# Laine: Banking on experience

**Publisher's note:** ***Lake Tahoe News asked candidates for South Lake Tahoe City Council, Lake Tahoe Community College, Lake Tahoe Unified School District, Douglas County School District, South Tahoe Public Utility District and Lake Valley Fire Protection District a series of questions. We are running the responses in the order received. All profiles may be found under the Special Projects listing and then the 2106 November Candidate Profiles category.***

Brooke Laine is running for one of two seats open on the South Lake Tahoe City Council.

**Name:** Brooke Laine

**Age:** 52

**Job/profession:** Branch manager, US Bank

**What boards, commissions, or other experience, including volunteering, do you have?:**

Current: Treasurer, South Tahoe High School Alumni Association, 2004-present

Past president, current parliamentarian, Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe, 1990-present

Chair, Citizen’s Oversight Committee, Lake Tahoe Community College, 2015-present

Past: Lake Tahoe Educational Foundation, California Tahoe Conservancy, Waste Management

JPA, Clean Tahoe Program, Tahoe Transportation District, Local Area Formation Committee,

South Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce, South Tahoe National Little League, American

Youth Soccer Organization, South Tahoe Babe Ruth.

**Why are you running for City Council?:** I am and have always been passionate about our community. I want to help bring professional and respectful discourse back to the public process so that we can work together and focus on moving our community forward.

**Why should voters vote for you over another candidate?:** I have six years experience as a council member. I fully understand the responsibilities and the time commitment. I will listen to all sides of an issue. While I may believe strongly in my position, I am willing to compromise when necessary for the good of the residents and city.

**What distinct experience or competency makes you uniquely qualified to lead effectively as an elected official?:** I served on the City Council from 1998-2002. During this time, the council oversaw the successful completion of the redevelopment project at Stateline and the creation of the ice arena. The experience that I gained during this term in office was exceptional as we negotiated complex contracts and funding strategies.

I was appointed to serve on the City Council from 2012-14.

During this term, we addressed the unfunded liabilities. Working with our current and former employees, we were able to negotiate a settlement thereby eliminating a huge financial burden that caused many cities throughout our country to file bankruptcy.

**Public agencies have been under scrutiny the last few years for lack of transparency and accountability. What will you do to ensure both?:** I would recommend that all public agencies videotape their meetings and make their public meetings available on the government channel just like what the city has been doing for years.

**What stands out for you in the current budget that you support and that you would change?:** During my recent service on the budget subcommittee we altered how we project our revenues which have improved the city's ability to accurately balance our budget. We lay down a baseline, conservative figure for revenues. Then at the midway mark of our fiscal year, we look at our actual revenue and adjust our revenues accordingly. This has allowed us to budget for one-time projects, knowing we have the revenue to support it or not. I would like to see the budget reflect actual projects. Currently, the budget is simply broken down by department. It is impossible to see the current expenses of an actual project. Being able to see these projects reflected in the budget will allow for even greater transparency and will also help to identify the costs of maintenance and operations.

**Do you support current legislation for $15 minimum wage? Please explain:** The average household income for a family in Tahoe is $36,000. An increase in the minimum wage will greatly assist the average family struggling to keep their head above water. I support an increase to the minimum wage. However, having been a small business owner myself, I understand that this increase has to benefit the employee as well as be affordable to the business owner. If this mandate is too large, businesses will most likely reduce their work force,

which defeats the purpose.

**Do you support Proposition 55? Please explain:** I do not like this ballot measure. Prop. 30 was to be a temporary tax increase on the wealthiest. Prop 30. included a one-quarter cent sales tax that went toward transportation improvements for the state of California. Prop. 55 proposes to keep the tax on the wealthiest for another 12 years, but does not renew the one-quarter cent sales tax. Prop. 30 was to be a temporary tax and I feel we should honor that.

