LTCC hires interim president for 1-year contract

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Community College is getting an interim president who likes to fix things and has experience with the accreditation process.

The brief special board meeting this morning was all about hiring someone for this coming school year. On a 5-0 vote, Steve Maradian was voted in. He will start Aug. 31. The contract is to expire no later than June 30, 2011. His rate of pay is equivalent to $160,000 a year.



Steve Maradian

“He has indicated his interest is fixing things,” board President Kerry David said just after the 7:45am vote on Aug. 20.

It is possible Maradian could throw his hat in the ring to be considered for the permanent job.

Susan Middleton has been acting president this summer and will preside over at least one more meeting before retiring from the college. She took over for Paul Killpatrick, the third president of the 35-year-old two-year institution in South Lake Tahoe, who quit after serving two years of his three-year contract.

All candidates for the interim job had to submit a writing

sample.

“He was incredibly sharp,” David said of Maradian.

With LTCC going through the accreditation process, which involves a self-study this year before the team of officials visits in 2011-12, Maradian’s two-year stint as vice president of policy and research for the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges is deemed an incredible asset.

Prior to that, Maradian was president of Los Angeles City College from 2005-08.

Pot advocates win right to help write cultivation law

By Kathryn Reed

A throng of citizens demonstrated Thursday that getting involved in the government process can bring change.

It took most of the morning session and until 3 that afternoon, but in the end the South Lake Tahoe City Council unanimously agreed to form a committee to help create an ordinance regarding marijuana cultivation for medicinal purposes.

More than two dozen people, mostly against the ordinance that was before the council, gave a range of reasons why the legislation as written was bad. Most called for it to be pulled from the agenda.



It was standing room only, with people listening to the pot discussion on the TV in the lobby on Aug. 19. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Representatives of the three medicinal marijuana collectives in town will be on the committee, along with Councilmen Bruce Grego and Bill Crawford; the city attorney; city manager; fire, police and building department reps; homeowner; and planning commissioner. In the coming weeks they will meet to hash out their differences and ideally find consensus so an ordinance is brought back to the current council to vote on.

Health and safety issues are what the council wants to address.

Jan McCarthy, who will be the homeowners' voice on the panel, told the council she has spent more than $30,000 to rehab a home that has been used as a grow-house. She is going to have a clause written into future rental agreements not allowing pot to be grown.

"Black mold is such a problem for insurance companies they will tear a house down before they remediate it," Fire Marshal

Ray Zachau told *Lake Tahoe News*.

It’s the high moisture content that causes the nasty mold. One house was so bad a few years ago on Walkup Road that the entire structure was demolished.

Holes are cut in floors and walls to move air around. The aroma of pot plants permeates the night air when the grow-houses use fans to circulate the air in the house – and subsequently push it outdoors.

Another concern of fire officials is if there were a fire at the grow houses with all the air circulating, it unknowingly puts firefighters at risk. Fire loves oxygen.

Several people who spoke wondered why no outdoor plants are allowed. The answer was the Planning Commission proposed that rule.

The city wants to restrict those who are allowed to grow marijuana per rules in the 1996 voter approved Proposition 215 to inside the house or the garage. Zachau said the garage is better for fire prevention reasons.

“It’s responsible growers who are speaking today, not the ones doing damage,” said Matt Lonardo. He works at Mt. Tallac High School and pointed out the students he is around have a lot more serious issues to deal with than medicinal marijuana.

It’s felony vandalism that the District Attorney’s Office has charged people who have recently been arrested with large indoor grows. With the state and federal laws about marijuana being out of alignment, this is a better legal route to pursue with less chance of an appeal or acquittal.

There is disagreement about how much space plants need as well as the wattage, or amps, needed to keep them thriving. Those are some of the issues that will be discussed by the committee.

It was said over and over that experts should be helping write the ordinance.

It’s legal for growers to sell what they don’t use to the collectives. But it’s only supposed to be at the price that it cost them to grow it. This is not supposed to be a revenue source for the growers, per state law.

