Fortier: become a world-class, eco-resort and recreation destination

Publisher's note: ***Lake Tahoe News is profiling candidates for South Lake Tahoe City Council and Douglas County Commission. The stories are being published in the order they were received.***

Name: Claire Fortier

Age: 57

How long have you lived in South Lake Tahoe?: 17 years

Job/profession: A former newspaper editor and CEO of a local medical practice, I now operate Laren Communications, a network of project-based communications freelancers.



Claire Fortier

What would you build or tear down on the South Shore to make it great, as in what Whistler is like?:

Since I have never been to Whistler, I can't compare it to South Lake Tahoe. However, I would tear down the energy-inefficient, rundown buildings in strip shopping centers and replace them with carefully considered, energy efficient, beautifully designed little shopping clusters that draw people

out of their cars and into small community nodes and pocket parks. I would make those nodes easily accessible by pedestrians and cyclists.

What form of recreation do you participate in? What recreation improvements would you strive to make in SLT?:

I hike, kayak, fish, camp, bike, garden, photograph and attend as many of the local events as I can afford, especially if they serve wine.

The South Shore should become a world-class, eco-resort and recreation destination. We should strive to improve all of our recreational infrastructure from bike trails to ball fields. From AYSO to the Olympics to disc golf to sledding, South Lake Tahoe should be the place that the world comes to play.

Recreation tourism is expected to be the driving force of the South Shore economy in the coming years, and according to a decade-old study, the majority of the South Lake Tahoe residents would like to see cycling-type facilities and maintenance projects. So, what do you specifically plan to do to improve our substandard, dangerous bike paths and lanes and roads beyond hiring a consultant to tell us how bad they are?

I support the work already in progress through the TRPA's 2010 Lake Tahoe Region Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. A strong community network, that has included the Lake Tahoe Bicycle Coalition and Sustainable Tahoe, has worked hard to develop that plan. When on City Council, I will work closely with the California Tahoe Conservancy, the TRPA and other governmental entities to make sure that plan becomes a reality. I will also look for opportunities with new redevelopment and street projects, like the project to upgrade Highway 50, to make the bike plan a reality. I will see what funding mechanisms are available to us now and in the future to complete and maintain South Shore bike paths.

What are the three major issues facing South Lake Tahoe and

how do you expect in four years to make it so they are not major issues when your tenure is through?

1. The most immediate issue facing our city is creating a transparent, accountable and innovative city government. With a new city manager and three new city councilmembers, that goal can be achieved immediately. And voters have an opportunity to make real changes. Voters must choose candidates who really understand the city's issues, who believe in cooperation as the only means to achieving measurable results and who have the courage make the tough decisions when necessary. I am one of those candidates.

2. We need to draft and then implement a five-year strategic plan based on a sustainable city budget and three or four achievable objectives. I would like those objectives to address the difficulty of doing business in the city and the basin, our city's crumbling infrastructure and the need to rebuild community.

3. We must build stronger connections with entities in the city boundaries, such as LTUSD and STPUD. We need to develop common goals and mutual areas of support with neighboring jurisdictions. We need to become a regional leader in the TRPA Regional Plan process and the new Prosperity Plan. The city is at a tipping point. We can either make a commitment to living prosperously within the environmental constraints of our delicate ecosystem or we can do nothing and consequently become nothing but a fading 1950s ghost town.

What compelling idea have you read in the citizens' input of the revamped, in-progress update of the city's General Plan?:

I am a strong proponent of the building code section that raises the bar on green building. I also support the idea of nodes of denser development that include pocket parks and surrounding green zones. I believe the city's push for sustainability has been a positive development since we must

live compatibly with our spectacular natural environment.

How do you plan to boost revenue in SLT?:

I plan to charge *Lake Tahoe News* a per-word content fee for the many questions they have asked me to answer. I pledge to donate that money back to the city.

Seriously, this is the biggest question facing our community, and there are no quick and easy answers. I would make the city friendlier to small businesses, because Mom and Pop are where to shop. I would encourage events, big and small, as ways of generating tourist dollars. I would establish a sustainability plan that focuses on capturing federal and state grant money for creating a green community, including establishing a training program for green building at the college. I would get the Hole filled as soon as possible with something other than timeshare. I would work with the great minds who have already developed a Prosperity Plan to map our economic viability. For example, enhancing our health and wellness business sector is a natural direction we should go.

What stands out to you in the 2010-11 budget?

There are a number of things that stand out about the budget, but overall this is what I think:

• We should thank the past few city councils that have made fiscally prudent decisions during the good times to give us a buffer that is not enjoyed by so many cities today.

• Our luck is running out and we need to address a $12 million shortfall over the next five years. We need to look at 2010-11 budget not so much with how we scraped by this time, but how we will operate in five years.

• A new council needs to look at the budget with fresh eyes to reexamine all aspects of our city government. We need to consider what is necessary and what has become customary.

What needs to be done to allow businesses to thrive in SLT?

Again, this question requires more than a few sentences to answer. But even with unlimited space, I don't think I have adequate answers without some real investigation. One of my first acts as a councilmember would be to develop a business advisory board to get just those answers. What I have heard from business owners is that lack of coordination between agencies on the regional level and the lack of follow-through on a city level.

The city seems to have no consolidated approach to the business community. More collaboration with local chambers of commerce and other business organizations is crucial. Improving the business climate in South Lake Tahoe is of paramount importance because it drives the financial health of community.

What have you done to help South Lake Tahoe be a better community?

I'm running for City Council because I want to move from the sidelines onto the field to actually improve our town. Currently, I chair the city's Sustainability Commission. But my involvement with the South Shore community goes back 17 years. I have done everything from volunteering at community events to picking up trash along our waterways. I have mentored high school students, sat on the St. Theresa's school board, establish the high school newspaper and coached Odyssey of the Mind teams. I helped organize a successful film festival with the American Film Institute and built an online issues forum on local concerns. I have hosted fundraisers for arts organizations and youth sports, and donated my time and resources to numerous other organizations. I have served up Christmas dinners to the hungry and marched for gay marriage. I have been involved in all manner of commissions, committees, coalitions and collaborations. In other words, I have been deeply involved with helping make South Lake Tahoe a better

community since I claimed this city as my own in 1993.