**Describe three attributes for a successful council:** Professionalism, respect for the process, and each other, listen and have an open mind

**What are your thoughts about public employee defined benefits?:** Our defined benefits are appropriate to attract the quality work force, which the city needs in order to fully serve the public.

**Please explain your position regarding contracting out work normally done by staff:** The city is proud of the work it provides in order to serve our residents. There are times that some labor needs to be contracted out due to understaffing or unexpected increase in demand. Occasionally, the city needs to contract out legal services due to the special nature of a case. These circumstances should not be routine but rather the exception.

**What is your 10-year vision for South Lake Tahoe?:** I can see a unified Tahoe with lines that used to define us, now joining us. I would like to explore the idea of a Tahoe County with other agencies who could benefit from this realignment. A Tahoe County that could include the city, all of the unincorporated areas perhaps as far up the West Shore to Tahoma, and across the state line to Glenbrook, and why not include Incline. All residents would be eligible to run for election to the county board. We would no longer have a

situation where residents who live in the unincorporated portion of our community feel they do not have a say or a voice. With a Tahoe County in place, we can maintain our fiscal resources for our direct benefit. I believe this is an option worth considering.

**What one vote in the last four years that the current council made do you disagree with and why?:** I regret that the current council chose to not enforce the fazed in ban on plastic bags as it relates to our restaurant industry.

Regulating plastic bags can mitigate harmful impacts to oceans, rivers, lakes, forests and the wildlife that inhabit them. Reducing bag use can also relieve pressure on landfills and waste management.

**How many City Council meetings have you attended this year?:** I have attended, in person, two council meetings this year. However, I watch them on TV regularly and fully support continuing the broadcast of meetings as a means to keeping the public involved.

**What do you know about the strategic plan, finances, debt, and goals of the city?:** As a council member I participated in the development and review of all of these matters. It is important to regularly review and update strategic plans and goals with community input to make sure they keep up with changing times and challenges. Finance and budgets reflect our values, goals, and execution of the strategic plan. We must constantly work on reducing any city debt and unfunded liabilities so we can focus more on planning for the future rather than trying to take care of the past. The city has made excellent progress in these areas over the past few years and my goal is to continue in that positive direction.

**Being on the council means working as a team. How will you work with the sitting members for the greater good of the community?:** My past years on council have demonstrated that

under unusual circumstances, I will remain professional and respectful to my fellow council members and to our staff and residents. Any other working environment is detrimental to the progress and growth of our city.

**What should be the three main priorities for the council?:** A well thought out strategic plan. A budget that allows for the implementation of the strategic plan. Most important, we need to build the public's confidence that the City council is capable of making decisions that are always in the best interest of protecting our natural resources and growing our economy such that all residents can prosper.

**What have you done to make yourself ready to be a council member?:** I have served as a council member for six years. I have stayed very active in city politics and events and continue to volunteer when asked.

**What role should government have in housing for residents?:** Our city should have a strong and supportive role in helping to resolve our current housing dilemma. (See below.)

**How can the city partner with the school district to improve high school graduation rates?:** I believe students are more successful when they can relate their education to the real world, not just as mandatory time spent with no perceived relevance. The city, the school district, and possibly the community college should consider partnering in community service projects that will give students the opportunity, possibly for credit, to be more involved in their surrounding environment.

**How can local government support and expand job creation and small local businesses?:** Government must support small businesses that then expand job creation by tearing down the barriers that discourage this growth. We must be open and supportive of new concepts; like turning a single-family residence into a fully-fledged business office. Our sign

ordinance needs to be adjusted to allow temporary signage for start-up businesses that are waiting for permanent signage. Examples like these will encourage business creation and will thereby create better job opportunities for our residents. We must look at everything we do and see if we can do it better.

