

Tax dollars being used to lure violent game creator to Nevada

By Anjeanette Damon, Las Vegas Sun

Last month, the Nevada Economic Development Board signed off on a plan to invest \$600,000 in tax dollars in a video game development company looking to relocate to Las Vegas.

The decision to approve the money for Take-Two Interactive garnered little notice at the time and won unanimous support from the board. In fact, the decision dovetailed perfectly with Gov. Brian Sandoval's economic development plan of attracting more high-tech firms – and specifically entertainment technology firms – to Nevada.

But within the roster of video games developed by Take-Two Interactive is "Grand Theft Auto" and its sequels – games that have become poster children for the violent video games at the center of a debate in the wake of the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn.

In an ugly irony, the board approved the money for the game developer the same day the shooting took place – a fact that most board members weren't even aware of during the meeting or that was mentioned in the discussion.

The full details of the horror at Sandy Hook were just emerging as the board considered the tax incentive for Take-Two Interactive.

"I personally didn't hear about it until after we adjourned and my chief of staff said to me, 'My God, did you see what happened?'" said board member and Secretary of State Ross Miller.

“Grand Theft Auto” is a critically acclaimed video game upon which Take-Two Interactive depends heavily for its revenue. It’s also decried by many who believe video game violence is at the root of societal violence today.

National Rifle Association Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre mentioned the game specifically while arguing that curtailing violent video games is more important than gun control.

In “Grand Theft Auto,” players steal cars – often violently. They can also participate in all manner of virtual mayhem, including rape and clubbing to death a prostitute to avoid paying for sex. (Some critics dispute that what is depicted in the video game is actually rape.)

“It’s disgusting. It’s repugnant,” former state Sen. Sheila Leslie said.

“I’m troubled by much of what we’re doing here,” Leslie said, referring generally to the use of tax dollars to draw private companies to the state. “But I didn’t know we could stoop to this level. It is unbelievable to me that we would invest in a business like this.”

A spokesman for Take-Two Interactive said the company has not become involved in the recent debate over video game violence and directed questions to the industry’s trade association. Calls to the Entertainment Software Association were not returned.

The decision to invest tax dollars in Take-Two raises the question of whether social issues should be part of deciding which companies should earn tax incentives.

In addition to fitting into Nevada’s economic development plan, Take-Two will become a business tenant in redeveloping downtown Las Vegas, bringing with it 150 quality-assurance jobs paying an average of \$18 an hour.

"We're happy that Take-Two chose Nevada and is bringing 150 really good jobs. We are happy to have them here," said Sandoval's economic development director Steve Hill.

He added it's unfair to draw a nexus between the types of games Take-Two creates and violence such as occurred in Newtown.

"It's unfair to imply a correlation between such a horrible tragedy without any evidence there is a correlation," he said.

Studies into the effect of video game violence are mixed. The video game industry holds no correlation exists between societal violence and video games. The American Psychological Association, however, finds violent video games can lead to an increase in aggression and hostility in some youth.

Many legislative leaders said the fact the company has violent video games in a library that includes sports games and others for a younger audience shouldn't necessarily be a deal breaker.

Miller said he doesn't believe violent video games play a role in atrocities such as the Sandy Hook mass shooting and would have voted to approve the money even if he had known what was taking place.

Democratic Sens. Debbie Smith and Mo Denis said a decency test would be difficult to administer in economic development.

"I personally have concerns about violent games, having raised three children, but on the economic development side, it's a bit of a slippery slope once you start making judgments on companies based on whether or not you approve of the product," Smith said.

Assembly Minority Leader Pat Hickey, R-Reno, admitted he's troubled by violent video games. But he sees another potential upside to bringing Take-Two to Nevada.

“The Legislature may want to invite their CEO to be a part of any discussion we have regarding the influences of video game violence on the young. Who knows, instead of “Grand Theft Auto,” we might influence them to do an interactive version of ‘Little House on the Prairie.’”

It’s perhaps a silly question to ask in Las Vegas, where the economy is driven by vice.

“Nevada is too moral?” Hickey scoffed. “I mean, please, with all of our institutionalized vices, I don’t think we are in position to make that call.”

Ski resort clinics keep people out of hospital ER

By Kathryn Reed

TWIN BRIDGES – An X-ray of a wrist is on the light board. The patient is being seen in one of the three exam rooms. Out front all of his vitals are inserted into a computer.

But this is no ordinary emergency room. This is where injured skiers and snowboarders come to be treated at Sierra-at-Tahoe.

It is one of three clinics Barton Health medical personnel operate. The others are at Heavenly and Kirkwood mountain resorts. They are staffed with an emergency room doctor, registered nurse, technician and radiologic technician.

Dr. Steve Leman considers Sierra the model ski clinic based on how it is set up and operates. Barton’s team works closely with Sierra’s ski patrol. Patrollers assist people with less serious injuries in the front area. They do more first aid

work as trained emergency medical technicians.



Steve Leman is the doctor on duty Jan. 6 at Sierra-at-Tahoe's medical clinic. Photos/Kathryn Reed

The three exam rooms Barton uses once were the ski patrol locker rooms. Dispatch is still there so everybody is hearing the same calls.