A concern of city officials is these small growers with medicinal marijuana permits are deriving income from the sale of the end product. That was not the intent of the proposition.

Regulating whatever ordinance is approved is another concern. Pot advocates on Aug. 19 said they didn’t want the police to be the ones knocking on their door to enforce compliance. Medical privacy – HIPPA – was brought up.

Most in the room supported regulating the industry. What they want is for it to be fair, logical, relevant and to have a say in the rules they will have to follow.

“You can’t change the law just because of your personal opinions,” Leanne Aalmo told the council.

Reno contemplating exclusivity rules for events

By Susan Voyles, Reno Gazette-Journal

To keep homegrown special events from taking flight, the Reno City Council is on the verge of setting new rules requiring special event producers to promise not to put on a similar event within 45 days before or after their events in Reno.

If they break the rule, they'd pay a penalty equal to half of the money received under their sponsorship agreements with the city.

"If the community nurtures an event," said Cadence Matijevich, city special events manager, "we would want our homegrown events to stay here."

The council asked for the policy in early July after the executive director of Hot August Nights, Reno's premiere special event, announced plans to expand to Long Beach, Calif., next summer. South Lake Tahoe was added for this year's event.

Read the whole story

Cops coordinating massive crackdown on DUIs

By Shannon Laney

The problem of impaired driving is a serious one. While America witnessed a decline in the number of DUI fatalities in recent years, the numbers are still too high. That's why the Avoid the 6 DUI Task Force Campaign today announced it will join other law enforcement agencies throughout the country in support of an intensive crackdown on impaired driving Aug. 20–Sept. 6, known by its tagline, Drunk Driving. Over the Limit. Under Arrest.

Alcohol involved fatalities and injuries have dropped dramatically in the last three years of this end-of-summer enforcement campaign in California. Combined deaths and

injuries in 2007 were 1,780, dropping to 1,682 in 2008. Provisional 2009 data show that the numbers have dropped again, to 1,317 a 26 percent decrease in just three years.

The Avoid the 6 El Dorado County will deploy officers to conduct 3 Checkpoints, a multi-agency DUI Task Force operation, 5 local roving DUI saturation patrols, and a warrant/probation sweep targeting repeat offenders throughout the county.

Aug. 20 from 8pm-2am, officers from South Lake Tahoe, Placerville and El Dorado County will be conducting a DUI checkpoint on Pioneer Trail and on Lake Tahoe Boulevard.

Aug. 24, South Lake Tahoe will be conducting a DUI checkpoint along Pioneer Trail.

Aug. 27, Placerville and South Lake Tahoe will be conducting a DUI checkpoint along Highway 50 in Placerville.

“All too often, innocent, law-abiding people suffer tragic consequences and the loss of loved ones due to this careless disregard for human life,” said Christopher J. Murphy, director of the California Office of Traffic Safety. “Because of the commitment to end the carnage, Police, Sheriffs and CHP are intensifying enforcement during the crackdown. They’ll be especially vigilant during high-risk nighttime hours when impaired drivers are most likely to be on our roads.”

According to the latest national data, 32 percent of fatalities in motor vehicle traffic crashes involve a driver or motorcycle rider with a blood alcohol content of 0.08 percent or above, averaging one fatality every 45 minutes.

“Our message is simple and unwavering. If we find you driving impaired, we will arrest you. No exceptions,” said interim Police Chief Martin Hewlett of South Tahoe. “Even if you beat the odds and walk away from an impaired-driving crash alive, motorists should be aware that the financial and social

consequences of a DUI can be devastating.”

Violators will face jail time, loss of their driver’s license, huge fines and maybe sentenced to use ignition interlocks. Their insurance rates go up. Other financial hits include attorney fees, court costs, lost time at work, and the potential loss of job or job prospects. When family, friends and co-workers find out, violators can also face tremendous personal embarrassment and humiliation.

Driving impaired is simply not worth all the consequences. Just designate a sober driver. Don’t take the chance. Remember, if you are over the limit, you’re under arrest.