**If you believe in the one South Shore concept, what would you do to further make this a reality? If you don't believe in blurring the state line, why don't you?:** I believe strongly in blurring the state line. In fact, my idea would be to support a new county: Tahoe County. Perhaps we could join with the lake portion of Douglas County, and create a bi-state county that would include from Echo Summit, down through the unincorporated portion of the city, the city of South Lake Tahoe up to Tahoma, and finally across the state line to Glenbrook. This is an example of the "outside the box thinking" I hope to bring to our discussions

**What are your views on:**

**a: Vacation home rentals:** I believe there needs to be much stronger enforcement of the VHR ordinance that relieves our residents from the current complaint driven process. I would propose a full time staff of enforcement officers that could be funded from an increase in the fees that VHR's currently pay. If all VHRs paid the same TOT tax as hotels and motels in the redevelopment area, this increase could fund multiple officers working to ensure that garbage is being properly managed in addition to all of the other issues including parking, noise, etc.

**b: Loop road:** The real value of this project is that new affordable housing would replace old and tired housing in the Stateline corridor where many of our residents reside and work. If the loop road project proceeds, it is mandatory that work force housing must be in place prior to the start of the project. I understand that the community wants to have a voice in this process. I look forward to hearing the results of the

November ballot measure.

**c: City streets:** Many of our streets are in very poor condition. I strongly support the one-half percent increase in sales tax as long as it is specifically directed to fund street replacement. The city's current process of simply repairing cracks, etc. is no longer an option.

**d: Relationships with other public agencies:** We must all work together. I will listen. I will be respectful and professional. I have experience working with other agencies and have a proven record of moving projects forward.

**e: Recreation:** This is currently a top priority for the city and I support this position. The city has made some important investments in our recreation infrastructure including Lakeview Commons, the bike park, bike paths, and now the recreation complex. We are moving in the right direction and I will be supportive of the maintenance and expansion of our recreational opportunities.

**f. TRPA defined commodities:** I would love to do away with them. I understand that they are a tool that helps us control growth. However, they have created an enormous financial investment before you can put a shovel in the ground. We must move away from seeing things as "yes" or "no" and, rather, figure out "how" to get things done

**g. Transient occupancy tax measure:** I fully support the TOT tax measure.

**h. Sales tax measure:** I fully support the sales tax measure as long as it is dedicated to street replacement.

**i. What do you want the additional sales tax money to go to?:** Street replacement

**Tell us something about yourself that people may not know:** I was born at Barton Memorial Hospital just three months after

the hospital opened for business.

**Voters said no to you two years ago, why should they say yes this year?:** Times change and issues change. I would like to contribute to a professional, respectful council and work together to move our city forward. I am passionate, experienced, professional, and respectful. I enjoy the political process and will take the steps necessary to reach the best possible outcome through collaboration and compromise. Our residents deserve no less and I believe I am up to the task.

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# Exline: Renewable energy is the future

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Nick Exline is running for

one of two open seats on the South Tahoe Public Utility District board.

**Name:** Nick D. Exline

**Age:** 35

**Job/profession:** AICP, senior land use planner, Midkiff and Associates Inc.

**What boards, commissions, or other experience, including volunteering, do you have?:** Master's of science degree in land use planning, bachelor's of science degree in geography, American Institute of Certified Planners, American Planning Association, Tahoe Chamber Government Affairs Committee, Tahoe Drug Free Coalition board member, Leadership Lake Tahoe. I began a non-partisan, market driven climate change group.

**Why are you running for the South Tahoe PUD board?:** I believe in developing innovative ideas that support the economy and our community. Through the installation of renewable energy we can stabilize rates and improve/expand fire safety infrastructure. I would also like to create a fair construction fee system.

High construction fees put an undue hardship on middle and lower income households. When a project is halted due to high fees this puts our community members out of work and hurts our economy. I would like to introduce a sliding scale on fees that will ensure everyone in the community has the opportunity to improve their businesses and homes. I would also like to improve community participation in STPUD board decisions. The STPUD board meetings start at 2pm, which means if you work during the day, you can't participate.