What boards, commissions, or other experience do you have?

This seems a bit redundant after my previous answer but let me list a few:

• City of South Lake Tahoe Sustainability Commission

• Tahoe Transportation District Board

• Tahoe Douglas Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors

• Citizens Advisory Panel for the Upper Truckee River—California Tahoe Conservancy

• Lake Tahoe AIDS Task Force Board of Directors

• Lake Tahoe Film Festival Board of Directors

• St. Theresa's Catholic School Advisory Commission

• Adjunct professor at Lake Tahoe Community College

• Recent recipient of a master's degree in environmental journalism from the University of Nevada, Reno that focused on Lake Tahoe environmental issues

Why should voters vote for you over someone else?

I am a good listener and believe that hearing from the community is the first step to making good decisions. I am an independent thinker with a real understanding of all the issues facing the city and the Tahoe basin. I understand that blue can be green: We can reach a balance between our environmental and economic prosperity.

As the editor of the local newspaper and through my project work, I know the people, positions and posturing of various entities and am not afraid to stand up for what I believe is in the best interest of the city.

I have no hidden agenda, nor am I beholden to any special interest. I will not benefit financially from this position, nor will my family.

Quite simply, I am a 17-year resident of South Lake Tahoe who is passionate about rebuilding a thriving community and developing a first class eco-resort.

BlueGo, the public transit, is mired in lawsuits and bankruptcy. Do we need public transit on the South Shore? If so, how do you propose to make it functional?

Yes, we need some form of public transportation, but what form that takes really depends on what is economically viable. As most of the information on BlueGo has not been available for public inspection, I am not in a position to determine what is best for the organization. But I would consider this a high priority since many city residents rely on BlueGo for their daily transportation needs.

Do you support commercial air service at Lake Tahoe Airport? Why or why not?

Yes, I support commercial air service at Lake Tahoe in the manner that has been dictated by the litigation settlement agreement. That means no more than 10 flights a day, with around 125 passengers per flight and a noise level that is equivalent to a vacuum cleaner. Commercial air service could generate more than $50 million a year for our area with little impact on the environment. I don’t think we can afford to let that revenue just fly away.

Is there any individual, group or organization you would not take campaign money from? Why?

Not so far, so please send a check.

I would not take money from any organization or group that I felt operated illegally or expected that a check would trade

for a vote. Otherwise, the public needs to understand that running a campaign is a costly endeavor.

Nepotism and favoritism runs rampant in the city when it comes to hiring preferences. The council sets policy. What type of policy would you write regarding nepotism and favoritism?

Again, that's an issue that I can't begin to address in a short paragraph. In general, I believe that nepotism can create a hostile work environment and create unnecessary alliances. But I have no real idea, and won't until I am on council, the extent of the problem and how to fix it. Certainly there can be no direct reports or inappropriate influences. Our citizens deserve a city organization with the highest ethical standards and I will work toward that end.

You and three other council candidates met with the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce. Then you and two others were invited back for a follow-up meeting. Tell us about that meeting.

I welcome the opportunity to meet with any group in town. As for the chamber, I was not invited to meet with them. As a matter of fact, I attended my first chamber meeting [Sept. 16]. I was asked to address a group of business people, many of whom I didn't know, on where I stood on a number of local issues. It was the same type of invitation I received recently from the Carpenters Union. Hopefully, other groups will be inviting me as well.

What makes you more committed to this run for council than in 2002 when you dropped out and your name was left on the ballot?

My circumstances have changed in many ways. I am no longer running a busy local business. I am no longer raising two preteen boys who required dinner daily, rides to soccer and other sports, and help on their homework. And I have a spouse whose employment is not dependent on the decisions I make on

behalf of the city.

Tell us something about yourself that voters don't already know:

At my first event as editor of the *Tahoe Daily Tribune*, I was asked to sing in front the joint event of the chambers of commerce. My song choice was "Please Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood." I am still taking requests.

McDermid: tourism infrastructure is an area to vastly improve upon

Publisher's note: ***Lake Tahoe News is profiling candidates for South Lake Tahoe City Council and Douglas County Commission. The stories are being published in the order they were received.***

Name: Nancy McDermid

Age: 67

Hometown: Wichita Falls, Texas

How long have you lived here?: Since 1979 in Tahoe, 2000 in the Carson Valley.

Job/profession: Developer-owner-operator limited service lodging properties



Nancy McDermid

What would you build or tear down on the South Shore to make it great, as in what Whistler is like?:

On the Nevada side, the Lower Kingsbury commercial area to the lake needs to be redesigned and rebuilt. There are some newer properties which are very nice, but most of it and in the Stateline Casino corridor are old, dated and need to be re-done to get more economic life for the next 30-40 years. Doing this would bring the environmental improvements (water quality improvements, etc.) as well as greater economic benefit. We need to continue to look for public-private partnerships to make this happen.

What form of recreation do you participate in?:

Walking, hiking, cycling, golf, swimming, snowshoeing, skiing, kayaking.

What improvements to recreation would you strive to make throughout Douglas County?:

Bikeways on and off road, more trails, greater pedestrian trails, more horizontal and vertical connectivity through trails, a permanent world-class motocross track in the right location, better soaring facilities at the airport, complete the swimming pool at Kahle Park, create sport parks for all ages from toddlers to senior citizens, dog parks.

Recreation tourism is expected to be the driving force of the South Shore economy in the coming years, what do you specifically plan to do to improve bike paths and roads?:

The South Demo project from Stateline to Round Hill Pines for cyclists is one project I fully support. Also, the Sierra Colina and Beach projects have potential for linear public linkage to the lake and to Kahle Park. As for roads, being able to adequately maintain what currently exists is challenging because the funding is shrinking. Again, public-private partnerships could be one way to achieve more paths and improved roads.