However, it is a patroller who decides when CalStar is called in to airlift someone off the mountain. Pilots have three locations they may land at Sierra. On Sunday a chopper is called to take someone out who has a head injury.

But Leman and his crew also treat head injuries.

"If we can stabilize them, they can go by private car to the hospital for a CAT scan," Leman explained during a tour of the clinic Jan. 6.

He said there used to be so many head injuries with all of them taken by ambulance to Barton Memorial Hospital. This would present a problem for the rest of the community because the ambulances were tied up going to ski resorts – sometimes stuck in long holiday or weekend traffic – and unable to

respond to other calls.

Leman said the medical clinics at the ski resorts mean fewer people going to the hospital's emergency room.

With the 10 to 20 patients each clinic sees a day on peak weekends and Barton's ER full at those times, "we would be in disaster mode," Leman told *Lake Tahoe News*, if the skiers ended up at the hospital. That is why it's imperative to have the clinics at the resorts, he added.

Barton staff was at Sierra all through the holiday period, while normally they are at the clinic just on weekends.



Sierra ski patrol operate the first aid clinic adjacent to Barton's operation.

Even though skier visits are up 900 percent compared to a year ago at this time for Sierra, the number of injuries has not increased anywhere near that percentage. The soft snow is the big contributing factor to keeping people out of the clinic.

But their info is easily accessible. All of their data is entered into a computer that is part of Barton's system, so it's all centralized.

Plus, people can leave with their X-rays to take to their physician.

Leman, who used to be on the ski patrol at Sierra in the 1970s, said there was a time when someone would come up via bus, hurt themselves, be hospitalized and then need their parents or someone to drive to Tahoe to get them. With the clinic, pain meds are available to make the ride back tolerable, docs can stabilize many injuries, and they have the X-rays to know if someone needs more immediate care. This can mean the person travels back with their buddies instead of needing someone to come get them.

“They like me. I’m the lady with narcotics,” Sandy Wirth, registered nurse, says. She shakes her head though; wishing snowboarders would wear wrist guards.



CalStar flies into Sierra on Jan. 6.

Wrists and shoulders are what snowboarders injure most, while it’s knees for skiers. And the harder the snow, the more injuries there are. However, fresh, deep powder can increase knee injuries.

It’s cheaper if people go to one of the clinics at a ski resort because the charges are nowhere near the hospital’s ER costs. Plus, it’s faster.

“We are able to serve most patients at the resort and in most cases deliver definitive care, which saves them a long, painful drive to the hospital,” Warren Wither, medical

director of emergency service at Barton Memorial Hospital, said. "The cost is lower for patients than at the hospital."

It's not just skier injuries the Barton crew treats.

"They help us with seeing employees with colds or flu," John Rice, Sierra's general manager tells *Lake Tahoe News*. "A lot of kids are away from home. They can come in and get a script."

Wirth says she's seen skiers who have had an allergic reaction, needed sutures and have let their sugar levels get too low if they are diabetic. While it's considered a clinic for skiers and snowboarders, it is a medical clinic for anyone who needs it.

Kings Beach attempted robbery may be connected to Incline incident

By Barbara Barte Osborn, Sacramento Bee

Placer County sheriff's deputies are seeking the public's help in apprehending a suspect who attempted one, and possibly two, recent armed robberies in North Lake Tahoe.

The suspect is male, approximately 6-feet tall and about 180 pounds. He was wearing dark clothing and wielding a handgun,

possibly a revolver, in an attempted Dec. 30 robbery in Kings Beach.

He also might have been involved in a similar Jan. 2 robbery in Incline Village.

At 9:09pm on Dec. 30, a person entered the Kings Beach Liquor Store at 8645 N. Lake Blvd. in an apparent attempt to rob the store, but did not complete the robbery and fled on foot.

Because of the similar incident later in Incline Village, the Washoe County Sheriff's Office is conducting a joint investigation with the Placer County department.

Anyone with information regarding the incidents or the identity of the suspect is asked to call Placer County Detective John Riella, (530) 581.6325.

To remain anonymous and be eligible for a reward of up to \$1,000, callers may contact Placer County Crime Stoppers, 800.923.8191.

Official: Byrne's footprints point to hypothermia or intoxication

By Mary Callahan, Santa Rosa Press Democrat

A 19-year-old Petaluma woman found dead in the snow near South Lake Tahoe appeared to have taken a wrong turn on New Year's Eve and wandered through the snow a short distance before

shedding her winter jacket and coming to rest behind a snow bank, authorities said Monday.

Alyssa Byrne was found dead three days later, her boot prints the only ones in the vicinity. The pattern of the footprints suggested disorientation that may have been caused by alcohol consumption, hypothermia, or both, an El Dorado County sheriff's official said.

"I don't want to speculate," sheriff's Lt. Pete Van Arnum said, though he confirmed authorities have received reports that Byrne had been drinking while in town with friends for an outdoor music festival.

He also noted that advanced hypothermia causes confusion and deteriorating cognition. Victims can become disoriented and lose judgment.