**Why should voters vote for you over another candidate?:** Every candidate talks about rates and fees, some talk about health and safety and too few talk about how renewable energy is the

future. We need to take action on those issues and start making the future happen now. In my role as a solution orientated planner I succeed everyday in getting government, private business and community members working together so that innovative projects become reality. Using my experience and determination I will work extremely hard to ensure my plan to stabilize rates is given top priority, that there is fairness in the fee system and to make certain our homes, businesses and most importantly our families are safe.

Through the installation of renewable energy we can lower STPUD's energy bills and fight climate change. Those savings would be used to improve/expand fire safety infrastructure. As we are all aware fire is the single greatest threat we face and we need to make sure our fire department have the tools they need to ensure our safety.

I'd push for the introduction of a sliding scale for construction fees so lower and middle-income homeowners and businesses are not stopped from improving our community and creating jobs, but are encouraged to do so.

Finally, I understand our community's concerns. My family is a single income household so I can sympathize with anyone that has stayed up at night worrying about money.  Our town's thoughts and worries will be with me at all times whenever I am faced with a tough decision.

**What distinct experience or competency makes you uniquely qualified to lead effectively as an elected official?:** I am currently a solution oriented AICP, senior land use planner with Midkiff & Associates. In this role I work with local businesses, homeowners and with every level of government from the federal to the local level to get innovative projects completed on time and under budget. These projects benefit the economy, create jobs and help the environment. Recently the $18.7 million state loan to complete phases 2-5 of meter installation was changed by the state. This resulted in higher

annual debt payments, which negatively impacted the future borrowing capacity of STPUD. My experience will allow me to assist STPUD with any regulatory processes and to negotiate with governmental agencies ensuring the best deal for us as consumers.

**Public agencies have been under scrutiny the last few years for lack of transparency and accountability. What will you do to ensure both?:** First, I will work to change the board meeting time from 2pm to a time that works for more people. If someone plans a party when they know you can't attend, you would think they don't want you there and that is how the community feels now. Secondly, I would make myself available. I have publically posted my phone number, address, email and have a Facebook page on which I invite everyone to discuss their thoughts on our water. This level of openness will enable me to be accountable to the community and transparent in all my actions.

**What stands out for you in the current budget that you support and that you would change?:** I fully support and would like to see increased investment into our fire safety infrastructure. A percentage of the water distribution system is undersized and does not provide appropriate fire protection. Fire is the single greatest threat we face and we need to ensure that when fire comes our fire departments have the correct tools and are fully prepared to fight it.

STPUD's energy costs are huge. With so much of STPUD's budget being fixed, we need to find areas in which we can lower costs without sacrificing service. With innovation and technology, and through the installation of renewable energy on STPUD properties we could lower our energy costs, which would allow us to reinvest those savings into fire safety infrastructure, rate stabilization and improved conservation efforts. We need to start looking at how we can make money instead of just spending it.

**Do you support current legislation for $15 minimum wage? Please explain.:** I would prefer we ask the question, how do we create good paying jobs in our community? We need to begin to diversify our economy because a diversified economy is far more stable. I am very aware that small businesses are concerned about the additional cost a $15 minimum wage would result in, but those costs would be outweighed by more members of our community having money in their pockets to spend locally. We are a community and with so many living in poverty we need to start working to create a brighter future for all.

**Do you support Proposition 55? Please explain:** I do support proposition 55. In a globally competitive world, education is only going to become increasingly important for both personal and community success. We need to support education, which will ensure our economic survivability.

**Describe three attributes for a successful board:** Rational: In my experience with boards (from every level of government and regulatory agency) I see decisions being made, not on a rational review of the information provided, but rather to check a bureaucratic box. Often times this box checking poses significant hardships to the people. A board should be a reflection of the people and decisions should be made rationally to the benefit of all of us.

Forward thinking: Boards need to be evaluating plans that extend 10, 50 and 100 years into the future.

Team work: Which not only includes other board members, but also extends to the STPUD staff, local businesses and our community.