How do you plan to boost revenue in Douglas County?:

We are looking at bringing more businesses to Douglas County, businesses that fit our values and quality of life. The LTBPP and the Douglas County Economic Development Vitality Plan are critical for the future financial stability and sustainability of the county. It is vital we implement the components in those plans.

What stands out for you in the 2010-11 budget?:

We balanced the budget through the cooperation of the different elected officials and departments working together. We have not had massive layoffs or furloughs though our workforce is down 15 percent through retirement and not filling positions. Our employees are terrific and are working hard despite being stretched as they maintain their workload and provide services for the residents.

What needs to be done to allow businesses to thrive in Douglas County?:

We can streamline our permitting process, update our does and design standards, support our current businesses by meeting with and asking them how the county can be supportive and add new businesses which fit our lifestyle. We need to be cognizant of government creep with regard to regulations and ordinances which hamper business.

What are the three major issues facing Douglas County and how

to expect in four years to make it so they are not major issues when your tenure is through?:

Tourism infrastructure in the county is an area we need to vastly improve upon, and I would strive to work with our private sector to accomplish providing those amenities for our visitors and residents.

Economic vitality – The LTBPP, the Community Assessment and the Economic Development Vitality Plan need to be implemented by working diligently with other jurisdictions, the private sector, different agencies and our residents to make certain these plans do not just take up shelf space.

Quality of life – We will protect our environment while providing greater public access to public land and by being financially responsible, keeping expenditures in line with revenues.

What have you done to help Douglas County be a better community?:

Since coming to Tahoe in the 1970s, I have engaged in numerous activities to help our community thrive. Whether it was my kids' activities, business activities, fundraising activities, or community volunteer organizations, I have been a tireless, energetic worker. When I say yes to do something, I do not undertake it lightly. I was schooled in my early years by my family to be engaged and make a difference. Two rules I follow: "there are the talkers and then there are the doers" and "always do your best and follow your heart."

What boards, commissions, or other experience do you have?:

AYSO soccer (coach, referee, commissioner), LTUSD District Advisory Committee, life member of Barton Hospital Auxiliary, charter member and life member of the South Lake Tahoe Cancer League, Soroptimist International (SLT and Carson Valley), treasurer (three years) of Heavenly Blue Angels, treasurer

Leadership Lake Tahoe inaugural class, president of Northern Nevada Ladies Golf Association, president Genoa Lakes Golf Association and Silver Oak Ladies Golf Association, Douglas County Republican Central Committee, Sierra Nevada Republican Women, Douglas County Republican Women, DAWG, Tahoe Rim Trail Association, Carson Valley Trails Association, to name just a few.

Why should voters vote for you over someone else?:

I have successful business and government experience and the energy to work full time as county commissioner. The last seven plus years is a matter of public record with regard to my decisions as a planning commissioner and county commissioner. I am committed to Douglas County and I offer principled leadership and trusted experience along with the pledge I made four years ago to be accessible to all and beholden to no special interest group, and to work my hardest and smartest to help protect our quality of life in Douglas County.

What would you do to make the lake and valley more unified?:

Douglas county is like a large family; many different individual and unique parts. From Topaz to Ruhenstroth, to Fish Springs to the towns of Gardnerville, Minden and Genoa, to Indian Hills and North County, the East and West Valleys, and Tahoe. All special and all part of the whole. Like families, we need to celebrate our unity and respect our individual characteristics. Perhaps we need to have our visitors authorities and our chambers hold joint meetings and provide events Douglas County.

BlueGo, the public transit, is mired in lawsuits and bankruptcy. Do we need public transit on the South Shore? If so, how do you propose to make it functional?:

Yes, we do need public transit. It is a vital component of the transportation system. The solution for public transit on the

South Shore is to have it administered under the Tahoe Transportation District.

What is your stance on the 100-room rule for gaming growth in the county?:

We have five hotel casinos at the lake and two in the valley plus two more which have been approved along with one stand alone casino. Both Washoe and Clark counties require 200-room minimums and Carson City requires the 100 rooms. Thus, Douglas County is compliant with our sister county to the north. Anyone who wants to build a lodging property can do so provided the zoning allows it. A non-restricted gaming license is a privilege granted by the state, and Douglas County requires Tourist commercial zoning for such a license. One of the Master Plan goals is to support existing businesses. This requirement does that.

Consolidation of water agencies is stalled, yet ratepayers are faced with higher bills. What are your thoughts on this issue?:

We must work over the next few months to find more solutions to the water issues. Higher rates are just not acceptable. We are looking at every possibility from grants to out of the box thinking. I would hope to have a committee to assist the board in crafting solutions.

On the November ballot is an ordinance regarding the Minden airport. What is your position on it and why?:

Commissioners are not able to take positions on ballot questions.

Is there any individual, group or organization you would not take campaign money from? Why?:

Clearly not from any illegal entity or unknown person or organization for obvious reasons.

Tell us something about yourself that voters don't already know:

In my youth I competed in barrel racing; I have climbed Mt. Whitney, I am a member of the NRA and qualified to carry a 9mm Smith and Wesson.

---

2 El Dorado County sheriff's candidates in final lap

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

One of the area's longest-running local elections – a two-year marathon – is nearing the finish line.

"It's kind of like 'Groundhog Day.' It just goes on and on," said Craig Therkildsen, who faces John D'Agostini in a Nov. 2 run-off for El Dorado County sheriff.

D'Agostini decided to run against then-El Dorado County Sheriff Jeff Neves back in September 2008, he said.

Neves' decision to step down, announced in 2009, set off a 12-month, six-candidate race that ended in June when D'Agostini edged Therkildsen – a sheriff's captain whom Neves favored as a successor – in the primary.

