking of.

Recruitment and outreach were repeatedly stressed when it comes to getting the Latino community interested in attending LTCC. Recognizing cultural and financial barriers exist was also talked about.

Creating a student ambassador was an idea – to have LTCC students talk to high school and middle school students about what college life is about, the benefits of an associate of arts degree or getting a certificate.

Looking at the curriculum, what is taught online and providing appropriate tutoring were other avenues to look at in regards to student access.

When it comes to the students' learning, success and achievement it was noted these might be measured in different ways. For some it's finishing the class, for others it's graduating, still others it's transferring to a four-year college.

"Can you separate learning from success and achievements?"

McVean asked the group to think about this as they delved into that strategy.

One table stressed the need for academic advisors for students, something the college does not have. Other support services such as counseling and financial aid were mentioned.

Preparedness was a recurring word – in terms of being ready for college level courses and ready to move on from LTCC.

Another group said students' goals need to be defined before anyone can tell if they have been achieved.

Michael Ward, project manager for the Lake Tahoe Basin Prosperity Plan, spoke to the group before they dissected the community engagement strategy.

His overriding message was to "invite career pathways that are consistent with why people live here." This means looking at what the curriculum has to offer related to the outdoors and recreation.

"We are growing tourists, not a middle class," Ward said of Lake Tahoe as a whole.

He wants LTCC and the other institutions of higher education at the lake to focus on educating people who will stay in the basin. This in turn will help with the escalating unemployment

rate. Ward said 50 percent of El Dorado County's unemployed are on the South Shore. In the city limits the official rate is 17.2 percent, though with the underemployed it's closer to 19 percent.

From there the groups came away saying the college is only selectively engaged with the community. Creating partnerships was a theme most of the groups championed – whether it is with other education outlets, the private or public sectors.

Hosting community-wide events, like today's rail jam, is an opportunity for non-students to get a feel for the campus. Doing more of that was encouraged.

Knowing what the community wants was also pointed out. Being proactive instead of reactive was the message.

The last strategy talked about was how to keep the college sustainable, with money, facilities, human resources and technology being the components.

Greene stressed it's time to look at moving from a state funded to a state supported institution.

A possible bond to raise money was floated, as were increasing summer programs and using the college when traditional classes are not scheduled.

Working with partners could also be a moneymaker. So could bringing in outside entities to host their meetings at the college.

Tying in with the community and recreation aspects, one table thought an intensive kids sports program is a good idea.

On the flip side, elder hostel was brought up.

"We will establish goal teams to establish clear, strategic goals. Don't expect to see too many goals," Greene told the group as he wrapped up the session.

El Dorado County program works with unlicensed drivers

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

El Dorado County District Attorney Vern Pierson has announced plans to offer a suspended driver's license diversion program.

The District Attorney's Office has formed a partnership with Pacific Educational Services Inc. to educate people who drive without a valid driver's license or on a driver's license that has been suspended for specified reasons.

Many of these offenders end up with criminal records, large fines, jail sentences and longer suspensions because they are uninformed about driving laws and basic options available to them, according to a news release.

Read the whole story

Report: Dugard expected to finish book this year

By Christina Mendonsa, News 10

SACRAMENTO – Jaycee Dugard spent last summer camping with family, the fall taking daytrips with her daughters, and this winter, writing her unique and painful memoirs.

The woman held captive for 18 years is now living the life she dreamed of in childhood dairies kept during her years in the Garrido's Antioch backyard. Dugard, her daughters and mother are renting a four-bedroom house on a tree-lined street in a Northern California neighborhood. Others living on the same street know who they are and are very protective of them.

As the case against Dugard's alleged kidnappers, Phillip and Nancy Garrido, drags on, Jaycee is putting the finishing touches on a book due out later this year. Simon & Schuster has no date for the release but the company's head of publishing has read excerpts.

"I was moved and inspired by the raw power of Jaycee Dugard's voice, her strength and her resilience," said Jonathan Karp.

Jonathan Glatt wrote the first book about the Dugard kidnapping titled, "Lost And Found." Glatt digs deeply into the events surrounding Dugard's kidnapping in 1991 and Phillip Garrido's early life as a bass player in a Lake Tahoe-based band called Rock Creek.

