Placer Valley hires former Tahoe marketing exec

By Mark Anderson, Sacramento Business Journal

The board of directors of Placer Valley Tourism hired Dave Attaway as the chief executive of the tourism bureau for Roseville, Rocklin and Lincoln.

Since 2005, Attaway was executive director for the Switzerland County Tourism in Vevay, Ind.

Prior to that Attaway worked 13 years in South Lake Tahoe, with most of that time at what was Caesars Tahoe in Stateline in hotel entertainment and marketing.

He led the merger of the South Tahoe Marketing Council with the South Lake Tahoe Visitors Bureau into what is now the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority.

Read the whole story

Ground continues to shake near Reno

By Steve Timko, Reno Gazette-Journal

The eight new earthquakes today near the Arrowcreek area southwest of Reno brings the total quakes in that area since Nov. 26 to about 43.

This comes after a pause when there was no quake greater than magnitude 1 between 1:50pm on Tuesday and 4:07am on Thursday.

“It looks like it slowed down a little bit, but it’s difficult to tell within a 24-hour period,” said Tom Rennie, a seismic analyst with the Nevada Seismological Laboratory. “These sequences last for a long time.”

The swarm started Nov. 26 as part of normal movement of the chunks of the earth’s crust – called tectonic plates – that move because of the forces of the earth. This swarm is in the area of the Mount Rose fault but these quakes are not on that fault, the seismic lab said.

Read the whole story

South Tahoe hires recreation director from Sparks

By Kathryn Reed

Parks and recreation may be the toy department of any city, but being the leader is more than fun and games. Stan Sherer knows that reality all too well.

Sherer is leaving his job as director of the Sparks Parks and Recreation Department for the same job in South Lake Tahoe. He starts in January.

His 16 years of experience in Sparks and more than 30 years in the industry are reasons City Manager Tony O’Rourke wanted him to take the helm. (Gary Moore retired Oct. 1 after 35 years.)

“He has tremendous energy. He is similar to Gary in that he has charisma and energy,” O’Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I see him as an asset for the whole city given his experience and leadership style.”



The new parks and recreation director will need to deal with issues at the ice arena.

Sherer knows what he is walking into – a city with financial troubles, a city manager who has been on the job four months, a City Council majority that will be new this month, facilities that are in need of repair, and residents who are not all thrilled with what has been going on in the department.

The 58-year-old is versed in having to work with less money and knows the pain involved in laying off employees. He also has been involved in creating parks, reducing hours at facilities, establishing partnerships with Reno and Washoe County to save on maintenance expenses and seasonal employees, being part of special events, opening a restaurant at a park, and launching a whitewater park.

Coming to a smaller department with fewer amenities than Sparks, or what he had the previous 14 years in Redding, doesn't matter to Sherer.

"You look at the potential and successes they have had in South Lake Tahoe and it is really exciting," Sherer said. "Initially, when you think about it, the area is one of the greatest recreation destinations on the West Coast."

He wants to build on that. He also recognizes the need to

rehabilitate some facilities, which could mean creating partnerships to financially solve those problems.

With ice hockey parents disgruntled and leaving town in swarms because of how they have been treated and policies that point to favoritism, Sherer will need to jump into that fray immediately. (O'Rourke has another meeting with parents today.)

Chris Hawken, No. 2 under Moore and interim parks director, had applied to be director. He was unavailable for comment so it's not known if he will want to stay on. And it's too early to know if Sherer will want to make personnel changes.

Sherer and his wife plan to move to South Tahoe – having spoken to a real estate agent Dec. 2. They have two grown sons – one of whom is trying to convince his dad to get into mountain biking. Sherer said the move to Tahoe would likely spur him to do so. For now, road bike riding is what he prefers.

Sherer told *Lake Tahoe News* he expects to be an active member of the community. Athletic-wise he is at the gym every day, and he loves to golf and hike. Skiing is out after three knee surgeries – one related to skiing, the others to football.

Crash course on S. Tahoe inner workings for council-elect

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe's three incoming City Council members got a

taste Thursday of what it is going to be like once they are sworn in Dec. 14 for their four-year term.

Walk into council chambers at Lake Tahoe Airport with a clear schedule for the day because you don’t know how long the meeting will last. That was one lesson. The 9am meeting was supposed to be done about noon. It was over closer to 2:30pm.

Don’t expect the agenda to follow what’s printed. In the case of the Dec. 2 meeting, public safety moved up three spots to accommodate Police Chief Brian Uhler needing to be at another meeting.