Read the whole story

South Tahoe provides answers to budget questions

On Sept. 29, *Lake Tahoe News* ran a story about the South Lake Tahoe budget for fiscal year 2010-11, which started Oct. 1. In that story a list of questions was posed to city staff. They went unanswered.

However, the city's Finance Department provided answers to the questions on Oct. 8. Click on answers to read what the city has to say.

LTN will analyze the answers in the coming weeks as well as the more complete budget documents that were provided by the city. Those documents were only secured after much back-and-forth about what a public document is and when the public ought to be able to view said document.

LTN is striving to provide transparency about where local tax dollars go, the budget process, the reliance the city has on grants, as well as bring awareness to the difficulty there is in getting straight, timely answers from some city departments.

– Kathryn Reed

Schwarzenegger signs

California budget

By Jim Sanders and Torey Van Oot, Sacramento Bee

Signed, sealed and delivered.

California's record-long budget impasse ended in a whirlwind Friday that included an all-night legislative session followed by nearly $1 billion in line-item vetoes by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The $86.6 billion spending plan is no cure-all. California faces the prospect of massive red ink again next year. For now, however, the nightmare is over.

"It is often said that politics is the art of compromise and, let me tell you, this is exactly what this budget is – it's compromise," Schwarzenegger said.

Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg was pleased but not rejoicing.

Read the whole story

Gooch: address the distrust of the City Council and the infamous Grand Jury Report

Publisher's note: ***Lake Tahoe News is profiling candidates for South Lake Tahoe City Council and Douglas County Commission. The stories are being published in the order they were received.***

Name: Adrian Gooch

Age: 57

How long have you lived in South Lake Tahoe? 35 years

Job/profession: Retired



Adrian Gooch

What would you build or tear down on the South Shore to make it great, as in what Whistler is like?:

I would continue every effort possible to get the convention center built. As an additional remark – I think South Lake Tahoe is pretty great.

What form of recreation do you participate in? What recreation improvements would you strive to make in SLT?:

My family and I are huge sports fans. In my younger years I participated in softball, volleyball, and bowling (I was terrible at volleyball, but had fun anyways). Now I enjoy easy hikes, walking, and a little kayaking. Many years ago when our children were younger we were involved in Little League, Babe Ruth, football, basketball, soccer, and bowling. Now we get to live vicariously through our children and our oldest granddaughter and we try to attend as many functions as possible to show our support while they play softball, soccer, basketball, and dance. The Parks and Recreation Department does a fantastic job of offering recreation options for the community. I do not have a favorite or preferred recreation. I

would support any recreation improvement that is reasonable and financially prudent.

Recreation tourism is expected to be the driving force of the South Shore economy in the coming years, and according to a decade-old study, the majority of the South Lake Tahoe residents would like to see cycling-type facilities and maintenance projects. So, what do you specifically plan to do to improve our substandard, dangerous bike paths and lanes and roads beyond hiring a consultant to tell us how bad they are?:

The city does not need to hire a consultant to tell us how bad the above noted items are. I personally am not a cyclist (however, I was the staff person who started the initial research and preparation that was needed from the city for the Bicycle Friendly Award). The city and California Tahoe Conservancy (CTC) have a great partnership in which the CTC funds pay for the construction of the bike paths/trails, but those funds generally do not, or cannot, be used for maintenance. Measure S funding was structured differently so that there are funds available for maintenance and repair. I would like to see if 1) the CTC grants could be structured differently; 2) how about creating a nonprofit "Bicycle Trail" fund that interested parties could donate tax deductible dollars to; and 3) I would ask if the many great cycling events that are held here in SLT contribute any financial assistance toward the maintenance of the bike lanes/paths.

What are the three major issues facing South Lake Tahoe and how do you expect in four years to make it so they are not major issues when your tenure is through?:

The first issue I would address is the current distrust of the City Council and the infamous Grand Jury Report. I will do everything in my power to regain the community's trust in its leadership. This issue needs to be addressed immediately and never stop. I am a common sense person by nature and do not condone any "closed door meetings" (not to be confused with

“Closed Session”). To me a city councilmember is someone who represents the community – this requires listening to what the community is saying whether you agree or not; set goals and policies and stay focused on those goals. Give direction to the city manager and let everyone do their job without micromanaging. Ten years ago having a council subcommittee was the exception to the rule, now it is hard to find an issue where there is not a council subcommittee.

The second issue is community. I would like to brainstorm and come up with some concrete attainable ways to bring people and families back into our community. We need community enhancements that all can enjoy. I am a supporter of affordable housing and that should remain a goal, but I would want to look at enhancing that goal by looking for options in assisting homeowners who are facing foreclosure.

The third issue I believe is directly related to the second issue and that is the economy. The city should consider offering economic incentives such as; streamlining city requirements, fast-tracking any permitting processes, offer business incentives, and encourage or possibly enter into a public/private partnership with the large employers to offer more options for employee housing. I would look at the Economic Development programs and try to find a way to offer the same programs that are currently offered to persons in the low income category and expand the programs to include persons who are in the moderate income category (similar to what was done with the First Time Home Buyer program with the addition of the Moderate Home Buyer program). I would encourage new businesses without sending the mixed message of “the city needs new businesses, but it doesn’t want your business”. The city has in its city code, General Plan, and community plans the requirements which define/outline if a particular business is allowed, where it is allowed, etc.

What compelling idea have you read in the citizens’ input of the revamped, in-progress update of the city’s General Plan?:

What I felt compelling in regards to the citizens' input was two issues that re-occurred during the process, and those were safe pedestrian and bike amenities and a sense of community/neighborhood. I agree.

How do you plan to boost revenue in SLT?:

Seriously look for and pursue a secondary revenue base. "We need to diversify" has been said so many times, that it sounds like a broken record. Tourism is and always will be our primary source of revenue. At one time it was the gaming and the lake, well we all know about the gaming decline, but we still have the lake. I am very interested in the geotourism concept.

