

The lake loses two of her sons

Two men with long ties to the South Shore have died in the past few days – Jon Springmeyer and Ron Bricker.

Mr. Springmeyer, the son of Marjorie Springmeyer and the late Buzz Springmeyer, was an attorney in Carson City. He died of cancer.

Mr. Bricker moved to South Lake Tahoe in 1987. One of his jobs has been the webmaster for his sister Deb Howard's real estate company. He also managed the Royal Tahoe Vacation Club in Stateline. He died of a heart attack.

South Tahoe to probe potential convention center investor

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe is waiting for a \$30,000 check so it can begin its due diligence – aka background and financial checks – of Woodridge Capital Partners LLC, the firm wanting to take over the would-be convention center.

At the City Council meeting this month, attorney Lew Feldman, who has represented original developer Lake Tahoe Development Company and now Woodridge, wanted the item to be discussed at a special meeting.

The city doesn't want to use taxpayer money to pay consultants to investigate Woodridge.



South Lake
Tahoe
convention
center project
in 2007.
Photo/Provided

The action unanimously taken by the council last week allows for the due diligence of Woodridge Capital Partners to be done, for the company to be an assignee to the owner participation agreement, and for the formation of a conceptual plan of the construction of what is known as the Chateau at Heavenly Village.

The council approved the item with the fee intact, but has since scheduled a special meeting for 10am April 27. (The budget and possible increase to business license fees will also be discussed at that meeting.)

Councilmen Hal Cole and Bill Crawford were appointed as an ad hoc committee to meet with Michael Rosenfeld, CEO of Woodridge. No meeting has been scheduled between the parties. However, Rosenfeld is expected to address the full council at the April 27 meeting.

"This guy, I don't think he has the money, but he has access to money," Gene Palazzo, South Lake Tahoe redevelopment director, said of Rosenfeld.

City Attorney Patrick Enright echoed those sentiments.

"He has access to funds. He would obviously be doing this with others who have funds," Enright said. "If he can't get the financing, it's not going to work."

Randy Lane and John Serpa, the men behind Lake Tahoe Development Company, have been in bankruptcy court since October because of their inability to pay creditors the \$54 million they are owed. They have until June 2 to come up with a plan.

Rosenfeld, so far, is the plan. He has been a player in projects this size and larger.

"Eventually, if we pick this guy, we will either amend the existing (owner participation agreement) or have a new one," Palazzo said.

The \$410 million, 11-acre project that was approved several years ago was to include two hotels – with at least one a four star; extensive retail space (this was before commercial vacancies became the norm here); a convention center that would double as a facility local organizations could use; have a possible under or overpass linking to Heavenly Village; and open space.

What a future project may look like is unknown. The footprint is likely to remain the same because of existing permits and environmental documents. What the inside looks like is expected to change. A smaller project has also been talked about.

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency permits were to expire this summer, but they will be extended for the length of time the project is in bankruptcy court, so probably another 10 months, according to Lane.

"This is not something that is going to be an easy solution

even if new people come in. There are still many issues that have to be addressed on an ongoing basis,” Lane told *Lake Tahoe News*. “First, you have to make some sort of reasonable agreement with the creditors. Second, you have to wait things out and decide when it is a good time to bring the project forward. You can’t build it today for what you can sell it for. That means you don’t build it. That’s the issue.”

He said just when he thinks things are solidified something unexpected pops up.

Per the judge’s order from last month, Lane et al have been filing twice monthly reports to the court that creditors and interested parties have been receiving.

Another report is due this week, but it is the first one in May that will be the most significant because that’s when an outline of a potential deal must be filed.

“That will give us our first inclination as to whether he can make this work or not,” Enright said.

One thing that makes this situation unique is that the foundation has been poured. But it’s not one parcel. A final map was never recorded so the concrete and rebar near the Nevada border is laid on 29 parcels. That’s why foreclosure is not much of an option for creditors because then there is little or no value for someone who would want to resurrect the project.

“I think what needs to go there is what is planned there. It makes sense,” Lane said. “Whether we get to a plan or don’t will be driven an awful lot by creditors. I’m not saying we aren’t going to get consensus.”

Once Lane and his people present a plan to the bankruptcy judge by the June 2 deadline, the judge has until Aug. 2 to make a ruling.

“Our position always has been we want the creditors paid and the project to go forward,” Lane said. “We don’t have anymore money to throw at it. At some point we’ll find a solution. We would not continue to be the developer. Whoever comes in would be.”

