Troubled HR director leaving El Dorado County

By Kathryn Reed

Two key positions in El Dorado County are going to be vacant in October.

Pamela Knorr, human resources director, and Steve Pedretti, director of Development Services, are leaving. It's up to the Board of Supervisors to hire for these positions. Even so, it will be staff in the chief administrative office that handles the bulk of the recruiting.

Pamela Knorr

Knorr, who has been **controversial** almost since she started with this county, is going to Butte County. In 2015, the **grand jury** came out with a scathing report about Knorr's department. Her last day is Oct. 11.

Pedretti has been hired by Placer County. His last day is Oct. 31.

For the Butte job, Knorr used the last name of Heselton. While she has been married for a few years, this is not a name she has used in recent jobs or in El Dorado County. The three-year Butte contract comes with a salary of $158,512, and a guaranteed 2 percent increase effective Feb. 11.

Knorr was recently the interim chief administrative officer for El Dorado County. She is the one who brought in Larry Combs as the next interim. He helped to further run the county into an economic quagmire by failing to address issues regarding the budget. Combs has since been replaced by Don Ashton.

The Board of Supervisors, though, also let the Knorr-Combs combo operate despite numerous articles pointing out their deficiencies.

Knorr is still involved in a lawsuit from her days as CAO of Alpine County. A settlement could not be reached this summer. The trial is expected to start at the end of the year.

Robert Levy, former undersheriff of Alpine County, in a 19-page lawsuit alleges Knorr along with three supervisors at the time and a private citizen violated his civil rights, conspired to do so, discriminated against him based on age, failed to prevent discrimination and retaliation, violated the Public Safety Officers' Procedural Bill of Rights Act, and defamed him.

STR to offer interest free bear box loans

By Kathryn Reed

Homeowners in South Tahoe Refuse's service area at Lake Tahoe are expected to soon have the opportunity to take out an interest free loan for bear boxes.

The South Lake Tahoe Waste Management Authority board this month approved the concept. Actual language for the program is expected to be solidified at the board’s November meeting.

The JPA will front $70,000 for the program that will be administered by the garbage company. Homeowners – whether they live in Tahoe full time or not – will be eligible to apply for a loan up to $1,200. It must be paid back in five years.

There was some discussion whether the program should be open to second homeowners.

“The point is to eliminate bears getting into garbage. Anything this agency can do to further that on the South Shore is being proactive,” Nancy McDermid said. She is Douglas County’s rep to the JPA. (El Dorado County and South Lake Tahoe are the other partners in the JPA.)

The South Shore ordinance is in large part following what Tahoe Truckee Sanitation District is doing in Placer County.

“If the homeowner doesn’t make a payment even though it is interest free, then there is 10 percent interest and a late fee,” explained Tom Bruen, attorney for the JPA. “It’s not a smart thing for the homeowner to skip out on the fee.”

It would also be possible to put a lien against the house so the refuse company could recoup its costs at the time of sale.

Homeowners who are currently delinquent with trash bills would not be eligible for the program.

There will be a non-refundable $50 application fee. If a homeowner goes forward with the bear box loan, that $50 will be applied to the $150 administrative fee. That $150 pays for STR to process the paperwork, have a site visit and work with the contractor as to where the box will go. Of that, $100 can be rolled into the overall loan.

It will be possible for people to order less or more expensive boxes, but the loan will not exceed $1,200.

STR at the meeting asked for the stipulation that boxes not be farther than 10 feet from the street. This has to do with crews having to carry the cans to the truck. The farther away the cans are the greater chance for injury.

Another regulation STR wants to ensure is that the cans in the boxes are 32 gallons.

The exception to this rule will be in the Tahoe Keys. The homeowners' association has architectural guidelines for residents stating bear boxes are not allowed. Those rules are being rewritten with input from STR and the city of South Lake Tahoe. Proposals include having the boxes closer to the house and larger totes – 64 gallons. This route would be accessed by a special truck.

A sticking point on finalizing the Tahoe Keys pilot program is the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. Coverage is a bugaboo for the bi-state regulatory agency.