Grants are and have been a source of revenue to the city for a long time. However, with grants, usually come restrictions and we have to be very analytical and pencil out what a grant is going to cost the city in the long run. I would like to meet with the city manager and Lori Marino, the grant coordinator, and talk about some grants that may be available from sources that the city has traditionally not applied for.

I would also like to evaluate the amount of additional revenue the city would receive if the Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) was increased from 10 percent to 12 percent for the vacation home rentals. It is my understanding that the city is collecting approximately $1.2 million a year now from vacation home rentals.

Last but not least, I would ask the public and the city employees for suggestions – never underestimate the power of collective brainstorming.

What stands out to you in the 2010-11 budget?:

Well, actually the first area I looked at was the City Council budget. Almost all other departments have been asked in the past "to hold the line" or more currently, to decrease their

budgets. The City Council budget for the 2010-11 fiscal budget year is significantly higher than last this budget year. Why?

What needs to be done to allow businesses to thrive in SLT?:

The city needs to be as supportive as possible. There are various organizations that offer a wide variety of services for the business in SLT. What has never been done (to my knowledge) is a gathering of all the various organizations (city, county, chambers, EDD, LTCC, etc.) to identify who is offering what, identify if any of the services overlap, and more important determine if there is a gap in the services and who is best suited to fill that gap. The more the city can do to help the better, if the city cannot help, it should not hinder.

What have you done to help South Lake Tahoe be a better community?:

I have dedicated 18+ years to the community as an employee of the city. I did a wide variety of duties with good old-fashioned values. I treat all people the same, be fair and honest and always try to do my best.

What boards, commissions, or other experience do you have?:

My experience includes: the Olympic Torch Relay Committee, the recording secretary for the Solid Waste Joint Powers Authority, the city's Information Technology committee (now defunct), recording secretary for the Airport/City, TRPA, League to Save Lake Tahoe, and attorney general negotiation meetings, the formation of the city's housing rehabilitation and the First Time Home Buyer programs, the Heavenly Village, EVR Phase IV, the convention center, Linear Park, the author of the first successful Economic Development Technical Assistance grant, and a committee member for the retirement reception for Father John Grace.

Why should voters vote for you over someone else?:

Because I am exactly what this community needs. I have the government experience and knowledge that is needed. My time working for the city has given me the experience of knowing the "nuts and bolts" of the organization so that I am aware of what goal and/or promise is feasible and attainable. I have had positive interactions with the other governmental agencies and organizations in the community. I also have the knowledge and experience of being a former small business owner in the private sector.

I have the time and the passion to do what I feel is right for this community. I always try to look at an issue from both sides. I am fully aware of the impacts that come from being a city councilmember and I am prepared to take them on and do my best. I want to represent this community, I do not have a desire to be the shock wave of a new higher consciousness, nor be a visionary of a new world of freedom and prosperity. I simply want to serve and improve the community that I live in and love. This council election comes at a very critical time for the community and it is imperative to vote for the right people for the right reason.

BlueGo, the public transit, is mired in lawsuits and bankruptcy. Do we need public transit on the South Shore? If so, how do you propose to make it functional?:

Yes, we need public transit on the South Shore. The profit margin in public transportation is slim to none and I would propose looking at a joint effort in obtaining and retaining a transit provider. When the convention center is built (yes, I believe it will be), there could be an opportunity to tap into a funding source for transit. We also have to remember that the bankruptcy and lawsuits with BlueGo are very unfortunate and disappointing, but the city cannot fix all – there are transit agencies in this community as well.

Do you support commercial air service at Lake Tahoe Airport? Why or why not?:

Yes, I support the Lake Tahoe Airport and feel it is an asset to the city. There are hurdles that will have to be addressed (example: the legal obligations between the city, TRPA, League to Save Lake Tahoe, and the attorney general), but with hard work, compromise and negations, it can be done. How a commercial air service would be structured will most likely be determined by the above mentioned proponents involved in the lawsuit. The commercial air service that is feasible to this community will most likely be a smaller commuter service and that's OK – it would be a step in the right direction.

Is there any individual, group or organization you would not take campaign money from? Why?:

Actually, I have not taken any campaign money from anyone other than my family. Needless to say, my campaign budget is small, but I am also not beholden to any organization or group.

Nepotism and favoritism runs rampant in the city when it comes to hiring preferences. The council sets policy. What type of policy would you write regarding nepotism and favoritism?:

There is a city policy in place for nepotism. The city does have a number of employees that are related and/or married. The ones that I know are good employees who are very conscious of the nepotism policy. This is a small community with only a handful of what you might consider select employers (pay decent wages and offer benefits), it is very unlikely that you will find any of those employers that do not have employees who are related and/or married as well. Being that said, I do believe that the policy can be revisited and strengthened with language that is very clear and enforceable. Favoritism is different – there is not a policy in place that I am aware of. I would initiate a very specific, clearly written policy and have it go into effect immediately. If there is one accusation of favoritism, it should be thoroughly researched, if there are two accusations of favoritism, chances are very high that

you do have a problem that needs to be addressed. It doesn't matter who the employee is or who they know – it is not acceptable and should not be tolerated. I have seen employees who have been let go unjustly and I have seen employees pass their probation period who should not have.

While you were employed by the city of South Lake Tahoe you were a supporter of now former City Manager Dave Jinkens' and spoke highly of him. Is he the type of leader you think is best for the city? Why or why not?:

I had the opportunity to work with David Jinkens when he was city manager and before him, I had the opportunity to work with David Childs. Both were very different in their management styles, but I can tell you that both were very dedicated and hard working individuals. If you could take the admirable traits that each man had and put them together, you would have a very good city manager.

What I respect most in a leader is: high integrity, transparency, leadership by example, fairness, connected to the community, the employees, and the City Council (in that order), and be a team player. I do not want/support a CM to tell me what they think I want to hear – I want a CM to have the courage to tell me what I need to hear.