Read the whole story

Federal health plan creates unexpected tax for some California parents

By Bobby Caina Calvan, Sacramento Bee

Thousands of California parents leaped at the chance to provide health coverage to their grown and uninsured children when a provision in the federal health care law took effect

last fall.

Now some of those parents, such as Barry Demant of Folsom, are finding a hidden cost to the new benefit: a bigger tax bill.

A loophole in California's tax law requires the state to levy income taxes on the premiums employers pay to provide health insurance to the non-dependent children of their workers.

Last fall, Demant added his unemployed 25-year-old daughter to his company's group health plan. That meant he no longer had to pay $180 a month to insure her through a separate individual health policy.

As part of the federal health care law, insurers are required to allow parents to enroll children up to age 26 on their health plans.

"I wanted to give the health care law a chance, and I thought it would be a great opportunity, even if only selfishly, to reduce the amount I pay for her premiums," Demant said.

He found out about the tax when his human resources department told him that a bump in income – and taxes – would soon appear in his paycheck.

In the end, he said, some of the money he thought he was saving could evaporate in the form of increased state tax payments. Demant would not say exactly how much more he'll be paying in taxes.

As Californians begin preparing personal income tax returns, some lawmakers are pushing to pass a law that would exempt those contributions from being subject to state personal income taxes, as was done on the federal level.

Read the whole story

City wants to adjust Heavenly Village contract, fix garage

By Kathryn Reed

Two of the current South Lake Tahoe City Council members are responsible for the city entering a 30-year agreement to pay 20 percent of the total cost, or about $140,000 a year, for the upkeep of Heavenly Village.

The current city manager, city attorney and redevelopment director all say the contract needs revisiting before it expires. Those three were not on staff when the deal was consummated in August 2002.

The city owns the common areas or walkways in the village that is anchored by two Marriott properties and the Heavenly gondola. This is not a usual way of handling these sorts of things, according to city staff.



An effort is under way to entice people to visit Heavenly Village. Photos/Kathryn

Reed

More than once current staff has said previous councils upon recommendation of former employees have given away more to developers and private entities than is logical based on what the return is for the city.

Mayor Hal Cole and Councilman Tom Davis were on the council at the time this particular document was signed by then Mayor Brooke Laine. The other councilmembers were Bill Crawford and Judy Brown, the latter who got appointed to the Planning Commission effective today.

The two Marriott properties pay 55 percent collectively, Heavenly Mountain Resort 20 percent, Trans Sierra Investments 2.5 percent, and Cecil's 2.5 percent into the kitty. Trans Sierra, run by Gary Casteel, owns the bulk of the retail buildings; Cecil's owners were a large stakeholder in the original deal and own what is now called Stateline Brewery. (Casteel did not return phone calls.)

Here is the current PADMA budget, short for Park Avenue Development Maintenance Association. It details the breakdown of expenses for things like snow removal, security and landscaping.

The board is made up of a rep from all of the entities that pay into it, with the city having two people on the board.

Last spring the City Council decided not to send anyone to the PADMA meetings. Councilman Bruce Grego and Redevelopment Agency Director Gene Palazzo had been the designees.

"They were in the process of negotiating to get out of PADMA. They have been talking about that for a year," Palazzo said in explaining why no one went to meetings for months.

City Attorney Patrick Enright attended the last meeting in December, with City Manager Tony O'Rourke wanting to go but

needing to be at the new councilmember orientation. They've been to other meetings, but could not vote.

In January, the current council appointed Enright and O'Rourke to the PADMA board, which means they are now voting members. The next meeting is Feb. 15. (The board meets every other month.)

From the December meeting a "window of opportunity" was opened to re-examine the agreement, city officials say. But that's not what other board members are saying.

"Our argument is private companies are benefitting," Enright said in why the city wants to renegotiate the deal.

Lew Feldman is the attorney for PADMA and was also the attorney representing the developers. So he was negotiating with the city for the deal that is now being revisited.

He told *Lake Tahoe News* if a conflict arises, he would not participate in negotiations.

But Feldman also said the city's current position is a political one, not a legal one. "It's a contract," he said, implying there is no wiggle room.

"At this time we are satisfied with how the contract is," said Greg Campbell of Marriott Grand Residence. He is chairman of the PADMA board.