STR officials at the meeting pointed out that as more bear boxes are installed it will take longer to service the routes. This is because there is no way for crews to know if the box has garbage in it so they have to check each one.

When *Lake Tahoe News* asked STR President Jeff Tillman if a flag like what is used on mailboxes could be employed on bear boxes he said no because opponents to this idea have safety concerns. They believe an indicator saying there is no trash is the equivalent to telling would-be burglars there is no one home.

SLT woman’s stolen credit card used in Carson Valley

Douglas County deputies are searching for this woman.

Douglas County sheriff’s investigators are looking for a woman who used a credit card in Gardnerville that had been stolen in South Lake Tahoe.

The victim lost her credit card Sept. 13 in the parking lot of a 7-Eleven in South Lake Tahoe. The bank could not locate her account information and was unable to close the account, according to deputies. The next morning the victim discovered that there was a $481.12 purchase on her account made at the Wal-Mart on Grant Avenue in Gardnerville..

The female suspect is described as Caucasian, in her 20s, wearing a hooded top and black baseball cap. She was accompanied by a male in his 20s wearing dark clothing.

A reward is being offered to anyone with information leading to the arrest and/or conviction of the suspect(s). Anyone with information is urged to call DCSO dispatch at 775.782.5126 or Douglas County Secret Witness at 775.782.7463.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Remote chance of cyberattacks affecting election

By Sandra Chereb, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY —The nation's secretaries of state are trying to reassure voters that despite talk of cyberattacks and "rigged" systems in this contentious election cycle, the prospect of outside hackers skewing the outcome is remote.

In a letter to Congress from the National Association of Secretaries of States delivered Monday, top election officials said they are working with national security agencies "to address any attempts by nation-state adversaries to disrupt the presidential election and call its integrity into question."

The association downplayed any suggestion that hacking could manipulate the election tally.

Read the whole story

Nev. gaming officials among few to have seen Trump's tax returns


Donald Trump, sitting in the rear, on his way to a fund-raising dinner at Harrah's Lake Tahoe in August. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

By Chad Day and Jeff Horwitz, AP

While Donald Trump won't publicly release his income tax returns, the New York businessman has turned them over when it suited his needs — if he stood to make a profit, needed a loan or when a judge forced him.

Pennsylvania gaming regulators were given at least five years' worth and eight boxes full of Trump's tax documents. Nevada, Michigan, Missouri, Indiana and other state gaming officials also had access to multiple years of his returns. Large banks that lent Trump money over the years have also obtained Trump's returns.

One common thread ties all those who have seen the documents: They can't talk about them.

Such legal restrictions leave the public with only small glimpses into what Trump's taxes might hold.

In Monday night's debate, Democrat Hillary Clinton cited documents unearthed by reporters to question whether Trump doesn't want to release his tax returns because he has paid little or no federal income taxes.

Trump’s response? “That makes me smart,” a comment he disavowed just minutes after the debate. Asked by reporters if he had admitted to not paying federal income taxes, Trump said, “I didn’t say that at all.”

Clinton cited documents unearthed by Politico showing Trump didn’t pay any federal income tax during at least two years in the early 1990s because he lost more money than he earned. Other documents show he also didn’t pay any federal income taxes in 1978, 1979 and 1984.

Voters know little about Trump’s more recent finances beyond his own self-reported estimations of his wealth and listings of his business interests.

In all cases reviewed by The Associated Press, each person, organization, company or government office that has seen Trump’s tax returns is barred from discussing their full contents by professional or legal restrictions.

For example, employees of the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board could face criminal penalties if they leaked information from Trump’s tax returns maintained in the board’s electronic files, said board spokesman Doug Harbach.

When asked whether Trump had turned over any returns to the Missouri Gaming Commission, officials said they were barred by state law from saying what Trump turned over.

“I could not tell you whether we had them,” said Edward Grewach, the commission’s general counsel.

Responses like these leave the decision to publicly release the taxes solely with Trump, who has repeatedly refused. Trump has cited an IRS audit as his reason for withholding the information, but the IRS and tax experts have said an audit doesn’t bar Trump from releasing his taxes. At the debate, Trump said he would release his returns — over what he described as his attorney’s objections — only after Clinton released roughly 30,000 emails she had deleted from her private server that she had deemed personal.

