

Tahoe social issues top EDC official's talk

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – While many people believe their job runs the gamut, Don Ashton's literally goes from A to Z – animal control to Zika virus.

Ashton is the director of Health and Human Services for El Dorado County. It's the largest department in the county, with about 550 employees. Countywide there are approximately 1,800 workers.

Mental health, homelessness and human trafficking are three of the big issues his department contends with in Tahoe.

Ashton spoke last week at the Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe meeting, of which Supervisor Sue Novasel is a member.



Don Ashton with El Dorado County talks about issues pertaining to Tahoe. Photo/LTN

"With mental health, we are seeing more of a need in Tahoe,"

Ashton said. He mentioned El Dorado County's suicide rate is higher than the state average.

Transitional houses – T houses for short – have been established in the basin to help those with mental issues. Twelve beds are available at the lake; on average 10 are full each night.

"T houses use the treatment model. They have to agree to treatment. It's not just housing," Ashton explained.

It's less expensive for the county to pay \$500 in rent a month to sleep six than it is to send the person to a board and care facility in Sacramento at a rate of \$15,000 per person.

The beds in Tahoe have only been available since last year. Countywide there are 33 such beds, double the number from two years ago.

"Seventy percent of the people in jail or prison have a mental illness," Ashton said. When they get out they are in the community, often times without the resources to cope.

One of the positives about Tahoe is the community has come together to try to address some of these needs. He mentioned how CASA is working with Live Violence Free to build a program regarding mental health that will likely be brought to the supervisors. The electeds can then decide about going after grant money to fund the program.

Ashton said the county is moving toward creating a "system of care" so people don't fall through the cracks. He hopes to have it part of the next budget cycle, which the supervisors will be getting under way this spring. The problem now is things are fractionalized and don't come under one umbrella.

For instance, programs for kids and adults are separate, which doesn't help families. The other aspect is the broader community that needs his department's resources. The goal is

to make the agency user-friendlier.

What wasn't brought up at the meeting is how Ashton is being endorsed by various entities to be the next chief administrative officer for the county. This is the highest position. Several electeds **wrote a letter** to the Board of Supervisors earlier this month saying as much.

Last week El Dorado County Superior Court judges Suzanne Kingsbury, Steve Bailey, Keith Brooks, Ken Melikian and Dylan Sullivan sent a similar letter to the board, as did the Taxpayers Association of El Dorado County.

The county has an interim CAO, Larry Combs, whose ability to understand the budget and make good hiring decisions has been questioned by many in the county, and yet he is the one the supervisors put in charge of hiring the next CAO.

SAR teams busy in Tahoe area

El Dorado County search and rescue teams were called out to bring two groups of hikers to safety on Saturday.

Five people from the Bay Area had to be rescued April 16 on the trail to Horsetail Falls. They got lost in the thick brush. The route to this waterfall off Highway 50 near Lover's Leap is not always well defined. And with overnight temperatures still in the 30s in the Tahoe area, the daytime heat goes away quickly when the sun starts to set.

It was 10pm by the time rescuers got the stranded hikers back to their vehicle at the trailhead.

At Cascade Falls a threesome lost their way and called for help about 7:30pm. Before the SAR team found them they met up

with other hikers who helped them find their way.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Bill advances to curb ADA lawsuit abuse

By Allen Young, Sacramento Business Journal

Businesses would have a new tool to help avoid abusive ADA lawsuits under pending California legislation that has already drawn strong bipartisan support.

The legislation by Democratic Sen. Richard Roth would give businesses a window of time to fix Americans With Disabilities Act compliance issues before being served with lawsuits. The bill is supported by both the California Chamber of Commerce and the Consumer Attorneys of California, a trial lawyers group.

[Read the whole story](#)

Financial workings of South Tahoe unveiled

By Kathryn Reed

It is up to the finance department of most agencies to have the pulse of the organization. South Lake Tahoe is no

different.

“We try to remain emotionally detached,” Mark Carlson, assistant city manager and director of Financial Services said.

He admits the council has made decisions he disagrees with. All he can do is keep them informed of the consequences of those actions.

