

LT Humane Society board in disarray, fires staff

Updated March 23:

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Humane Society has gone to the dogs – in a bad way.

Now the board is backpedaling a bit on what is going on.

Board secretary/treasurer Sue Pritchett on Thursday sent *Lake Tahoe News* an email stating, “The comment on the closing of the Humane Society was premature. We are reorganizing and will be open on Fridays to give out pet food.”

She would not explain the reorganization and stopped communicating with *LTN* when we started asking questions.

Judy Brown, who was on the board for 14 years before being termed out in 2013 and then became the office manager, said she was told by Pritchett on March 21 to post a **note on the door** saying the nonprofit was closed. Brown was also told that would be her last day of employment.

But she wasn’t given her last check, and she said the board is refusing to pay her her vacation and comp time.

Brown has been the acting executive director, at a pay of \$11 an hour, since last summer. This came on the heels of the former ED being fired for allegedly embezzling from the Humane Society.

“I was totally surprised by this. Apparently they had a secret board meeting on the 15th and decided they needed to sell the building and pay off the debt,” Brown told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The local Humane Society has been in operation for 51 years.

The other board members are Lorna Lefler, president, and Kim Stephenson. They with Pritchett were the board members when the alleged illegal activity occurred.

“I think the board should resign if they are so tired and they don’t want to hassle with it anymore,” Brown said. “Turn it over to people who are willing to make the organization continue. If it means downsizing, fine.”

Brown said the Humane Society runs the Disaster Animal Response Team for the city. After Hurricane Katrina the federal government said cities had to have a plan to care for animals during an emergency.

Acting City Manger Jeff Meston told *Lake Tahoe News* the animals will be cared for.

“In a disaster we would address that working with the county, Fish and Game, state of California OES and the Wildlife Care center. This would be a process worked through our logistics, planning and operations sections,” Meston said. “We had a successful animal evacuation shelter as well as people shelter last year with the floods and actually never used the Humane Society.”

As for the two house cats at the Humane Society, Brown took them to her home and is finding people to adopt them.

Experts: Wet weather great, but no ‘Miracle March’

By Peter Fimrite, San Francisco Chronicle

It has all the earmarks of a “Miracle March” – heavy dousings of rain, intense flurries of snow in the Sierra mountains and roadway havoc – but the showy display of stormy weather across California this week isn’t fooling the experts.

Despite encouraging signs, including a Sierra snowpack that has risen to respectability from record-breakingly meager depths this month, meteorologists say California will almost certainly emerge from the winter drier than normal.

“I would call it a very helpful March,” said Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at UCLA. “It has brought us up from the bottom of the barrel in a lot of places, but it is not close to” a miracle recovery. “It may not actually increase the snowpack at all.”

Read the whole story

Lira’s Market in Meyers sold

Lira’s Market in Meyers is changing hands.

The Lira family opened the Tahoe grocery story in 2000. They have sold it to North State Grocery, which operates Holiday Market and Sav-Mor Foods. Reports are that Lira’s will become a Holiday Market.

The new company is based in Cottonwood and has been in business since 1962.

No one from North State Grocery was available for comment. It is not known when the deal will be finalized, how things will change or what happens to the current employees.

Mike Lira declined to comment. This leaves the family with its

original store in Rio Vista. There was a brief time when Lira's had a market in Minden.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

El Dorado County VHR meeting canceled

The special El Dorado County Board of Supervisors meeting scheduled for March 24 in Meyers has been canceled.

The incoming storm is the reason.

The meeting was to solely focus on vacation home rentals.

The county plans to reschedule at a later date.

Power out in parts of Lake Tahoe Basin

Liberty Utilities and NV Energy are reporting outages at various locations around the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Weather is the culprit. Rain, snow and wind have brought down lines.

Both companies said they are working as fast as they can to restore power to the affected customers.

“We do have a contract line crew on standby during this weather event in case things get really crazy,” a Liberty official said.

According to the National Weather Service, a winter storm warning and flood watch remain in effect until 5am March 23.

The agency reported Thursday morning that Tahoe City in a 48-hour period received 3.52 inches of rain and 4 inches of snow.

On the South Shore at lake level it has been raining, with it turning to a rain-snow mixture in the afternoon of March 22.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Crews search for vehicles in Mt. Rose Hwy. avalanche

By Marcella Corona and Yvonne Beasley, Reno Gazette-Journal

Trooper Matt McLaughlin of the Nevada Highway Patrol said one car was caught in the edge of the slide on Thursday, but the single occupant of the vehicle was able to escape.

But ski patrol from Mt. Rose Ski Tahoe is currently searching for a second vehicle that they suspect may have been also caught in the avalanche. But it's still unknown if there is a second car underneath the snow.

Read the whole story

\$2 slot bet wins player \$1.3M in Stateline

By Daniel Behringer, Las Vegas Review-Journal

A visitor to the MontBleu casino in Stateline recently won an IGT jackpot valued at about \$1.3 million.

The winner made a \$2 wager on the three-reel, one-line Wheel of Fortune 5X Pay machine on March 10 to win the prize, an IGT spokeswoman said in an email.