Do you see any potential conflict as former employee going back and setting policy for friends and former colleagues? Why or why not?:

The answer to this question is probably the easiest one and the answer is – no. You cannot run for City Council without the knowledge that at some point you are going to set policy that some people will like and others will hate – that goes for friends, former colleagues, and the public in general. The employees of the city are very knowledgeable and reasonable. I have to go forward believing that they would trust me to do what I feel is best for the community and the organization.

(In anticipation of a “comment” – most city employees do not live in the city limits, so they are unable to vote for me.)

Tell us something about yourself that voters don’t already know:

I am a smart good listener and very down to earth. I can feel passionate about an issue, but I am not an “in your face, I am right” person. I am goal oriented and strive to keep a positive attitude. I love to surround myself with people who are upbeat, trustworthy and who love to laugh as much as I do. I am patient, but persistent. On the lighter side, I can survive adversity – after all, I am a Red Sox fan.

Nevada gaming win surges in August

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – Strong baccarat play and a rebound in the slot machine business helped casinos on the Las Vegas Strip post a 21-percent increase in gross gaming win for August.

The state Gaming Control Board reported today that, statewide, casinos registered a gross win of $994.4 million, up 11.5 percent. The increase was fueled by increases in Southern Nevada.

The increase of 21 percent by the 41 casinos on the Strip, at $544.3 million, was the biggest gain since February, when the gaming win rose 32.8 percent.

Read the whole story

Swanson: leadership, collaboration and respect need to be primary goals

Publisher's note: ***Lake Tahoe News is profiling candidates for South Lake Tahoe City Council and Douglas County Commission. The stories are being published in the order they were received.***

Name: Angela Swanson

Age: 49

How long have you lived in South Lake Tahoe?: 17 years

Job/profession: School facilities planning consultant



Angela Swanson

What would you build or tear down on the South Shore to make it great, as in what Whistler is like?:

Whistler has done a good job of creating vibrant centers for art, recreation, and government that are lacking in South Lake Tahoe. As a start to create those centers, I'd love to see the Mikasa complex replaced with a quality mixed-use project

featuring live/work lofts, ground floor retail, a reconfigured parking lot, and native landscaping. That corner should symbolize the convergence of our urban core and the Highway 89 scenic/recreation corridor. Having served on the 56-acre [Lakeview Commons] steering committee, I am committed to realizing that site's potential as the arts/cultural hub for the city. We must work to achieve the planned community center complex featuring an updated museum, arts facility, expanded library and outdoor meeting areas. These improvements are the perfect complement to the improvements at El Dorado Beach, the campground and on Harrison Avenue. The time is ripe to resume work with Harrison Avenue businesses and residents. Last, let's take our recreational facilities to a new level. Our recreation-based economy requires improved and expanded playfields, particularly in the area off Rufus Allen and Al Tahoe, in order to serve locals and visitors alike.

What form of recreation do you participate in? What recreation improvements would you strive to make in SLT?:

I have just started bicycling again and enjoy our beaches and walking our trails. I particularly love to spend time at Valhalla and Tallac. As a parent of two teens, I spend a lot of time at our sports playfields, too.

It's a conundrum that much of our recreational facilities and infrastructure are in poor condition when we live in nature's paradise. Bike paths – the stretch along Eloise is a mess, for instance – are in terrible shape, our playfields overused and in need of upgrades. We are slow to embrace the niche markets for geo-tourism such as paddleboarding. I'm not an expert in this area, so my approach is to fix these problems collaboratively with the Parks Commission, our Parks and Rec staff and community groups that understand the specific needs. This is a high priority if we want to truly embrace the vision for diversified tourism.

Recreation tourism is expected to be the driving force of the

South Shore economy in the coming years, and according to a decade-old study, the majority of the South Lake Tahoe residents would like to see cycling-type facilities and maintenance projects. So, what do you specifically plan to do to improve our substandard, dangerous bike paths and lanes and roads beyond hiring a consultant to tell us how bad they are?:

The mistake made in the past is that we built infrastructure without funding for maintenance. Our challenge is to implement those improvements – and the primary obstacle is funding. One thought is to revise the rules governing air and water mitigation fund accounts that would be logical sources to provide funding to be diverted to maintenance and operation of the bike trails and facilities. The funding has been established temporarily for now and should be made permanent with the approval of the Regional Plan. These pots are logical sources to fund the improvements and provide long-term maintenance.

Additionally, we need to more actively partner with the CTC and aggressively pursue grant funding to continue the plans for bike pathways and scenic corridors. In pursuing these projects the city and its partners must dare to be bold and agree to take on the challenge of working to resolution instead of falling back into our respective corners. That old way of thinking is holding up progress like the planned trail linking Meyers to Stateline.

What are the three major issues facing South Lake Tahoe and how do you expect in four years to make it so they are not major issues when your tenure is through?:

There are too many issues to choose from and so little time to solve them! But I'd start with the obvious problems. In four years each of these can result in vision becoming reality by creating a plan, timeline and commitment to the future of our community.

* The City Council and city government culture must change for the better. Leadership, collaboration and respect will need to be a primary goal for the new council in January.

* Jobs must be created and preserved. I am an advocate for the Prosperity Plan's vision to grow three economic sectors – tourism, wellness and environmental innovation.

* The Hole will be on its way to becoming a convention center complex. A new developer will be starting work, employing our local labor force, ending an ugly chapter in our city's history.

What compelling idea have you read in the citizens' input of the revamped, in-progress update of the city's General Plan?:

Most compelling to me were actually some concerns raised through citizen input. For instance, there is the concern citizens had with the Tahoe Valley Community Plan and its incorporation into the broader General Plan. It's of particular concern as the vision and goals for the TVCP are also integral to Redevelopment Area No. 2, which was just approved. A second compelling issue was the way stormwater drainage, a major issue in California and particularly the basin, will be handled. These issues merit a final review as the GPU nears completion. I also have a great appreciation for the value added by citizens in the Neighborhood Improvement Plans. It's gratifying to see residents stepping forward to express their visions to preserve and improve the neighborhoods where they live.