"It was subzero that night and, depending on how long she was out in the cold, that could have affected her," Van Arnum said.

Experts say it's common for those with fatal hypothermia to remove clothing shortly before death because of physiological changes that cause a spreading sense of warmth.

Byrne was attending the three-day SnowGlobe Music Festival at Lake Tahoe Community College when she died late New Year's Eve or early the next morning.

She had driven to Lake Tahoe the previous Saturday with three friends and was sharing a room with them at the Horizon hotel-casino Stateline.

But on New Year's Eve she got ahead of her friends in a concert crowd and suddenly disappeared about 11pm, telling a friend by cell phone 30 minutes later that she was taking a shuttle bus back to the hotel. They never saw her again, despite earlier reports of saying they had.

On Friday morning, a South Tahoe Public Utility District worker perched atop an elevated truck peered over a 4-foot snow bank and spotted her lifeless body about a half-mile from the college campus.

Byrne was lying about 10 feet off Pioneer Trail, between Al Tahoe Boulevard, which leads to the college campus, and Black Bart Trail, the opposite direction of the hotel.

Authorities said long shuttle bus lines may have caused her to join others who elected to walk back to Stateline – an approximately 4-mile route that would have followed Al Tahoe Boulevard and then turned left along Pioneer Trail, headed northeast. It also is possible she walked through the campus instead of taking a paved path used by others, Van Arnum said.

But her final location indicated she turned right on Pioneer Trail, rather than left, crossed the road, and walked along the road a ways before climbing over a 4-foot berm of frozen snow pushed off the roadway, Van Arnum said.

Her boot prints were visible coming over the berm and heading southwest for about 100 yards along the back side of the snowbank, he said.

“It looked like she was kind of disoriented from the footprints. They kind of wandered a bit,” he said.

She was fully clothed when she died except for her white ski jacket, which was found a short distance away, he said.

Investigators hope a forensic autopsy scheduled Tuesday in Sacramento will shed some light on what happened.

A full toxicology panel would automatically be included, but will be an important investigative tool in Byrne’s case. The toxicology tests will be run through an independent lab and could take a full month, Van Arnum said.

Nevada one day may not be only place for sports betting

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

Lawmakers from across the country are contemplating whether it's worthwhile to move into a domain that's been almost exclusively Nevada's since 1949 – legalized sports wagering.

But a top Las Vegas race and sports book director says that even if other states cleared the numerous legal and legislative hurdles to offer betting on sports in their states, it probably wouldn't have a big effect on Nevada.

The issue of legalizing sports wagering was a topic of a panel discussion Saturday at the three-day meeting of the National Council of Legislators from Gaming States. The organization's winter meeting at the Rio in Las Vegas is being attended by about 100 lawmakers and regulators from 21 states, a Canadian province and Washington, D.C. Representatives of several American Indian tribes that operate casinos also are attending.

New Jersey is the state most likely to move in on Nevada's territory after the state's voters overwhelmingly approved a constitutional question that would enable gamblers to place sports bets at New Jersey's horse tracks and in Atlantic City casinos.

New Jersey voters approved the measure in 2011, and Gov. Chris Christie signed a constitutional amendment in January 2012 to pave the way for sports betting this month. The state decided not to challenge a federal law enacted in 1992 that makes it illegal for people to bet on professional and amateur

athletics.

The Professional Amateur Sports Protection Act gives Nevada, Oregon, Montana and Delaware exemptions from the law. Although Nevada is the only state with legal sports books, the three others were grandfathered in because they had laws on their books to allow football betting in conjunction with lotteries and contests.

Christie said New Jersey would continue to move toward licensing sports books, and the NCAA and the four major professional sports leagues filed a suit in federal court to block New Jersey's plans.

Most of the panelists in the session of the National Council of Legislators from Gaming States supported state efforts to get into the sports book game.

Donn Mitchell, chief administrative officer of St. Louis-based Isle of Capri, said sports wagering offers another "hook" to get customers to come to a casino.

"Why does the federal government say you can't have it anywhere except Nevada?" Mitchell asked. "New Jersey is asking that question and rightfully so. It needs to be challenged."

Alan Koslow, a lawyer with the Fort Lauderdale, Fla.-based Becker & Poliakoff law firm, said while sports books don't generate a high percentage of revenue for a casino's bottom line, it does generate gross revenue in hotel rooms, food, beverages, shows and shopping.

"I talked with an executive at Wynn (Resorts) who said the biggest weekend by far at the Wynn Las Vegas properties is the Super Bowl weekend," Koslow said. "They're coming here to have a good time, and they're having a good time."

Art Manteris, who oversees the sports books at 17 Station Casinos properties in Las Vegas, said the ban on sports

wagering in most states diverts money to illegal offshore Internet casinos. Manteris, who lives in Boulder City, said he has a hard time reconciling that what he does for a living is illegal just across the Colorado River in Arizona.

He said the horse racing industry shot itself in the foot years ago when it didn't attempt to get sports wagering legalized at tracks. Today, the horse-racing industry is dying, and it lost an opportunity to bring a new generation of young gamblers to the track.