Building consensus

Two things the parties who spoke with *Lake Tahoe News* agree on is more needs to be done to bring people to Heavenly Village and the parking garage is a deterrent to making that a reality.

The City Council at its March 15 work session is scheduled to discuss PADMA and the city owned parking garage.

The PADMA board next week is expected to delve into parking and special events.

PADMA was not designed to be a marketing entity. It’s more of a property owners association.

“We are looking at forming a subcommittee this season to look at more opportunities,” Campbell said in regards to getting locals and tourists to the Stateline area complex.

He pointed to the success of Hot August Nights last year and said the village will play a larger role in hosting that car event this year.



More special events like the ice carvers on Feb. 5 are being talked about.

Campbell and Feldman pointed to the family-friendly inaugural New Year’s Eve festivities at the village as something to build on with the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, which spearheaded the event.

“In the past, funding has always been a challenge,” Campbell said of developing special events.

City Manager O’Rourke wants daily activities and major special events at Heavenly Village.

The other problem the village has is no one tells the media, therefore the public, about what is going on there. *Lake Tahoe News* reporters stumbled across two ice sculptors on Feb. 5. The guy taking a chain saw to a slab of ice captured the attention of dozens of spectators at Fire + Ice, which was doing a brisk business, while the rest of the village that afternoon was quiet.

Parking issues

One thing holding back locals from going to Heavenly Village is having to pay $3.75/hour at the garage.

So few people use the structure that the city loses $100,000 a year on the garage.

“It doesn’t help us to get 9 cents an hour from the movie theater,” O’Rourke said. “If it were an independent theater, wouldn’t they provide their own parking or couldn’t they have worked out a deal with Raley’s?”

The good deal for the public is four hours of validated parking with the purchase of a movie ticket.

The bad deal for the city is the theater pays the city 9 cents for each of those tickets. Many other private businesses in the village pay the city $1.56 per validated ticket. Retailers buy validation coupon books from the city.

O’Rourke wants to make those books more equitable to all involved. He can’t understand how anyone in the city ever thought it a good idea for a business to pay 9 cents.



The city violates its sign ordinance to direct people to the parking garage.

He also doesn’t believe the city needs to keep paying for consultants to figure out how to run a parking garage. O’Rourke said talking to other cities that operate successful parking garages should do the trick. One thing he is looking into is how Vail offers free parking after 3pm.

O’Rourke told the council, “Based on current hourly revenue streams, it would cost the city approximately $100,000 to initiate a ‘Free after 3’ program at the parking garage. Staff is examining opportunities to off-set that loss with garage management changes, sponsorship advertising better garage signage, and possible PADMA cost sharing.”

Campbell agrees filling up the parking garage will help the businesses be more successful.

Feldman’s stance is the city has not adequately made the public aware of the garage. The city agrees.

However, last weekend the city violated its own sign ordinance by having a sandwich board sign pointing to the garage. This is the second time the city has been caught violating the ordinance. The other time it had a banner on the movie theater building.

“People driving down Highway 50 don’t know where to park for the gondola,” Feldman said. “I felt strongly and I still do that the village has not been (embraced) by locals as it ought to be and the major obstacle is parking.”

O’Rourke agrees, as he says, “Parking is a major disincentive

for the public to go there.”

But the city’s top leader also acknowledged there has to be reason to go to the village.

Activities are one solution.

A better mix of retail, O’Rourke and Feldman said, will also get locals to come and visitors to stay. Both point to a need for a more unique mix of food and beverage options.

O’Rourke has worked with Bon Appetite officials in prior jobs and spoke to magazine officials when he was in New York last month about possibly having them do an event in South Lake Tahoe.

Although a better mix of retail is called for, some entities have survived since shops opened less than a decade ago – the movie theater, Heavenly Sports, Powder House, Kalani’s, Wolf Gang Puck, Fire + Ice, Patagonia, North Face, Cecil’s (with name changes and alterations), Boarding House, Cold Stone Creamery and Century 21.

“Heavenly Village is probably among the most functional mixed use developments in the basin in the economic situation we find ourselves in,” Feldman said. “Retail has taken a beating everywhere. Like the rest of the world, we are turning a corner.”