[Read the whole story](#)

Divided council keeps South Tahoe SUP at Lakeview

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe Standup Paddle will continue to be the concessionaire at Lakeview Commons unless legal action is taken to prevent that from happening.

The South Lake Tahoe City Council this week on a 3-2 vote rejected the bid protests. Councilmembers Wendy David and Brooke Laine were in the minority.

Before the council were two protests that followed the council's **Feb. 20 decision**. One was from Anthony Spatucci of

Day Go Adventures and the other by Andrew Laughlin of Tahoe City Kayak and Paddleboard.

The choices before the council on March 20 were:

- Award the contract to the selected bidder, South Tahoe SUP.
- Award the contract to the next responsible bidder, Tahoe City Kayak.
- Reject all bids, and begin the process over.

The first option is what was selected.

Resident Rich Hodge questioned the whole process going back to when the concession was first awarded. While he has worked for Kayak Tahoe, one of the bidders, he said he was there representing himself. He questioned how a company with perfect credit didn't score well, while one with questionable financials gets to keep operating. His questions as to who did the scoring and the reasoning went unanswered.

Spatucci told the council a one-year extension should be given to South Tahoe SUP, which has had the concession for five years, or start over.

Laughlin said had he known he should have filled the council chambers with friends like South Tahoe SUP owner Chris Brackett did in February, he would have. He was shocked the "court of public" opinion swayed the electeds to go with South Tahoe SUP instead of his company. After all, it was Tahoe City Kayak that scored the most points by the judges, even though it was by less than one point.

"You asked the city attorney (last month) whether you could select a bidder who is not recommended today. Without citing legal authority, she said yes," Jacqueline Mittelstadt told the council. She is the attorney representing Tahoe City Kayak, and the former city attorney for South Lake Tahoe so

she has a familiarity with how the city works. “At the end of the hearing [your attorney] stated doing so was ‘within your allowable discretion.’ I see no legal authority for this assertion.”

One of the issues brought up by Tahoe City Kayak is the **lawsuit pending** against South Tahoe SUP in relation to a drowning in 2015.

Brackett said the allegations in that lawsuit have no merit and he is confident he will prevail.

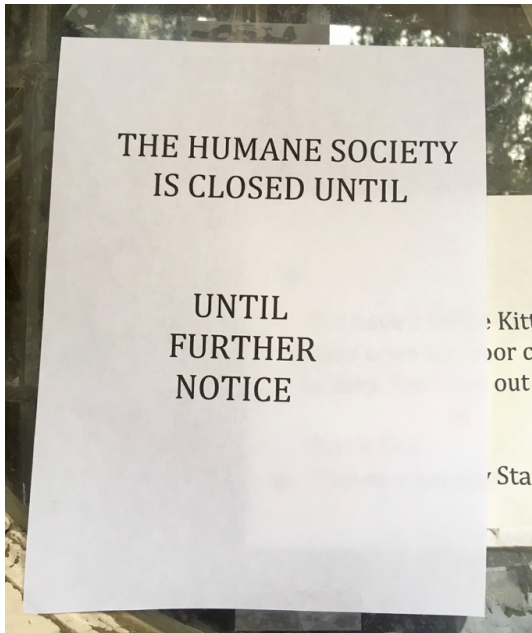
After the decision was made, Mittelstadt told *Lake Tahoe News*, “It’s unfortunate that the council does not follow its own regulations and RFP. Council member [Brooke] Laine had the most fair suggestion to redo the RFP process allowing the one-year extension to their favored contractor. Tahoe City Kayak will evaluate whether to seek court intervention for the council’s misplaced approach and to restore fairness to the city’s process.”

Lake Tahoe Humane Society abruptly closes

By Kathryn Reed

Nearly one year after the Lake Tahoe Humane Society **fired its executive director** the doors have been closed on the South Lake Tahoe facility.

A sign on the door says it will be closed until further notice.



The sign on the door at Lake Tahoe Humane Society.

Charges have still never been filed against Niki Congero, the executive director who was accused of embezzling more than \$100,000. The police department late last year wrapped up its investigation and sent it to the DA. A call earlier this month to the deputy district attorney handling the case went unreturned.

The nonprofit has been limping along this past year. The Humane Society last March secured a hard loan for \$180,000 for bills related to the building it owns on Emerald Bay Road. Their payments are current.

The answering machine at the office still lets people leave a message.

A post on the Facebook page "Knuckle Draggers of Tahoe Rejects KDTR" from March 21 says, "These cats need our help! They're the resident cats at the humane society and the lone worker came to find out today that they were shutting down (secret board meeting) and today is their last day open."

Judy Brown, the lone employee, could not be reached for comment.

Nev. pot revenue continues to surpass expectations

By Chris Kudialis, Las Vegas Weekly

The state collected \$5.54 million in taxes in January from legal marijuana, continuing to outpace projections, according to the Nevada Department of Taxation.

That's near a record \$5.8 million in October, \$5.5 million in November and \$5.7 million in December.

[Read the whole story](#)