Angela Swanson, Tom Davis, Claire Fortier

This was the first of two initiation sessions for Claire Fortier, Tom Davis and Angela Swanson. The Dec. 2 meeting was all about getting a lesson on open meeting laws, who may talk to whom when, what is considered a gift and if it can be accepted or needs to be declared. It was also about all the department heads sharing what is going on and their concerns.

Next week’s get-together is with outside agencies which are partners with the city so the three have an idea of who else is in the sandbox.

Fire Chief Lorenzo Gigliotti was after Uhler. This led to another lesson. It can take multiple questions by a councilmember to get an answer to the first question.

Councilwoman-elect Swanson wanted to know more about the ladder truck that was supposed to be bought through Redevelopment Agency funds once Lake Tahoe Development Company was given its building permits for the now bankrupt convention center near Stateline.

Gigliotti didn't have an answer for why the city didn't receive its money before developer Randy Lane filed for bankruptcy in October 2009. What was revealed is the original price tag to replace the 26-year-old outdated ladder truck was $675,000. With California law changing, the vehicle now costs $800,000 – and it would not fit into any of the fire stations.

The city worked the ladder truck into the original agreement because it would be needed to fight a fire at the center. Now it's possible the city will lobby to get a firehouse built with mitigation funds from whatever might rise from the rebar and concrete.

But, still, no funding exists for the ladder truck. Gigliotti's first answer, when pressed by Swanson about how to fund it, was to tax property owners. The second idea was to up the transient occupancy tax.

This discussion all came after Finance Director Christine Vuletich detailed what a sorry state of affairs the city's finances are in – which isn't news.

"The days of wine and rose are over and I don't anticipate them coming back soon," City Manager Tony O'Rourke said.

He said it is possible to use the operating reserve one more year as a stopgap measure before dipping below the 25 percent threshold, which is about $8 million.

"Our biggest problem is a complete infrastructure deficit," O'Rourke said.

A sign of the economy improving is the peak unemployment of

18.1 percent for South Lake in spring 2010 has dropped to 15.9 percent in October.

Councilwoman-elect Fortier, who is touted to be the next mayor pro tem, asked if the drop relates to those people not living in town anymore.

To this, Vuletich said, “It could be.”

She had no reason why unemployment numbers are changing.

The general fund is expected to have a deficit of $2 million to $3 million for the next five years.

Vuletich spoke a bit about the five-year budget plan O’Rourke has told her and others to come up with. She expects a report and plan to be presented to the council in February.

South Tahoe police chief looks to overhaul department

By Kathryn Reed

Honeymoons are supposed to last longer than eight days for department heads. No so for South Lake Tahoe’s police chief.

Brian Uhler has been tasked with handling a reorganization of the department because Lt. Marty Hale has announced he is retiring Dec. 30.

“We’re considering a restructure. It could possibly mean more boots on the ground at the line level,” Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I’m not prepared to say we need more or less officers.”



Brian Uhler

Hale said his retirement has nothing to do with not being given the chief's job. When he got the notice the city manager was going outside the department he looked at the two-year service credit as incentive for early retirement and filled out the paperwork.

Hale, who is in his 50s, has been with the department a little more than 24 years. He worked for 2½ years for the Utah County Sheriff's Department near Provo after graduating from Brigham Young University.

"It's been a great place to work and a good community," Hale said of South Tahoe.

He won't be leaving for good right away. He will work on a part-time basis through June, but at retired stats. This gives Uhler, who has been on the job less than a month, time to figure out how to structure the department, as well as allows Hale to be on the job when Lt. David Stevenson attends the FBI Academy in April.

But Hale doesn't know what he will do when summer comes along.

"I can pick and choose what my next career will be," Hale said. He isn't committed to staying a resident of the Carson Valley either.

Learning the ropes

Uhler has been busy meeting with groups in the department and scheduling one-on-one sessions with sworn and non-sworn

personnel. He’s asking what they want.

Officers are saying they want more training. The current City Council has wiped most training off the books for financial reasons without much analysis to know what the training might have been for.

El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury has told Uhler he needs officers who are trained to be expert witnesses in gang cases in order for suspects to be put behind bars.

Uhler is contemplating an officer exchange with a department well versed in this regard.

He was able to get in on the last part of a meeting Thursday with the South Lake El Dorado Narcotics Enforcement Team members.

The police associations will meet Dec. 6, with the reorg on the agenda.

On Dec. 8 a department-wide meeting is scheduled to discuss ideas everyone has for what the future of the department looks like.

“I hope we come to some consensus with what to do in the future, or at least a clear understanding of where we are going,” Uhler said.

Staffing issues

With Hale’s departure, it leaves one lieutenant and one captain right under Uhler. That would be an unusual hierarchy if it were left that way.