Manteris thinks that if sports wagering were legalized in other states, it wouldn't hurt Nevada's industry. He said that like the perceived threats of riverboat gaming and tribal casinos to Las Vegas in the past, legalized sports wagering elsewhere would broaden the market and attract more people to the city.

"On Super Bowl weekend, where would you rather go: Las Vegas or some other place that may have a casino that has sports betting?" Manteris said.

In 2011, Nevada's 216 sports books took \$2.9 billion in wagers, but about 95 percent of that was returned to gamblers who won. The state wins about \$10 billion in gaming a year, but of that, only about \$150 million comes from sports wagering.

Only one panelist took an opposing viewpoint on encouraging states to legalize sports betting.

Former U.S. District Attorney Michael Fagan, now of the St. Louis-based Center for Advanced Prosecution, said states should be wary of the hidden costs of any form of gambling.

"If you think it's something that can be regulated, you have to devote resources to it," Fagan said. "You'll need to be able to investigate corruption and fraud and allegations that inevitably occur with sports wagering."

Fagan said he has seen studies show that jurisdictions that allow sports wagering spend \$3 for every dollar they make from gamblers on investigations and the social costs of problem gambling associated with sports betting.

California gun sales rise, injuries decrease

By Phillip Reese and Cynthia Hubert, Sacramento Bee

California has millions more guns than it did 10 years ago. It also has thousands fewer gun injuries and deaths each year.

Those are two simple facts that, depending on whom you ask, have everything or nothing to do with each other.

Last month's horrific Connecticut school shooting has reignited the debate over gun control in California, a state with some of the nation's strictest gun laws. State legislators will likely take up additional gun law proposals later this year, ranging from further limits on ammunition purchases to requiring regular background checks for gun owners.

If recent trends hold, that debate will take place as gun sales boom and gun injuries fall.

From one perspective, those figures suggest more guns mean less violence – a view embraced by many gun rights advocates. They say criminals are less inclined to draw their weapons out of fear their targets will also be packing heat.

“Criminals don't know who has a gun,” said Sam Paredes, executive director of Folsom-based Gun Owners of California.

So they ask themselves, “why go into a dangerous situation?”

Others who study crime in California and America say the trends are more nuanced. Most gun-related hospitalizations and deaths are due to assaults. And the drop in firearm-related injuries in California coincides with a well-documented, nationwide drop in violent crime that began in the early 1990s.

Researchers said that drop has little to do with gun sales, which peaked in California around 1993 as gun crime also hit a high point. For much of the 1990s, guns sales fell while gun injuries also declined.

Instead they say changing demographics, improved law enforcement techniques, stronger laws dictating who can legally buy guns, increasing incarceration rates, and falling gang violence, among other factors, have driven down gun injuries and deaths.

“People who are passionate about guns see things through a single-subject lens,” said Frank Zimring, a UC Berkeley law professor and author of “The Great American Crime Decline,” a book on nationwide crime trends.

Not in dispute is the fact that guns are flying off California shelves.

Dealers sold 600,000 guns in California during 2011, up from 350,000 in 2002, according to records of sales tallied by the California attorney general’s office.

Those figures track sales, not ownership, and don’t include guns taken across state lines.

At the same time, the number of hospitalizations in the state due to gun injuries dropped roughly 28 percent, from about 4,000 in 2002 to 2,900 in 2011, according to records newly collected by the Office of Statewide Health Planning and

Development.

Gun-related deaths in California fell 13 percent over roughly the same period, from about 3,200 to about 2,800, according to the California Department of Public Health.

Even with the declines, California, which would be the world's ninth largest economy if it was a separate nation, has a higher rate of gun-related homicides than almost any industrialized country, United Nations figures show."

The decadelong surge in gun sales is driven partially by a widespread fear of more gun control, several gun dealers said.

Ten years ago, roughly 5 million Californians, or 20 percent of the state's adults, had at least one gun in their home, according to the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research.

Since then, California gun dealers have sold another 4 million guns.

The uptick in sales started in 2004, but exploded around 2008, when Barack Obama was elected president.

"When the president or senators threaten to take people's gun rights away, that's when we see things really pick up," said Bryan Schaff, owner of Hoffmeyer's Firearms & Sporting Goods in Grass Valley.

This phenomenon happened again last month during calls for new gun control measures in the wake of the Sandy Hook Elementary shootings. "Since the school shooting there is nothing left out on the market at all," said Dan Hendrix, of Dan's Discount Guns & Ammo in Oakdale.

Some researchers said the notion that more legal gun sales would immediately lead to more gun injuries ignores a basic truth: Guns were everywhere in California a decade ago; and they are everywhere today.

“My guess is that we are way beyond that,” said Mark Kleiman, a UCLA public policy professor who has written on guns and crime, when asked if California has reached a saturation point for guns.

More important than the increase in gun sales, several researchers said, is who is buying guns. Young men are the most likely demographic group to be injured or killed with a gun, state health records show.

“If you have a population entirely comprised of little old ladies, you can increase the number of guns and nothing is going to happen,” said Will Vizzard, a California State University, Sacramento, criminal justice professor who has written extensively about guns and crime.