How do you plan to boost revenue in SLT?:

The city's largest revenue sources are property taxes, TOT, and business licensing. These streams require a strong economy to grow. The fastest boost will come with increasing the number of visitors to Tahoe and keeping them here longer. One measure I advocate for is providing some support to LTVA to keep sending the message to our prime tourist draws.

We can also do a better job of enforcement and collection of TOT on vacation rentals. The same applies to business licensing. Many businesses in the city do not register for a license. They should be identified and required to comply. All of these measures will improve our bottom line without increasing existing fees, a move our community can ill-afford in this economy.

What stands out to you in the 2010-11 budget?:

What immediately jumps out is how little of a $101 million budget is unrestricted. That matters because we know an additional $12 million must be cut over the next five years. When the options for cuts are small, it's difficult to maintain the city's prime responsibility to its citizens: police, fire and emergency services, snow removal, roads maintenance, parks and recreation. It will be challenging to work with a budget where the cuts could potentially impact these important services to our residents.

What needs to be done to allow businesses to thrive in SLT?:

Get out of their way! As I walk precincts, I hear regularly from small business owners that the city's regulations and requirements are as or more, onerous than TRPA's. There is inconsistency in the application of rules and a failure to recognize that the city must take a customer-friendly approach. Solving that problem takes training, a review of our policies and codes and support of the staff who deal with the public daily. My impression is that the city has a good staff that wants to do their best but need the support and tools to deliver.

What have you done to help South Lake Tahoe be a better community?:

It was an honor to work with the community in a leadership capacity to successfully pass and implement Measure G, a measure that's putting local businesses – suppliers,

contractors and trades people – to work. Yes, Measure G is a tax, but one delivering value, substance and jobs. It's also proof that a public agency can and will fulfill promises to get the job done. Only 20 months after approving the bond, the district has two building completed, two more under construction and two more ready to start in the spring. And the work is attracting new students and families to the community. In addition, I was able bring my 20 years of experience working with state government agencies to help deliver $30 million in state matching funds, $12 million of that through collaboration with the grant-writing team at the high school.

What boards, commissions, or other experience do you have?:

I currently serve on the boards of two groups – the Boys & Girls Club of Lake Tahoe and the Lake Tahoe Educational Foundation and was a member of the steering committee for the Lakeview Commons (56 acre) project. I am most proud of my tenure on the Lake Tahoe USD Board of Education where we were confronted with labor negotiations, ongoing budgetary cuts, and the challenge of serving an increasingly poor population. Despite that, we managed to implement innovations like the Two Way Immersion program, retained class size reduction and revolutionized the high school with career pathway programs.

I also have 20+ years experience working with state and local governments and school districts. I understand development issues, redevelopment policy and the impacts growth and decline have on communities. I work with legislative staffs in Sacramento, worked in a congressional office and cut my teeth in politics doing grassroots organizing. These skills and experiences are important to making sure our city receives its fair share from Sacramento and is pro-active not reactive.

Why should voters vote for you over someone else?:

Passion, ability, experience. I have the passion for the work

of the council. This passion gives me the energy and drive to invest the time needed to understand the issues, reach out to diverse constituencies and build the alliances needed to create good policy. My abilities were proven in governance with the school district. I understand that it's not primarily my vision that counts, but taking the vision already out there and making it happen. I'm skilled at consensus building, working to decisions publicly and with broad input. And I play nicely in the sandbox – a skill that's sorely needed. Experience counts. I've been charged with the accountability for a $30 million public agency budget, dealt with tough union negotiations, had to make cuts to programs and laid off staff. I then faced hurt and angry people affected by those cuts in the supermarket. It's hard work that takes the ability to make the best decision for the greater good, knowing that few decisions will never make everyone happy. I've been there, I can do it, and I do it well.

BlueGo, the public transit, is mired in lawsuits and bankruptcy. Do we need public transit on the South Shore? If so, how do you propose to make it functional?:

Yes! Public transit has two types of riders – those who ride by choice and by necessity. This community has a large 'necessity' ridership that must be served. We also have the choice population that we need to motivate out of their cars and into other forms of transit. This group includes our visiting guests.

We make public transit functional by getting out of the red in the short run, improving infrastructure and restructuring operations in the mid-run and expanding ridership in the long run. BlueGo got into trouble when its budget, built on grant, state and federal subsidies, fell hundreds of thousands of dollars short and was too understaffed to manage operations, financial oversight and chasing grants. No agency in the basin, particularly the city, can subsidize this shortfall. We can't escape the fall-out of a $500,000 deficit and our

transportation budget will demand better monitoring in the future to be successful. Service options must be simplified and routes consolidated for now. It’s not a good option but it keeps buses on the road and ensures service to the segment of residents in need.

Looking ahead, the bus service suffers because there is no infrastructure to encourage ridership. Currently residents sit in the open air on metal park benches or stand exposed to the elements. We must build enclosed, pedestrian and bike friendly shelters that make it bearable to wait. Long-term success demands luring those “choice” riders to use the system. They won’t ride until the system is convenient, includes more routes and increased run frequency. Can we accomplish this? I’m not sure, but it’s a goal we must strive to meet.

Do you support commercial air service at Lake Tahoe Airport? Why or why not?:

I do, but expect it to be at least three to five years away. The commercial air traveler will be looking for a quality, high-end experience when they arrive in South Lake Tahoe. Our goal must be “build it so they will come.”

This is an opinion I’ve come to after a great deal of research in the past few months. Originally, I felt as many do in the community that commercial air was doomed, would sap precious revenue from the city’s coffers. Several considerations swayed my position.

* First, to be successful a new carrier’s aircraft would have smaller passenger capacity – around 74 seats. Horizon Air is doing this successfully in Mammoth. In fact, they’ve expanded their service to Mammoth in 2010 despite these hard times. This is different from the old days when PSA and AirCal flew 737s into Tahoe – filled to capacity – as regulations prohibited flights within California landing at Reno. The smaller aircraft are important, too, to make service reliable

given our weather conditions, the limitations on noise and for environmental sensitivities.