South Tahoe pedestrian dies after being struck by vehicle

A South Lake Tahoe woman who was crossing Highway 50 Wednesday night died from her injuries Thursday morning at Renown

Medical Center in Reno, where she had been airlifted.

The name of the 62-year-old is not being released pending notification of her family.



South Lake Tahoe police Officer Deanna Lewis works the accident scene Feb. 9. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The accident occurred about 6pm Feb. 9 in front of Grocery Outlet. Officers said the woman was jaywalking across the highway when she was hit leaving the store.

Traffic headed toward Stateline was backed up for a while that night. Vehicles were diverted through the parking at Grocery Outlet while officers took measurements on the highway and collected evidence.

“He was not speeding. He just didn’t see her walk in front of him,” Sgt. Shannon Laney said of the driver.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Body of missing Reno hiker found

By Reno Gazette-Journal

The Washoe County Sheriff’s Office today confirmed that a body found above the White’s Creek Trailhead is that of missing hiker Rick Gentry.

Deputy Armando Avina said that two Washoe County Sheriff’s Office Search and Rescue volunteers were training their cadaver dog, Geiger, when they discovered the body in the area above the Whites Creek Trailhead around 3pm Monday.

They immediately reported it to the sheriff’s office.

Read the whole story

Retired SLTFD captain dies snowmobiling

Retired South Lake Tahoe fire Capt. Steve Taylor died in a snowmobiling accident Feb. 8.

He was 58.

Taylor was riding with two friends on personal sleds in the Blue Lakes Road area off Highway 88 when the accident occurred.

The California Highway Patrol report says Taylor was riding at a high rate of speed on Blue Lakes Road when he was unable to negotiate a left curve. The snowmobile he was driving struck a

tree.

CalStar responded, but was unable to revive Taylor.

The CHP and Alpine County sheriff's deputies are conducting the investigation. Sheriff's Lt. Ron Michitarian said in a press release, "Preliminary investigation indicates the accident may have been a result of an unknown medical episode and an autopsy and toxicological examination are pending."

Flags are flying at half-staff in South Lake Tahoe in Taylor's honor.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

South Tahoe man can't outsmart police dog; he's in jail with bites

A 40-year-old South Lake Tahoe man was arrested Tuesday on charges of possession of a dangerous weapon, violating parole and resisting arrest.

Stephen Michael Wood was being sought in regards to a burglary at a residence in the 900 block of James Street.

Probation officers responded to the 800 block of James in South Lake Tahoe on Feb. 8 to talk to Wood about the theft. Officers said when Wood noticed them, he fled – which is a violation of his probation.

Wood was found hiding in the attic closet, and detained by South Lake Tahoe police Officer Tony Broadfoot and canine

officer Duke. Wood sustained several dog bites during his arrest. Wood was treated at Barton Memorial Hospital before being booked into the El Dorado County Jail.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Nevada water quality lab looking to expand

By Bob Brundage, Reno Gazette-Journal

Western Environmental Testing Laboratory has found a growing need for its services in Nevada, California and Colorado during its short existence, and now it is trying to stretch its reach even farther.

“We’re definitely looking to stay on the West Coast, in Arizona, Utah, Oregon and Idaho,” operations manager Nick Ross said. “Those are the states we’re looking at.”

Founded in 2002 with five employees, WETLAB now employees 28 at a state-of-the-art laboratory in Sparks that was completed in 2006 and recently expanded by 11,000 square feet.

There also is a new office in Elko. The office started in a part-time employee’s home in 2007 and moved into a larger facility in 2009.

So what does the fast-growing company do? WETLAB monitors water contaminants for its clients. The company monitors the water in Lake Tahoe as well as the ground water in the Elko mining region.

“We do a lot of continuum monitoring, that’s the bulk of what

we do," Ross said. "Mining companies have to be monitored monthly, quarterly or yearly, depending on the size of their operations, to make sure they aren't introducing contaminants into the ground water.

"The different towns or cities or counties that surround Lake Tahoe have to do monthly, quarterly or yearly monitoring because their goal is to preserve Lake Tahoe, so they're regulated for different types of contaminants than mining companies. Their main goal is to maintain the clarity of Lake Tahoe."

Read the whole story