Hybrid 4-day school week approved for WHS



By Kathryn Reed

ZEPHYR COVE – Whittell High School’s four-day school week is almost exactly how Principal Sue Shannon wants to leave it for her successor starting in the fall.

The only thing the school board didn’t agree to on Tuesday afternoon was to put the snow days on Fridays in April or May instead of tacking them onto the end of the school year.

Douglas County school board member Randy Green pulled the item from the consent agenda so he could get some clarification as to why staff was recommending this. He called the make-up days “educationally useless” when they are in June.

Assistant Superintendent Rich Alexander explained it was necessary to have the snow days at the end of the school calendar because Whittell and Zephyr Cove Elementary share staff for physical education, art and music. Contractually

with teachers it would not work to have two make-up days for one snow day.

Board member Cindy Trigg said she would like to see the district move in the direction to have Whittell's snow days incorporated into the school year instead of extending the school year. She said this would be better for AP testing as well not extending the school year.

What the board did approve 6-0, with Keith Roman absent, was a hybrid schedule for 2010-11. Next school year will be the second year of the pilot four-day week. The major change is having students go to class on Fridays during weeks when there is a holiday so instruction is still given four days.

For more information about the Zephyr Cove school's four-day school week, [click here](#).

Mt. Rose Highway closed part of this week

By Lenita Powers, Reno Gazette-Journal

A portion of the Mount Rose Highway is scheduled to be closed to traffic through Thursday from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. to allow construction on a bridge, Nevada Department of Transportation spokesman Scott Magruder said.

The section of Mount Rose Highway beneath the Interstate 580 bridge will be closed to allow workers to put up temporary supporting structures used to erect bridges, he said.

"They don't want to do that over traffic, so we're closing the portion of the highway beneath the bridge," Magruder said.

2 Fallen Leaf Lake board members threatened with recall



By Susan Wood

Although a contract for a new concessionaire at the Fallen Leaf Lake store and marina was sealed last weekend, some want two community service board members to be recalled.

Two notices obtained by *Lake Tahoe News* target CSD board members Mike Kraft, the president, and Eric Thaden. "Unresponsiveness to (their constituencies)" is the grounds for the filing.

The other two board members, Teri Thomas and Jennifer Thornton, appear to be safe.

The fifth seat, vacated by Dana Clark, is due to be filled in an August election. The former president left amid the turmoil plaguing the quiet mountain village over former concessionaires John and Ruth Rich.

Hundreds came out in protest last fall when it became apparent the board would not continue to have the Riches run the store and marina operation. Resident Betsy Wheeler came armed at one

meeting with a petition and legal threat insisting the board reconsider its direction to change operators.

This latest petition takes issue with Kraft and Thaden's conduct, implying mismanagement and negligence at a time of dire financial circumstances for the district.

"It is very disappointing that there are some people in the community that cannot allow the healing to begin," Kraft said in response to the recall petition intent signed by 10 proponents.

Calls made to half the petitioner supporters went unanswered Monday.

"It appears the constituency is very angry with those two directors," Thornton said to the news.

An intent to recall must be filed with El Dorado County Elections Department. None had been as of Monday. Once it has, the directors have a week to respond; then the county must approve the action. To make it to the ballot, the petition requires 30 percent of the registered voters of the Fallen Leaf district to sign the petition. As of March 15, the district had 155 registered voters.

Concessionaire has 6 weeks to get Fallen Leaf Lake ready

By Susan Wood

The community services district managing Fallen Leaf Lake operations put to bed months of ambiguity by awarding its concessionaire contract to Rob and Sandy Wirth, who run a

South Shore electrical company with ties to the mountain haven.

The Fallen Leaf CSD board voted 4-0 Saturday in a special meeting at Lake Tahoe Airport for the Wirths to take over the store and marina business. Now the clock ticks for the duo to get the operation going by summer's kickoff on Memorial Day weekend.



For the first time in 14 years, Fallen Leaf Lake's operations are in different hands.

Photo/Susan Wood

Sandy Wirth told *Lake Tahoe News* she's well aware of the task before them. They have pledged a number of improvements during the upcoming months and years, plan to conduct community outreach and offer an enhanced experience at the popular gateway to the Desolation Wilderness outside South Lake Tahoe.

"It's going to be exciting," she said.