Vizzard noted that many crimes are committed using stolen guns – gang members killing one another, for instance – or by people who legally own a gun who get caught in the heat of the moment.

About 40 percent of guns used by felons nationwide before their admission to state or federal prison were stolen or bought on the street, according to a survey released in 2002 by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Another 40 percent were obtained from friends or family, leaving about 15 percent purchased in stores and 5 percent acquired in other ways.

Vizzard cited last week’s Old Sacramento shooting, in which Gabriel Cordova, 35, and Daniel Ferrier, 36, were killed and two others were wounded when Carlito Montoya allegedly opened fire in a bar.

Police say Montoya, 22, was involved in an argument with Cordova and his wife over a spilled drink, and pulled out a gun – allegedly stolen – when things got heated.

"You have a bunch of people together and somebody bothers somebody else. And the guy shoots the wrong people," Vizzard said.

State officials do not release demographic information on gun owners, so it's not clear just who has been buying firearms in California. Gun dealers and gun rights advocates argue that all types of people – hunters, target shooters, moms, elderly couples – are buying guns.

"It's a lot of first-time buyers," said Bill Sharff, co-owner of STS Guns in Folsom. "Half of the folks coming in here have never owned a gun."

Customers at area gun shops include older people and couples who enjoy testing their skills at shooting ranges, hunting game, firing at clay targets and participating in recreational gun clubs, dealers said.

It is not unusual, they said, for people who shoot for sport to have several guns of different types. Collectors may own a dozen or more weapons.

"I was raised up with guns," said Hendrix, whose father taught him to shoot as a boy. "I have always been comfortable with them." He now takes his own children hunting and target shooting.

Schaff, of Hoffmeyer's Firearms, said he carries a legal, concealed weapon on occasion when he travels to cities, keeps a gun at home for protection and enjoys recreational shooting and hunting. He also teaches classes on gun safety.

"We recommend that every new owner take a class before they even buy their gun," he said. At least half of his customers do so.

"I don't think stricter gun laws will help reduce violence at all," he said. "All it would do is penalize law-abiding

citizens.”

Daniel Webster, director of the Center for Gun Policy and Research at Johns Hopkins University, said he believes that most firearms sold recently in California were bought by people who already had guns, so the actual number of people who own firearms may not have risen much or at all.

Webster said the spike in gun sales has likely occurred among older men and women whose incomes have been less impacted by the recession. “The behavior of these groups don’t typically drive crime trends,” he said.

Zimring, the UC Berkeley researcher, noted that gun ownership in California is much higher in rural, inland areas than in urban hubs like Los Angeles. Yet much of the decrease in crime over the last decade in California happened in Los Angeles County.

Rural areas tend to have more hunters and more political conservatives who support unfettered gun rights than urban areas such as San Francisco, which had the lowest rate of gun sales in 2011.

“Most of the places where people buy and own guns are outside the places with the most residents,” Zimring said. “You have to be specific,” when looking at gun injury and sales data, he added. “A state with 50 million people is not the right unit of analysis.”

There is one broad point of agreement between both sides of the gun debate: Whether the buyers are seasoned hunters or first-time owners, most guns purchased legally in California are sold to law-abiding, responsible citizens.

“The guns that are being recorded are legally purchased, and I really don’t think that these guns are being used in criminal conduct,” said former Sacramento County Sheriff John McGinness.

An important consideration, then, when talking about the relationship between legal gun sales and gun injuries, McGinness and others said, isn't how many guns are sold or crime trends in a particular area; it's the personal decision made by millions of Californians each day to keep their guns secure.

The number of guns stolen nationwide, along with other types of theft, has dropped sharply over the last 15 years, according to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

"I hope that people who make the decision to purchase a gun store it safely," McGinness said. "And make it damned difficult for someone to steal it."

Armed man robs Incline gas station

Washoe County sheriff's detectives are looking for man who robbed an Incline Village Chevron station at gunpoint.

The incident occurred Jan. 2 at 8:45pm.

A masked man flashed a silver colored long barrel revolver at the clerk, according to deputies. The gunman fled with an undisclosed amount of money.



Deputies are
searching for
this man.
Photo/Provided

The suspect was last seen wearing a heavy blue jacket, blue pants and a red bandana over his face.

Anyone with information is asked to call (775) 328.3336 or Secret Witness at (775) 322.4900.

Barton Memorial Hospital's 50-year evolution a testament to tenacity of South Shore residents

By Susan Wood

The day after President John F. Kennedy was shot and killed in Dallas, South Lake Tahoe made a major move to heal its community, decrease fatalities and provide well-rounded care to its local citizenry and visitors.

Barton Memorial Hospital opened about a half century ago on Nov. 23, 1963, with 38 licensed beds, 18 physicians, five

dentists and about 20 employees on a 6-acre plot valued at \$200,000 that dairy farmers Alva Barton and Fay Ledbetter donated. The landmark opening came after a long-fought effort to raise more than \$400,000 in funds because lives were at risk and a tight-knit group of pioneering families that reads like a "who's who" list of South Shore history demanded more and cared much about their community's health care.

The hospital commemorates the last 50 years in 2013 with a historical book available to those who have donated their time to Barton. Others may access an online version starting Jan. 17.