“I don’t like administrative duties to fall on the sergeants,” Uhler said. “They oversee the officers in the field. If we take the sergeants out of the field, we undermine ourselves.”

Capt. Martin Hewlett, who was interim chief after Terry Daniels left nearly a year ago, never wanted to be top cop. But he has said retirement isn't that far off. That prospect allows Uhler to envision longer term at what the department may look like.

Uhler is quick to say he has made no decisions about what changes are forthcoming. He knows officers are interested in working four 10-hour shifts, some want to work 12-hour stints.

In the department's 45-year history there have been a dozen reorganizations. There are those who remember when the department was more flush with personnel. Today three sworn and one non-sworn positions are frozen.

On the community survey City Manager Tony O'Rourke is developing will be questions about what the residents want from the police department. Uhler believes too many programs are in place because the resources to carry them out don't exist. He wants citizens to help prioritize what the department should be doing besides the expected patrol.

As Uhler examines how the department operates he is also analyzing patrolling patterns that create a dead zone in the middle of town while the bulk of activity is near the state line and Y.

Then there is the issue of the workload tripling on a Friday from 8pm to 2am, but not triple the staff to handle it.

It might be possible to utilize reserves more often to handle things like traffic, where guns and handcuffs aren't warranted.

Other concerns

Uhler's signature is already on the bid documents to acquire five patrol cars. He said the fleet of 28 vehicles is in sorry shape. He called it "eye-opening" to find out the percentage

that need replacing – 17 of those 28.

Instead of continuing to buy vehicles outright, he wants to investigate a lease option.

To deal with the sketchy technology, Uhler met Wednesday with Lt. Les Lovell of the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department to talk about sharing a system. He is meeting with Sheriff-elect John D'Agostini today.

The radio system the police use was implemented in 1985. Now it is costing the city more than $100,000 a year to keep putting Band-Aids on it, is how Uhler describes it. He said how reports are done via the antiquated computer system means officers are in the station and off the street for longer periods than seem reasonable.

Combining resources with the county would mean each could tap into the system to know if the other had had an encounter with a suspect. It's also possible SLTPD could handle the sheriff's dispatch instead of it being routed through Placerville.

While Uhler sorts through what needs to be done at the station, he still hasn't unpacked his house and is living among boxes.

Judge appoints expert to study Garrido's mental state

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

The judge in the Phillip Garrido case today appointed an expert on "malingering" to assess the accused kidnapper and rapist's mental state, and his lawyer revealed she may seek a

change of venue for at least part of the case.

Garrido, accused of kidnapping Jaycee Lee Dugard in 1991 when she was 11, already is the subject of a mental evaluation requested by his public defender and El Dorado Superior Court Judge Douglas Phimister.

But the judge said he wanted another expert to also examine Garrido, but didn't elaborate why.

District Attorney Vern Pierson said after the hearing that he believes Garrido will be found competent to stand trial along with his wife, Nancy.

Read the whole story

Search suspended for missing Reno hiker

By Reno Gazette-Journal

The Washoe County Sheriff's Office has suspended the search for a man who called in to dispatch Nov. 21 and reported he was lost in the Galena Creek area.

They will resume search and recovery for Rick Gentry, 55, when weather allows, the sheriff's office said. The RAVEN helicopter will continue to search the Galena, Thomas and Whites creek areas as part of their routine duties.

Gentry used his cell phone to report he was lost and was wearing only jeans and a windbreaker.

Read the whole story

Home prices sputtering regionally

By Ron Trujillo, Sacramento Business Journal

It was better times, it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom, after the age of foolishness.



OK, so I altered a few of the classic words, but when you are dealing with the housing market, changing a few things is almost required.

And a lot has changed, especially in the four-county region during the past few years. In fact, we are talking about a tale of two markets – one with great expectations and the other facing grim reality.

Sacramento-area's median-home price – meaning half the homes sold for more, the other for less – has increased a modest-but-respectable 7.6 percent to $180,000 from the so-called bottom of the market in April 2009, when homeowners hung their heads and home-shoppers licked their lips with the lowest prices in several years.

Read the whole story

Swarm of quakes keeps Reno scientists on their toes

By Frank X. Mullen Jr., Reno Gazette-Journal

Seismologists at the University of Nevada, Reno are keeping their eyes on the ArrowCreek area of Reno where a swarm of 21 small earthquakes were recorded between Friday and Sunday and another small temblor hit Monday morning.

“The earthquakes have all been in about the same spot,” said Ken Smith, a seismologist at UNR’s Nevada Seismological Laboratory. “It’s a little cluster. I felt it in north Reno.”