Everything that goes on in the city touches the finance department because those employees are the keepers of money.

Carlson, along with Maryann Brandt, who is the manager of the department, delved into the city’s finances with this year’s Citizens Academy students.

The free seven-week course is designed to give residents a better understanding about how the city works as well as an opportunity to ask questions of staff. (This reporter is part of the current class.) The first session was an overview about the city, the incorporation and basic functions.



Members of South Lake Tahoe’s Citizens Academy learn about financial dealings of the city. Photo/LTN

Also part of the April 14 session was a lesson about the airport by Sherry Miller, who oversees that facility. The city is actually a tenant of the airport's, paying \$1.45 per square foot. That will go up to \$1.50 a square foot in June per the council's approval earlier this year. That is the same rate all tenants pay.

The finance gurus touched on how the city has \$160 million in debt, with the bulk of it – \$90 million – being for the construction of Heavenly Village. That total, though, does not include pension debt for the California Public Employee Retirement System. A change in how the state wants financial documents recorded will put that \$19 million liability on the ledger in a more visible manner. Carlson stressed how the city has no ability to change PERS.

The debt would be substantially higher if the city had not changed its health care plan.

Carlson explained how public safety employees are the most expensive because of their training, equipment and pension costs.

Carlson also stressed how there is no denying South Lake Tahoe is a tourism-based economy.

"We live and die by the tourists who come to town," he said. He mentioned how the city is considering raising the hotel tax by 2 percentage points, which could be on November's ballot.

The next academy group will be hearing about the financial part of the city from other workers. This is because Carlson is leaving at the end of the month to take a job in Union City and Brandt is retiring in late summer.

The airport used to be a much larger financial drain on the city's coffers. Seven years ago \$630,000 came from the General Fund for the facility, while today it is \$106,000.

Any money that is made at the airport – including the vending machine – must be reinvested in the airport per Federal Aviation Administration rules.

The FAA has tremendous say over what goes on at Lake Tahoe Airport. The city even looked into closing the facility and the feds said no way. It's deemed too valuable for the region.

It's the FAA that wants more trees cut down because they are deemed an obstruction. Miller has a meeting scheduled for Monday to talk to various agencies about which ones will come down. It's a careful balance between negotiating for safety (trees aren't why planes go down here) and keeping the natural surroundings as they are.

While the South Lake Tahoe airport has not had commercial air service since 2001, it has some of the infrastructure from those days. A tunnel on the runway level runs the length of the upstairs entrance and council chambers. This is where the baggage would come in. A spot on the ceiling is obvious where the conveyor belt would have come down to carry bags to the carousel that was in what is now the empty entrance way. Today the tunnel is used for storage.

Even without commercial service, the airport is busy. Caesars flies in guests at least once day, sometimes five times. There are 23,000 takeoffs and landings a year. Helicopter tours are given, a flight school operates there and the medical helicopter CalStar is stationed at the airport. The busiest time is during the July celebrity golf tournament.

Miller is a one-person department. New to her plate is having to deal with drone activity.

"They are starting to fly in the same airspace as the big airplanes," Miller said.

"They can be just as dangerous or more so than birds. It would only take one to be ingested into an engine or fly into a cockpit window."

Calif. lawmakers collect public pensions and legislator's salaries

By Patrick McGreevy, Los Angeles Times

Republican state Sen. John Moorlach of Costa Mesa has emerged as a leading voice in the Legislature against skyrocketing debt piled up by public pension systems.

But some in the pension reform movement say the former Orange County treasurer may be contributing to the problem: Moorlach receives an \$83,827 government pension check from the Orange County Employees Retirement System while making \$100,113 a year as a senator.

At least 16 other state lawmakers collect two checks each month, including Assemblyman Jim Cooper (D-Elk Grove), who retired two years ago at 50 as a captain in the Sacramento County Sheriff's Department. When added to his legislative pay, Cooper's annual pension of \$173,820 brings his total income each year to \$273,000.