The case for a local hospital goes far and deep for those who lived alongside the health care community in the 1950s and early 1960s. Deep snow, substandard transportation, many life-threatening injuries and illnesses as well as a baby boom and limited number of independent doctors made a local health care facility a necessity.



Alva Barton and Fay Ledbetter helped bring the South Lake Tahoe community together in the 1960s to build a hospital. Barton Memorial Hospital is named after their parents, Bill and Ouida Barton.

Photo/Provided

According to patient records from 1959, 1,500 emergency room visits to Carson Hospital were from South Lake Tahoe residents – nearly one-third of the hospital's emergency room usage. In one year, the Carson-area hospital's admissions from here totaled 467 in May 1959.

Barton and Ledbetter's parents, Bill and Ouida Barton, even had their share of medical emergencies when both fell off a horse. Despite the danger and no local access to care for serious injuries, the late Alva Barton at age 96 told this reporter years ago that she "wouldn't live anywhere else but Tahoe."

In 1958, one call marked a watershed moment for building South Lake's own hospital when a man shot himself and didn't make it to Carson City in time to save his life, local stakeholders recounted.

Estimates showed the proposed "Lake Tahoe Community Hospital" would cost about \$1 million. Federal and state grants totaled \$598,010, but the community would need to reach \$422,011 in donations by Feb. 8, 1962, or the funding would not be available for another decade.

Taking the bull by the horns

A citizens group was formed and spawned the Barton Memorial Hospital Association. If a business, organization or individual donated \$200 or more, either would get a vote on who would serve on the hospital board of directors. Heavenly Valley Ski Resort, Safeway, Soroptimist International, South Lake Tahoe Kiwanis, St. Theresa Parish and many more stepped up to the plate.

"It's been a labor of love in the community for a lot of people," said Patty Olson, whose husband Walter Neal Olson served as the initial special gifts division chairman. Years

later, a children's playroom was dedicated in his honor. All of their children had to be born at St. Mary's Hospital in Reno because Barton Hospital did not exist at the time.

"The vast majority went to Nevada (to give birth)," said Del Laine, who ended up serving as a Barton Foundation trustee. She recalled how her daughter, Brooke, was one of the first babies born at Barton in 1964. The subject is near and dear to the Laine family.

Before the hospital was built, it was the medical emergencies that got the stark attention when the fund-raising teams were spawned. Campaign slogans declared: "The life you save may be your own" and "In an emergency, will death wait?"

The necessity was loud and clear.

Leading the way to better medical care

"If someone was really hurt, we'd have to take the Old Grade (over Spooner Summit) to Reno – without four-wheel-drive," Karen Pavlakis told *Lake Tahoe News*.

She reflected on the challenges that faced her father, Jim Whitely, when it came to caring for the local community. The physician responded to accidents with his own vehicle loaded with emergency supplies. Public safety units provided escorts. When people were injured in Desolation Wilderness, he was flown in to the injured party via helicopter.

Whitely, along with Dr. Peter Irving – Barton's first general surgeon – and Dr. Ken Smith, represented the primary physicians in town handling a multitude of calls during snowstorms and limited support services.

Some involved celebrities who starred at the Stateline casinos. While Irving cared for "some Judy" – as his wife Shirley Irving described a call from the late singer Judy Garland for Barton's 40th anniversary, Whitely had his hands

full with the likes of the Andrew Sisters, Pavlakis and her sister Jane Callahan recalled.

This was nothing new. The two women said their father had developed a reputation for being a doctor of entertainers, and that legacy stuck. Rock legend Elvis Presley donated money to Barton in 1973 for an intensive care unit that opened two years later. It was named after his mother, Gladys, whom orthopedist Dr. Paul Fry cared for. Presley needed care when he contracted the flu and was forced to cancel his remaining concerts at the Sahara Tahoe (now the Horizon) after one sold-out show.

When superstar singer, actress Bette Midler filmed “Jinxed” in 1981, she donated \$10,000 to the Barton Hospital Auxiliary – which in turn funded a new birthing suite. Ed Asner, Duke Ellington – the list goes on and on of celebrity connections.

“When we were young, we’d go down to Harrah’s (to see a show) for our birthdays, and he’d always get called,” Callahan said of her father. The beeper would go off and Whitely would need to spring into action, the sisters remembered of their late father during their childhoods. Callahan’s eyes welled up when she reminisced about her kind-hearted, hard-working father, who died in 1989 of brain cancer.

Callahan said she’s been dreaming about her father lately.

“I’d look at my husband and tell him I can smell dad’s medical bag,” she said.

Unbeknownst to Callahan, her sister brought the iconic symbol of their father’s work to the interview. The duo took out tools and reflected on times when the bag came out – sometimes to their detriment if it meant they were getting a shot.

“I remember the noise it made when it opened. All us girls would run out and try to carry it,” Pavlakis said, while demonstrating the fold-out design. She pulled out an otoscope.

“God knows how old this is.”