The strongest temblor was measured at a magnitude 3 on Friday. The quake Monday at 10:22am was a 2.1 magnitude. No damage was reported from either event.

He said such earthquake sequences aren’t unusual in Nevada, but because quake swarms are sometimes precursors to stronger temblors, his lab is keeping tabs on the activity.

Read the whole story

South Tahoe firefighters vote no confidence against chief

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe firefighters have taken a vote of no confidence against Fire Chief Lorenzo Gigliotti.

The lack of credibility, communication and leadership are the

issues firefighters have with the chief.

Gigliotti, who will have been at the helm for six years as of January, did not know about the vote until contacted by *Lake Tahoe News*.



Lorenzo Gigliotti

Asked if the news came as a surprise, he said, “Absolutely.” He considers his relationship with the rank and file members as “pretty good.”

The members, who belong to International Firefighter Association Local 4427 and the South Lake Tahoe Firefighters Association, have been disgruntled for a number of years with Gigliotti’s leadership.

It wasn’t until this fall that the vote of no confidence was taken to ensure it wasn’t just the lousy economic situation that was influencing perceptions of how things are in the department, as well as three years of on again, off again contract negotiations.

Union President Dan Sullivan deferred comment to Kim Gillingham of Goyette and Associates, the union’s labor representative based in Gold River near Rancho Cordova.

“We distributed the executive evaluation form to all of our members. We did meet with the city manager about four weeks ago. We told him the vote of no confidence was done,” Gillingham said.

City Manager Tony O'Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News*, "I haven't gotten anything official. I heard grumblings, but I haven't heard anything official. I would expect a letter or some communiqué."

Gillingham said another meeting had been set up two weeks ago with O'Rourke and Human Resources Director Janet Emmett, but O'Rourke had to cancel. It was rescheduled for a day when a storm hit. Another meeting has not been set.

"The goal is not to create more acrimony or compromise the community, but to share concerns so we can improve the department," Gillingham said. "This was not a traditional vote of no confidence. The vote of no confidence was to ensure the concern raised was a universal perception, and now what to do and how to start to create transparency."

But in paramilitary organizations like a police or fire department, a vote of no confidence is sending an unmistakable message that officers are demanding changes – whether it is personnel or behavior.

O'Rourke said he wants to talk to the union and the chief to resolve the issues. He believes critical critiques can be "a road map for improvement."

"It gives me concern, but it also gives me the opportunity to help him and the help the department to improve in those areas," O'Rourke said.

He is conducting a survey next week of all city staff – which he has wanted to do since being hired in August. He is interested to see if what the firefighters say on that survey is similar to what the union is presenting.

Issues the firefighters have are working in a culture of fear – some were even afraid to participate in the vote of no confidence, Gillingham said. Fear of being black listed or not being promoted are concerns.

“The fear runs pretty rampant,” Gillingham said.

She said the union wants all parties to work together, but that hasn’t happened for years.

A memorandum of understanding the union has with management is there will be regular meetings between the two. Gigliotti has essentially eliminated those.

Gillingham says this exacerbates the distrust employees have with the chief.

Firefighters aren’t thrilled with some of the expenditures the chief has authorized either.

The duty chief response vehicle was replaced in the 2009-10 budget for about $52,000. But fire personnel who spoke to *Lake Tahoe News* off the record, which gets back to the fear factor, said this vehicle is not needed because all the chief officers have a vehicle and one of them is retiring at the first of the year.

What bothers the men and women in the department is what they call reckless spending for an unneeded vehicle when it wasn’t until March that a 1982 fire engine was taken out of service. It no longer met state emissions standards.

“It is not the practice of the fire department to require fire department employees to sign any form of waiver or ‘liability form’ to drive,” Gigliotti said.

But that isn’t what more than one firefighter told *Lake Tahoe News*. They said management asked for the form to be signed before this particular vehicle was driven.

Gigliotti said this engine has not been replaced because there has not been the funding to do so. It costs about $70,000 to replace. So, management got a vehicle, but the firefighters have one less to use.

Funds for fire vehicles come from Proposition 172, the state safety sales tax, Gigliotti said.

“Proposed within the 2010-11 budget was the pursuit of grant funds to replace an engine, however, the 10 percent match created an impact which compromised a balanced budget so it was determined to pursue grant opportunities and should a grant be funded, to bring the grant back to the council for consideration and possible budget amendment. The result is this activity does not appear in the current budget document,” Gigliotti said.

It is the City Council that ultimately decides which vehicles to buy – so they chose the manager vehicle with all of its bells and whistles instead of an apparatus to fight fires.