* Second, in 2009, the airport recorded 30,000 take offs/landings. It's already much busier than I realized and a bellwether for what could be accomplished with commercial service.

* Third, any meaningful efforts to reduce traffic congestion must include air service as an anchor and hub to get visitors onto public transportation.

Is there any individual, group or organization you would not take campaign money from?

Wow, I'd love to have that problem! Right now my campaign is funded primarily in $50 chunks from friends and family. To be more serious, this is an important ethical question. I would not accept funds from an individual or organization that I find morally or ethically repugnant. Nor would I accept funding from anyone expecting favors in return for support during the election.

Nepotism and favoritism runs rampant in the city when it comes to hiring preferences. The council sets policy. What type of policy would you write regarding nepotism and favoritism?

I want to separate the fact that there are many, many family relationships among employees at the city from the word nepotism. Both are issues, but nepotism means that there is favoritism, unfair and discriminatory practice in the work place. These are two different problems that should be addressed with strong, enforceable policies and a change in culture.

The city needs to adopt a policy that reflects best practices found in municipalities elsewhere in California. That policy needs to expand on existing harassment and discrimination regulations already in place. It must include provisions such

as requiring that one relative cannot directly supervise or manage another relative. It must address protections during the hiring process to eliminate bias in selection and screening. It should also provide a clear means for confidential protest, complaints and grievance filings.

Despite having these rules in place, the system won't work if there is not a culture in place to stop the infamous "good old boy" attitude that allows for abuses. This problem, I believe, is the heart of the issues raised by the media in recent weeks. It was asserted that there are lateral issues of discrimination wherein an employee was protected because a relation had a high-level position and exerted nepotistic influence across departments. True or not, this is a good example of workplace problems that can't be regulated. It can only be controlled through culture and regular ethics training.

This brings up another dimension in this discussion, one more relevant to the City Council. I do not support having close relations in elected office and serving in appointed positions on boards and commissions. Councilmembers should have an ethics policy of recusing themselves from votes that could benefit family members or are personnel issues. The policy should include a public statement as to the reason for recusal.

You left your elected position to the Lake Tahoe Unified School District board before your term expired. Why should voters believe you are more committed to the City Council position?

Thank you so much for giving me the chance to address this! I did leave the board six months before my term expired. I was devastated to have to do it and to this day regret having to make that decision.

But I was in a position where I had to put my family first.

Like many others, in January 2009 I found myself jobless, financially fragile and scrambling to figure out how to support my family. My work, as a planning consultant to school districts through California, often demands travel outside the Tahoe basin. The logical job choices were to go to work for a school district or join another consulting firm in Sacramento. Fortunately, my clients chose to follow me, letting me establish what's now a successful practice based here in South Lake Tahoe that gives me the freedom to join the City Council.

You and three other council candidates met with the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce. Then you and two others were invited back for a follow-up meeting. Tell us about that meeting.

Yes, I accepted an invitation to meet with the Chamber of Commerce. It was a great conversation and they grilled me on the issues. I am, however, an independent candidate working with my own campaign supporters, without obligations to any interest group. I am passionate about learning as much as I can in order to serve as an educated and informed council member. I have met with many business leaders, TRPA, the Conservancy, the local Carpenters Union, and the Sierra Club among others. It is important to understand their perspectives and build the relationships that I will need to call on as a councilmember. I am also walking door-to-door, speaking with voters, listening to their concerns. My decisions will always be made while keeping the door and my mind open to all information and communication.

[At the second meeting], I was offered the chance to get some free advice on how to run a campaign, but didn't participate in the teleconference.

Tell us something about yourself that voters don't already know:

I'll tell you a couple of things people don't know that sum me

up:

* I am afraid of heights – to this day, my stomach flip flops when I take that first bend coming down Echo – but I love roller coasters.

* My dad inadvertently helped to become politically active. As a soldier in WWII, he spent three torturous years as a POW in a Japanese prison camp. His experiences encouraged me to spend time developing my own beliefs and acting upon them. He taught me its action not opinions that count.

Chase: Real estate numbers improving in LT Basin

Third quarter sales figures in four major regions of Lake Tahoe plus Truckee continue to show a strong pattern of increased home sales.

Single family home sales in South Lake Tahoe, Incline Village, Tahoe City and Truckee saw significant growth in the first nine months of 2010.

“We are very pleased to see an increase two quarters in a row; however the median cost of homes are still tracking downward,” Sue Lowe, corporate broker and senior vice president of Chase International, said in a press release. “Buyers understand that this is the time to obtain the ultimate value in housing and are purchasing these incredible deals at rapid rates.

The units sold for the Lake Tahoe Basin are up 28 percent and sales volume is up 37 percent, according to Chase.

Chase reports on the South Shore, total sales volume is up 32

percent and units sold up 28 percent; Tahoe City, sales volume is up 67 percent and units sold up 46 percent; Incline Village, sales volume is up 28 percent and units sold up 27 percent; on the the East Shore of Tahoe sale volume is up 9 percent, units sold down 2 percent; and in Truckee, the sales volume of is up 9 percent and units sold is up 13 percent.

Harrah's eyeing becoming public company again

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – A recapitalization plan by Harrah's Entertainment Inc. to open the door eventually to sell public stock has been recommended for approval by the state Gaming Control Board.

Eric Hession of Harrah's told the board it has reduced its debt from $25.8 billion to $20.8 billion, preparing the company for an economic recovery.

In Nevada, Harrah's has casinos in places including Las Vegas, Reno and Lake Tahoe.

Hession and Michael Cohen of Harrah's explained the transaction, saying the giant casino company has reduced its annual interest expense by more than $125 million and extended the maturity dates for the debt.

Read the whole story