More than the noise, Callahan said she remembers the smell – a “septic, pilly” scent of the bag. Whitely shared stories of his day around the dinner table and “always made us laugh,” the sisters recounted of doctor visits from Whitely’s office. It was located where the Lake Tahoe Art League building now sits next to the Lake Tahoe Museum.

Back in the early 1960s, some people bartered for medical care. The sisters recalled their father bringing home dresses and allowing a contractor to fix their roof.

“Sometimes he didn’t charge people,” Pavlakis said.

When it was time for their own family medical care, the girls hid under the Jeep to no avail.

Children may have shied away from seeking care, but the two sisters recalled how smokers would go to Whitely because, if anything, he was not judgmental because he smoked.

“He’d say to them: ‘Just cut back’,” Pavlakis said.

However, the attitude changed when a boy on a motorcycle tried to pick up Callahan on a date. He let the boy borrow the family car, and that was the last date with him.

“He never allowed us to ride a motorcycle,” Pavlakis said. “He saw too many accidents. He’d say: ‘The motorcycle never wins.’”

Still, the sisters reflected on quality time with their father and believe his time lives on in the legacy left in helping the hospital get off the ground.

“Mom used to say: ‘Jim could diagnose anything’,” Callahan said.

Just after he retired a year before he died, Pavlakis asked

her father what medical discipline the family practitioner would have gone into.

“He said: ‘I’d be a cardiologist because matters of the heart are so interesting’,” she said.

The comment proved prophetic.

Callahan developed a blood clot recently.

“I was scared. But my dad’s hospital saved my life,” she said.

And, it added another to the local community. Callahan’s granddaughter, Cienna Marie Griffin, was born there within this last year.

From accidents and babies to the birth of advanced medical technology and orthopedics

Barton Memorial Hospital has come a long way since the hospital represented a glimmer in the eye of the community.

One could even argue it’s not even the same hospital as the one that opened its doors a half century ago. Now it has a larger footprint, rooms are cozier, equipment is more computerized and specialties are more pronounced. There is even evidence of decades of personality in its skilled nursing facility.

Within one year of its opening, the 23,000-square-foot hospital built in the shape of a snowflake operated in the black – a notable feat.

In the mid-1960s, the South Lake Tahoe community grew to 7,500 year-round residents – up from the 400 of 15 years earlier when unrelenting snowstorms buried the South Shore in the winter of 1951-52.

In the 1970s, new hospital wings were added and the ICU opened.

Another decade later, the ambulatory wing came on the scene and was joined by a pharmacy and birthing room. The radiology department was expanded.

In the 1990s, Barton, as a health care enterprise, built the Carson Valley Medical Center to extend its reach. Other practices such as Stateline Medical Center came on board. Mammography, laser technology, nuclear medicine, X-ray and CAT-scanning divisions were upgraded.

In addition, another 60,000 square feet expanded the hospital space that opened up the emergency and surgical departments. A nearby community clinic would add a new, much-needed realm of health care for the neediest of the community.

For our aging population in need of extra help, the Barton Skilled Nursing Facility opened with 48 beds – where a “healing garden” at the entrance marks the contributions of the Ledbetter family led by sister and brother Jessica and Kirk. They are descendants of Fay Ledbetter.

In 1991, the Barton Foundation was formed with 21 volunteer board of trustees.

After the century turned, medical imaging dominated health care. Seismic upgrades were made. Physician partnerships spread across the land. Employees topped 1,000. Medical ski clinics at Heavenly, Sierra and Kirkwood were built to stabilize those participating in Tahoe’s primary choice of recreation.

Orthopedists associated with Barton have made a name for themselves – from the early beginnings with Fry to U.S. Ski Team Dr. Terry Orr. Plus, a comprehensive physical therapy division and occupational health department round out the offerings for skiers and boarders trying to keep their limbs and joints intact and healthy.

“In recent years, the focus on improving quality and state-of-

the-art technology has benefitted patients and allowed our small town hospital to offer services on par with larger cities,” foundation board Chairwoman Julie Regan said. Regan is convinced that with aging baby boomers from the Bay Area continuing to visit Tahoe, the orthopedics program will become increasingly more important.

The wave of the future for Barton leading into the next 50 years and beyond also includes private patient suites, electronic ICU technology and retail health care kiosks.

“What (has) really impressed me most about the history of Barton was the way the community rallied together to fund raise for the creation of the hospital and to help it expand. It wasn’t by happenstance that the hospital was formed. It took a lot of collaboration, vision and a ton of hard work by everyone in our community,” Barton spokeswoman Monica Sciuto said. “I have great pride in what we have been able to accomplish over the last 50 years. It is amazing to think that we started with just a small 38-bed hospital and have grown to what we are today.”

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)

Probe: State Parks officials knowingly hid money

By Matt Weiser and Jon Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

Former California state parks leaders engaged in a “conscious and deliberate” effort to hide millions of dollars for as long as 13 years, according to an investigation by the state attorney general’s office released Friday.

The long-awaited probe was ordered by Gov. Jerry Brown after revelations, first reported by the Bee in July, that headquarters officials at the California Department of Parks and Recreation kept a stash of “hidden funds.”

At the time, the total was reported as \$54 million, held in two special revenue accounts.