Earlier this month, Donald Trump Jr. gave a different reason why his father wouldn't release the returns: The American people would ask too many questions.

"He's got a 12,000-page tax return that would create . financial auditors out of every person in the country asking questions that would detract from (his father's) main message," the younger Trump told the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review.

Since 1976, every major party nominee has released the returns and Clinton has publicly released nearly 40 years' worth. Even Trump's running mate, Indiana Gov. Mike Pence, released 10 years of his tax returns.

Tax returns don't measure net worth, so they wouldn't verify whether Trump is worth the $10 billion he says he is. But the returns would reveal how much Trump earned from his assets, helping someone work back to an approximation of his net worth.

Trump's own estimates of his income and net worth have previously been scrutinized by those who had access to his tax returns.

For a decade, Trump tangled with New York City authorities over his city tax bill, a battle first reported in June by journalist David Cay Johnson in The Daily Beast.

In Trump's 1984 tax filings, he said he had lost money during a time in which he had just completed Trump Tower and regularly boasted about the success of his business deals. Trump also declared that he was primarily a consultant that year, and that his consulting business had $684,000 in business expenses and no income. He provided no receipts to justify the claimed expenses.

City tax authorities didn’t buy it — and after Trump appealed his tax bill, they fought with him for the next 10 years. Trump lost and was ordered to pay the taxes on more than $1 million in income.

Trump’s multibillion-dollar fortune has been questioned by banks that demanded his tax returns before lending him money. Commercial lenders generally require both personal and business tax returns as part of a loan application, and Trump provided such information to North Fork Bank in 2004 and 2005.

Though the bank’s evaluations aren’t public, discussion of them in a later deposition of Trump revealed they were unflattering. The deposition was taken in a defamation lawsuit Trump filed against journalist Tim O’Brien, who wrote a book that questioned Trump’s net worth. Trump lost the suit.

“(North Fork) concluded in their estimation that your net worth was actually $1.2 billion instead of $3.5 billion as you claimed. Are you aware of that?” asked O’Brien’s attorney, Andrew Ceresney.

Trump said he had not known that, but dismissed the quality of the bank’s opinion.

“The numbers are wrong,” he said.

North Fork wasn’t alone in marking down Trump’s net worth. Deutsche Bank also reviewed Trump’s finances as of 2004, deeming him to be worth “give or take $788 million,” Ceresney said in the deposition. The attorney did not say whether Deutsche Bank relied on Trump’s tax return in its calculation.

Deutsche Bank declined to comment about its evaluation of Trump’s worth, but the bank is required to keep customer information confidential by law. Capital One Bank — it bought North Fork in 2006 — did not respond to requests for comment by phone and email.

O’Brien did not respond to requests for comment, but in a story he wrote for Bloomberg, O’Brien said he was barred from discussing the contents of Trump’s tax returns because they were produced under seal in the court case.

In addition to a suggestion of his worth, Trump’s tax returns would reveal his charitable contributions. Despite boasting of sweeping generosity, the AP reported more than a year ago that there is little record of substantial personal philanthropy from Trump.

Trump has been dogged by questions about his personal giving and how his namesake foundation operates. The Washington Post has reported that Trump used donations given by others to pay for legal settlements, political contributions and even purchase portraits of himself.

Public disclosure would resolve many of these questions for voters.

A new Associated Press-GfK poll found that just under half of registered voters– 46 percent – say it is very important for candidates to release their tax returns, though Democrats were far more likely say it was very or extremely important than Republicans.

A recent Monmouth University poll also found that most Americans are aware that Trump has not released his tax returns, and just over half think it’s because he is hiding something he does not want the public to know.

Caesars strikes deal to end main unit’s bankruptcy

By Tracy Rucinski, Reuters

Caesars Entertainment Corp said on Tuesday it has struck a crucial $5 billion deal with most of its casino operating unit’s creditors, resolving billions of dollars in legal claims and paving the subsidiary’s way out of a costly bankruptcy.

The Las Vegas-based company’s main operating unit, Caesars Entertainment Operating Co Inc, filed in January 2015 one of the most complex U.S. bankruptcies with $18 billion of debt.