For more information on local and statewide Avoid DUI Task Force Campaign Enforcement Schedules and Daily DUI Arrest/Fatal Stats, visit the www.californiaavoid.org. The Program is funded by the California Office of Traffic Safety who reminds everyone to report drunken driving by calling 911.

Shannon Laney is a sergeant in the South Lake Tahoe Police Department.

Experts: Feds can help, but not save Nevada’s economy

By Erin Kelly, Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON – While U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., and Republican U.S. Senate challenger Sharron Angle, a former assemblywoman, debate whether the federal government has helped or hurt Nevada, economists say there’s little doubt the state would be in even worse shape without aid from

Washington.

Money from the feds – including about $3.2 billion in stimulus funds awarded to the state from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act stimulus bill – has helped prevent layoffs of state workers and extend unemployment benefits for the jobless, experts say.

The role the federal government should play in boosting Nevada's economy has been a constant source of friction between Reid and Angle. Reid has touted his efforts to bring more money to his home state, while Angle has denounced the spending as "reckless" and said it has not helped Nevada.

Nevada's unemployment rate reached 14.2 percent in June, the highest in the nation. The state also suffered the highest home-foreclosure rates in the U.S. during the first half of this year.

"Without federal aid, we could be talking Great Depression levels of unemployment in Nevada," said Elliott Parker, professor and chairman of the economics department at the University of Nevada, Reno. Unemployment rates reached as high as 25 percent at the peak of the Depression.

Read the whole story

St. Theresa test scores worth bragging about

By Mike Filce

While so much news about education these days highlights the negative, we need look no further than a small local school

for the positive.

St. Theresa School, going strong since reopening in August 1994, approaches standardized testing differently from its counterparts. Students in grades 2-8 take the ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) in the third week of September, rather than in the spring when public schools conduct their standardized testing. The test has a mixture of questions covering key information from the prior school year, and introductory information from the current grade level expectations.

This year, grades 3-8 scored in the top third or higher nationally, and all grades performed above grade level. These most recent results show the third-grade class testing at a grade equivalent of 3.9, which is just short of fourth grade. That trend widens to 6.5 for fifth-graders, 10.1 for seventh, and 11.3 for eighth-graders.* (*Composite class scores rather than individual student scores.)

Each year, the school receives the results in early November, at which time the staff reviews both individual and grade-level results to plan and guide instruction for the rest of the year. This approach allows teachers to focus on each student's weaknesses rather than teach to the test, according to third-grade teacher, Anne Filce.

Kelly Shanahan, parent of a sixth-grader, finds it "remarkable" that the teachers and administration "have the guts to test at the beginning of the year, before the students have been exposed to the material"; she appreciates how teachers then "take the testing information and tailor it to improve their curricula instead of spending time on state standards in which the students are already proficient."

Principal Danette Winslow, clarifies, "the purpose of testing for grades 2-8 is diagnostic only … we are looking at what the students are bringing into their academic experience after having three months off of school. Teachers use the test

scores as a barometer, to help guide them in their instruction."

Matt Tillson, long-time middle school teacher at STS, expresses similar thoughts. He believess the "the test scores in the fall are a more true or accurate indication of the child's memory and knowledge, versus in the spring when teachers have had the opportunity to teach to the test, which may not provide as true an indication of what they know."

Mike Filce is a long-time educator on the South Shore.educator, involved parent, and school advisory commission member

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Placer County may expand defensible space program

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

Placer County is considering expanding a program that allows the county or local fire districts to step in for negligent property owners by clearing brush and reducing the risk of wildfires.



The county's hazardous vegetation abatement program has been running as a pilot program for the fire districts north and west of Lake Tahoe since 2007.

Now there's talk of expanding it to the remainder of the county.

Read the whole story

Nevada food stamp program swamped with applicants

By Kara LaPoint, Reno Gazette-Journal

In June of this year, 14,601 Nevada residents applied for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, which are more commonly known as food stamps.

Of those applications, nearly 90 percent were processed within 30 days as required by the federal government.

But last year, more applicants were left waiting, especially in Reno, where roughly 68 percent of applications were processed on time in November and December.