The attorney general’s investigation concludes, however, that only \$20.5 million held in the State Parks and Recreation Fund was truly concealed. The remaining \$33 million, held in the Off Highway Vehicle Fund, was not intentionally hidden but simply obscured by long-term complexities in managing that fund.

The \$20.5 million piled up because the department had a practice of reporting one fund total to the state Controller’s Office and a smaller amount to the Department of Finance, the agency with final authority for compiling the overall state budget. This violated state budgeting rules.

The accumulation of money, however, was “unintended,” according to the investigation, and did not accrue from any misconduct.

Active efforts to keep the money hidden, however, raise questions about whether any employees committed crimes. The

attorney general's office, known as an aggressive law-enforcement agency in other arenas, did not probe this crucial question.

The investigators also were unable to fully explain how the money piled up, despite interviewing 40 key employees in more than 2,000 pages of testimony.

It likely began, according to the investigation, in 1995 when the department was "engaged in a performance-based budgeting project, which reportedly entailed the added complexity of operating dual financial tracking and budgeting programs."

The disparity was first noticed by former budget officer Becky Brown in 1998. When she informed superiors, they made the decision not to inform the Department of Finance, perhaps as early as 1999.

"The primary reason consistently given for not doing so was fear that the department would see its already-reduced general funding cut further if the extra monies ... were revealed," the investigation states.

This extended as high up as the No. 2 employee at state parks, Michael Harris, who was chief deputy director until being fired July 19 just as the scandal was revealed.

"I obviously didn't think it was terribly important because I didn't do anything to change it," Harris said in his testimony. "I would say that I never saw correcting this as being of any benefit to parks."

Harris and other officials told investigators they treated the money as a "rainy day fund." Noting that massive storms in 1997 closed many parks and curtailed visitor spending, officials said they hoped the surplus would cover department costs in the next disaster.

In fact, this was their plan to rectify the surplus someday,

according to the report: spend it on park operations in a future calamity.

The attorney general's office found no evidence the money was used for any "surreptitious expenditure" – or spent for any purpose at all.

It also found no evidence that former parks director Ruth Coleman knew about the money.

Coleman refused to be interviewed by the investigators, citing advice from her attorney. She offered to answer questions in writing, but the attorney general declined.

Coleman resigned July 19, the night before news broke about the hidden money, saying she didn't know about the money but felt obligated to take responsibility. In his testimony, Harris said Coleman was asked to resign.

The investigation also found that Manuel Lopez, the former deputy director of administrative services, was not responsible for accumulating the surplus.

The money began accruing long before Lopez joined the department in 2005. In his testimony, Lopez said he learned about the money soon after joining state parks, and promptly told Harris. From that point on, however, Lopez adhered to the department culture of keeping the surplus secret, according to the investigation.

Lopez is the central figure in a related scandal involving an illegal vacation buyout program offered to 59 employees at parks headquarters, which cost the department at least \$285,000. He admitted authorizing the buyouts, and resigned just as state officials were moving to fire him.

All of this unfolded as the department was moving to close 70 state parks to achieve \$22 million in budget cuts ordered by the governor and Legislature. Money from the separate scandals

would have been sufficient to avoid those closures, had it been revealed.

Yet for reasons that baffle park advocates across California, state parks officials continued to keep the “rainy day” money a closely held secret.

“I feel like this was the rainy day. What were you waiting for?” said Alden Olmstead, who started a nonprofit to collect pocket change from customers at retail counters across the state to help keep parks open.

Also still unanswered is whether any laws were broken by employees who kept the money hidden. The attorney general’s office did not even analyze what the relevant laws might be in that regard.

Linda Gledhill, a spokeswoman for the attorney general, said it will be up to local law enforcement to decide whether crimes were committed – likely Sacramento County District Attorney Jan Scully.

“We were asked to do a civil investigation, which we did, and then turn the facts over,” Gledhill said.

Officials at the state Natural Resources Agency, which oversees the parks department, will analyze the findings to determine whether to involve local law enforcement, said spokesman Richard Stapler.

Mike Genest, former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s finance director, said he found it “odd” that the attorney general’s office would leave it up to the department’s parent agency to determine whether anyone committed a crime.

“Usually that decision goes the other way,” Genest said.

Since state investigators have determined the hidden money wasn’t spent or embezzled, there may be no crime to prosecute.

That leaves the state with an option it has already exercised: disciplining or firing employees who engaged in the cover-up. It has done so with nearly a dozen state parks employees. The entire leadership at the department is now composed of new people, and numerous accounting and budgeting practices are being reformed.

The long-awaited probe was ordered after revelations, first reported by The Bee, that headquarters officials at the California Department of Parks and Recreation kept a stash of "hidden funds."

Thieves steal cash from Incline movie theater

Burglars stole an undisclosed amount of cash from the Incline Village Cinema last week.

At approximately 5:30pm Jan. 1 a manager at the movie theater notice one of the glass entry doors was smashed in. The theater was secure the previous evening at about 11:30pm when the manager closed for the night.

Washoe County sheriff's deputies are asking anyone has information to call (775) 328.3336 or Secret Witness at (775) 322.4900.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report