The restructuring has been embroiled in a sprawling web of litigation between some of Wall Street’s most aggressive investors.

Caesars is the parent company of Harrah’s Lake Tahoe and Harveys in Stateline.

Read the whole story

Undeveloped Chateau property in SLT sold

By Kathryn Reed

The remaining rebar and concrete at the Chateau site near the state line in South Lake Tahoe is going to be developed by a new owner in the near future.

Owens Financial out of Walnut Creek is selling about 8 acres of the undeveloped site, plus the parking structure to Kawana Holdings for $42.5 million. Kawana is a Malaysia-based firm with offices in Corte Madera.

"Their plan was for immediate development of the property rather than hold it or try to do something else," Bill Owens told *Lake Tahoe News.* That is why his company chose to go with Kawana. "Their intention is to build what has been approved."

No one from Kawana could immediately be reached.

It is possible for Kawana to ask for revisions to the approved permit, but substantial changes would likely trigger environmental documents to be recirculated. That would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and delay the project for years.

While a convention center, two hotels, retail and spa were planned for the 11-plus acre site, no one expects a convention center to see the light of day. When the now defunct Lake Tahoe Development Company first broke ground it was going to be a $410 million project, with the city having control of the convention center.

Now the city has zero involvement at the site other than permitting.

The sale is expected to go through no later than the end of March. This is contingent upon a tentative map being approved by South Lake Tahoe.

City officials have been in on some of the talks with Kawana, letting them know what is approved for the site, what could occur and the intricacies of commodities – the development rights policy the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency created that has backfired to make it even more difficult to get anything built in the basin.

For now, Owens Financial plans to remain the owner of the developed retail and the Zalanta condominiums that are under construction.

“We have a list of people who want to buy these units. We expect to get a number of contracts signed in the next month,” Owens said.

They should be finished in early 2017.

Colo. offers lessons on legalizing recreational pot

By Colton Lochhead, Las Vegas Review-Journal

DENVER — Just beyond the Rocky Mountains, an industry that once conjured images of dank basements and back-alley deals is blossoming under state regulation.

After a sluggish start in sales following the 2012 vote to decriminalize marijuana, Colorado’s pot trade — and corresponding tax revenue — is booming as consumers from within and outside the state flock to cannabis shops.

Some predictions made during the campaign by legalization supporters have proved true: Fewer people are being arrested. And despite initial fears that legalization would cause a rampant increase in drug use among Colorado’s youth, teens aren’t smoking more weed, according to the state Department of Public Health and Environment.

But Colorado’s first-in-the-nation dive into a legal pot market also has come with unanticipated problems and failed predictions.

Read the whole story

Poll: Voters back Calif. tax increase, crime measures

By Filipa A. Ioannou, San Francisco Chronicle

Criminal sentencing reform and an extension on tax increases for high earners are among California’s November ballot propositions supported by a majority of likely voters, a Field Poll found.

Proposition 56, a $2-per-pack tax on cigarettes, was also leading among the poll’s respondents, though by narrower margins. Fifty-three percent of respondents favored the tax, 40 percent were opposed and 7 percent remained undecided.

In several past elections, tobacco tax initiatives have performed competitively in polling only to fail on election day. In 2012, a $1 cigarette tax to fund cancer research was defeated by a margin of only 0.4 percentage points. In 2006, a proposed tax increase prompted $66 million in tobacco industry spending, and the measure failed.

Prop. 56 would redirect the revenue from the cigarette tax – estimated between $1 billion and $1.4 billion – to health care for low-income Californians. Smoking-related illnesses are costly to the state; a 2015 analysis from the California Health Care Foundation found that among Medicare patients, lung cancer was the deadliest and costliest to treat of the four most common cancers.

Read the whole story

Basic casino cheating scams hardest to catch

By Nicole Raz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Inside jobs, chip grab-and-runs and craps cheats are the largest ongoing headaches for casinos and casino regulators.

And it's the most basic scams that can be hardest to catch.

The Nevada Gaming Control Board had 574 arbitration cases in 2015, disputing $51.8 million and made 602 criminal arrests.

Read the whole story