Wirth has supported her husband's dream of expanding the options at the store and café – with a little help from qualified friends. He spent seven years working at Stanford Sierra Camp as the electrician for the university's lake retreat. They will continue to own and run Innovative

Electric.

"We feel we can keep the electrician part going while running the marina and store," she said.

Their desire is to stay grounded on what can be delivered immediately. The couple would like to offer lakeside dining, but that idea may come to fruition down the road. The Wirths expect their background in business and desire to please the community to be their recipe for success.

CSD President Mike Kraft said Monday he was in full support of their plans.

"Rob has a great reputation with our community for being an outstanding person with good business ethics. This is a win-win situation for the board and the Wirths. Not only is the minimum payment (to the district) much higher, we have also negotiated a completely open-book contract. This will allow the transparency required to be able to work together as a team," Kraft told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The final contract includes \$110,000 to be paid by the Wirths to the board for rent and access to the store, café and marina operation for six years. The Wirths agreed to put up a \$20,000 security deposit.

Kraft had major issues with some of the business practices that helped lead to a breakdown in talks with former concessionaires John and Ruth Rich. An impasse with the Riches, who ran the operation for 14 years, led to shouting matches, legal threats and a divided community for almost a year. (See *Lake Tahoe News*' article on the intent to recall two board members.)

The turmoil resulted in one of the board's earlier choices to run the operation to resign after less than a month of accepting the job. At Saturday's meeting, the board approved canceling the contract with caterer Rick Firkins.

Bank robber strikes in Carson City



The fedora-wearing bank robber struck again. This time it was the Bank of the West in Carson City on Monday about 4pm.

The suspect, who authorities believe to be the same person, has hit Bank of the West branches in Grass Valley on Dec. 22 and March 31, South Lake Tahoe on Feb. 18 and Kings Beach on March 8.

The suspect is described as a white male, about 6-foot-1, short gray hair, fake beard, and wearing a fedora.

He has brandished a silver handgun in more than one of the robberies.

Authorities are asking anyone with information to call one of the following agencies: FBI in Sacramento (916) 481.9110, South Lake Tahoe Police Department (530) 542.6100, Placer County Sheriff's Department (530) 581.6330, or Grass Valley Police Department (530) 477.4600.

Ex-priest in Vatican

pedophile case lived in Truckee

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

A defrocked Catholic priest now at the center of a Vatican pedophilia scandal is a former Truckee resident who in 2002 was investigated for possible connections to the 1988 disappearance of Amber Swartz – for whom Amber Alerts are named – and to the 1991 abduction of South Lake Tahoe resident Jaycee Lee Dugard.

In March 2002, police with cadaver dogs, backhoes and ground-penetrating sonar twice searched the Truckee vacation property of Stephen Kiesle and found nothing to connect him to the two young girls.

Those two cases have been closed and aren't related to the ex-priest, but in 2004 Kiesle pleaded no contest to a felony for molesting a young girl in his Truckee home in 1995 and was sentenced to six years in state prison.

Read the whole story

Wind advisory in Lake Tahoe

A wind advisory has been issued for the Lake Tahoe area, including the lake, from 11am to 6pm today.

The National Weather Service says to expect winds from the southwest at 15-20mph, with gusts up to 35 mph.



This light at Highway 50 and Third Street in South Tahoe already looks like it has been through a wind storm.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Waves could be 2-3 feet high. The highest waves will be along the northeast shores from Kings Beach to Glenbrook. Small boats will be prone to capsizing and should remain off the lake until conditions improve.

Old Man Winter about to unleash his fury again

A winter weather advisory for snow remains in effect from 5pm this afternoon to 9am Monday.

Snow will develop this afternoon, then become heavy at times tonight with snowfall from 1 to 2 inches per hour. Numerous snow showers will continue through Monday.

Snow accumulations through Monday morning of 8 to 14 inches

will affect areas above 7,000 feet, with 4 to 8 inches at lake level.



Roads in Tahoe are about to be covered in white again. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Expect south to southwest winds of 15 to 30mph, with gusts up to 40 mph today. Sierra ridge gusts may reach 100 mph this evening.

Snow covered roads and visibility below one half mile at times will cause difficult travel conditions this afternoon through Monday morning.

Snow is expected to pose an inconvenience to travelers. Roads will become slick and hazardous, with snow and ice first developing on bridges and overpasses. Motorists should slow down and use caution.

Check the road icons on the home page of Lake Tahoe News to know about restrictions and closures.