Read the whole story

DCSD board faces \$1.7 mil.

shortfall

Douglas County School District needs to find \$1.7 million in revenue or expenses to cut before May 18 when the board is expected to approve the 2016-17 budget.

At this week's meeting Holly Luna, who heads the finance department, gave the bad news to the board members.

Funding for a reading grant is ending, which accounts for about \$1 million of the shortfall. Enroll is off as well.

At the April 12 meeting no one brought up the idea of cutting staff to save money in what is projected to be a \$56.69 million budget.

The next meeting is in Minden on May 18 at 5pm.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

EDC resident launches robo calls for roads



El Dorado County has warnings on View Circle on the South Shore because the roads are so bad. Photo/Susan Wood

By Kathryn Reed

Tony Russo is prepared to unleash another round of robo calls targeting El Dorado County supervisors if they don't start funding roads.

"If the supervisors address the road fund and maintenance issues, I won't do it again. If they don't, I will," the El Dorado Hills resident told *Lake Tahoe News*.

For one day calls were placed to the supervisors' districts telling residents what a horrible job the electeds are doing and that it's time the public made their concerns known.

Russo enlisted the help of Californians Against Wasteful Spending to place the calls. They cost about 5 cents each.

His road on the West Slope has not been touched since he moved there in 1994.

"When it rains, water pours out of the manholes," Russo said.

Roads throughout the county are in bad shape. With Tahoe finally having a winter, the freeze-thaw cycle and beating

from snowplows has created potholes that can lead to the need for vehicles to be realigned.

Supervisor Sue Novasel at a Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe meeting on April 13 briefly touched on the subject. She told the group the robo calls mainly had to do with another supervisor.

The truth is at the Feb. 23 board meeting **she voted against** using General Fund money for roads even though this has been the norm for years. The chief administrative officer recommended this course of action even though he admitted at the meeting to not having read the budget.

On the flip side, Novasel told her Soroptimist sisters that taking money out of the General Fund is being looked at.

At the April 26 board meeting the supervisors are scheduled to get an update on items that likely won't be funded for the next fiscal year. Roads are expected to be on the list because that is how CAO Larry Combs wants things and the supervisors follow his recommendations instead of being the ones to set policy like they were elected to do.

Burning Man ticket sale was broken after all

By Jenny Kane, Reno Gazette-Journal

Immediately after Burning Man 2016 main sale tickets sold out in late March, Burners were certain that something had gone wrong during the sale.

And, although Burning Man denied that anything had gone wrong

at the time, something had.

In short, the online “waiting room” was a flop.

The waiting room, which had been set up last minute to hinder an overload of the ticketing website, benefited no one other than 3,500 people who signed on before the waiting room even opened. Of the 30,000 people who bought out all of the tickets in a half-hour, that was more than a tenth of them. Tickets cost \$390 each in the main sale, excluding the ticket fees and taxes.

Read the whole story

Barton Hospital scores well with patients

Based on patient surveys conducted between April 2014 and March 2015, Barton Memorial Hospital earned a four star rating from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

“This is a new program that CMS has rolled out to compare hospitals with the same survey and criteria,” explained Katie Shea, Barton’s patient experience coordinator.

Five stars is the highest rating. Barton received three stars last time.

Barton is in the top 14 percent of the 298 hospitals in California that were assessed. Facilities across the country that are Medicare certified acute care took part in the survey.

Nearly three-quarters of the patients surveyed rated Barton a

9 or 10 for overall hospital experience. Barton scored well in categories that assessed patient satisfaction, including communication with nurses and physicians, staff responsiveness, and room and bathroom cleanliness.

“Barton employees and physicians value the patient input from these surveys and has made a tremendous effort to improve the patient experience and quality of care,” Shea told *Lake Tahoe News*.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Senate passes Nevada Native Nations Land Act

By Juan Carlos Flores, KRNV-TV

The Senate has passed the bipartisan Nevada Native Nations Land Act.

The legislation would transfer land into a trust for six Nevada tribes: the Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribe of the Fort McDermitt Indian Reservation, the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation, the Summit Lake Paiute Tribe, the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony, the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe and the Duckwater Shoshone Tribe.

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