With record SNAP participation nationwide, Nevada is not the only state struggling with timely processing, says the United States Department of Agriculture, the organization that facilitates the program. The most recent processing rates available showed state timeliness ranging from 74.16 to 97.97 percent, but those figures are from fiscal year 2008.

Read the whole story

Rash of Truckee burglaries ends with 3 arrests

Three Truckee residents were arrested related to a string of burglaries this week.

On Aug. 16 at about 5:30am, an in-progress residential burglary was reported in the Sierra Meadows subdivision of Truckee. Officers responded and arrested two suspects after a short foot pursuit.

A third person was identified through investigation as being involved and was later arrested. A fourth subject fled the area on foot and is actively being sought.

Investigation revealed that the same suspects were involved in numerous auto burglaries throughout Truckee overnight.

Arrested were Rogelio Espinoza, 23, of Truckee on charges of residential burglary, conspiracy, and auto burglary; and Luis Gonzales, 18, of Truckee on charges of residential burglary and conspiracy.

In addition, a juvenile was arrested and booked at Juvenile Hall on charges of residential burglary and possession of drug paraphernalia. Another juvenile is still outstanding.

Anyone with information concerning this case should call (530) 550.2323.

Economy woven into annual Tahoe environmental summit

By Kathryn Reed

INCLINE VILLAGE – No documents to sign. No grand announcement of buckets of money coming to Lake Tahoe. No new threat to the lake.

Tuesday's annual environmental summit was more of an update on what is going on than anything else. The economy was a last-minute add as a topic, which was embraced by some of the speakers.



Hundreds gather for the 14th annual environmental summit Aug. 17 at Sand Harbor. Photos/Kathryn Reed

David Hayes, Department of Interior deputy secretary, talked about the importance recreation has on the U.S. economy. It accounts for 6.5 million jobs, generates $49 billion annually in tax revenue, and $289 billion in retail sales.

"It's an important industry. It's a way to bring economic

development to rural areas," Hayes said.

Recreation was evident on this bluebird day, as beach-goers frolicked along the shore and in the water at Sand Harbor. The historic Thunderbird woody sat offshore during the summit.

Sen. John Ensign, R-Nev., sported a bandage on his right arm – a mountain bike misadventure along the Tahoe Rim Trail during his multi-day visit to the area with his family.

What would also help the Lake Tahoe economy and the environment is for Congress to reauthorize the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act. With it being an election year, action on the plan that would bring $415 million to the region in an eight-year period may not occur until after Nov. 2, if at all.

It was the inaugural summit in 1997 with then President Bill Clinton that spurred the federal funding for Lake Tahoe. The original act passed in 2000 brought $424 million to Tahoe in 10 years.

All told, $1.5 billion has been spent on environment improvement projects in Lake Tahoe since the first summit.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., spoke to the nearly 300 people on Aug. 17 about how the Travel Promotion Act passed by Congress earlier this year will help Tahoe. He said it will create 6,000 jobs for Nevada and a half million nationwide. The idea is people outside the country will be told about the virtues of Lake Tahoe and be enticed to re-create here.

As always, lake clarity was a substantive part of the summit. Invasive species and forest fuel reduction were also touched on. El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago and consultant Trish Kelly rehashed the previous day's meeting about the Prosperity Plan.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif, spoke about a meeting she

hosted for 50 locals on Monday who provided her with a slew of reports – mostly about lake clarity, some about the thousands of acres treated for fuels management.

At the summit she said, “Twenty-five percent of these beautiful forests around us are dead and dying, therefore it’s primed for a catastrophic fire.”

She illustrated how the Asian clams invading Lake Tahoe could extend 3.5 miles if laid end-to-end.

In these trying economic times, Feinstein and others pointed to the need to tap into the private sector even more. She praised Steve Teshara with Sustainable Community Advocates and Andrew Strain at Heavenly Mountain Resort for their efforts. She also acknowledged Art Chapman who runs JMA Ventures.

The constant theme for the day was Tahoe is an international treasure that needs protecting.

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