**What are your thoughts about public employee defined benefits?:** Having employee defined benefits allows families to properly plan for the future and enables them to invest in the economy. Unfortunately these sorts of benefits are on the decline. I believe that the future of these plans is one that

combines the best features of all those currently available including employer contributions, pooled investments and annuities along with the best parts of 401(k)s, including employee contributions and portability.

**Please explain your position on contracting out work normally done by staff:** I do not support contracting out work that would result in layoffs or a reduction of critically important staff. If the contracting work is needed to assist staff, to speed up projects or infrastructure improvements (specifically fire safety infrastructure projects) then I am supportive.

**What is your 10-year vision for STPUD?:** Throughout this questionnaire I have outlined my proposals and vision. Now I want to explain how that vision affects our community. In 10 years we will have installed renewable energy both in Alpine County and up at the lake. This renewable energy will have created good jobs, stabilized our rates and resulted in savings while fighting climate change. These savings will be used to install fire protection infrastructure so that wherever you live, you and your family can feel safe knowing that in the event of a fire you have the proper protection.

As a result of the sliding scale for construction permit fees more of us in the community will be improving our homes and businesses. This will lead to more work for those in the construction field, engineers and landscapers, etc. This additional work will spur economic growth throughout the community as people begin to spend more money locally.

Finally, the board meetings will be held at a time when the community can attend and the transparency I am demonstrating throughout this campaign will become the norm and more people will be involved in the conversation about our water.

**What one vote in the last four years that the current board made do you disagree with and why?:** STPUD has done many things well over previous years and has kept up with basic needs from

a “business as usual” stance. For a time the rates were kept low because of the poorly performing economy but then eventually a rate increase was made. I am concerned that if the board continues working in the same vein we may reach a time when every decision is made from an emergency only perspective.

We should be building for tomorrow and not making decisions from a standpoint that leaves us constantly playing catch-up. I will bring progressive ideas to the board that will keep STPUD at the forefront of innovation and fire infrastructure. I will work to develop a fair construction permit fee system so more of us can improve our homes and businesses.

**How many meetings have you attended this year for the board you are running for?:** The current STPUD board meeting schedule does not allow for participation. That is why I propose changing the meeting time to when more people can attend. I have always kept up with STPUD board decisions, as it is also a part of my role as a planner to do so. I am up to date with all staff reports and meeting minutes for the year and have been present at two meetings.

**What do you know about the strategic plan, finances, debt, goals of the district?:** I have been the lead land use planner on projects with comparable budgets, strategic financing and debt mechanisms as STPUD deals with annually. In addition, I have done a thorough review and met with staff regarding all STPUD related plans and budget items.

What concerns me is that with aging infrastructure the speed at which rates will have to increase within the next 10-15 years will begin to accelerate. Today we need to begin to lower long term cost wherever possible. The area of energy is a large, non-fixed cost in which STPUD could begin to realize savings immediately. With the installation of renewable energy (specifically solar) we could lock in low energy rates and fight climate change. With California’s cap and trade law all

non-renewable energy will become more expensive. What this means is that as time goes on the savings made will only become greater. We can use those savings to ensure that we don't see the "business as usual" massive rate increases in the next decade.

In addition, construction permit fees only comprise 3 percent of STPUD's revenue, but these fees make it difficult for households and small business to redevelop.  This has a negative impact throughout the community because when projects can't start, people can't work. We need to create a fee system that incentivizes redevelopment and creates more, good paying jobs.

**Being on a board means working as a team. How will you work with the other board members for the greater good of the community?:** I grew up in the world of sports and the idea of team is fundamental to my very core. Being part of a team means picking your teammates up when they are down, spending the extra time to get something right or running that extra mile. Although there will be disagreements on any board I will never let ego or arrogance get in the way of working with board members to accomplish what is best for the community. Because in the end the team's performance doesn't stop with the board, the team is all of us.

**What should be the three main priorities for the board?:** 1. Water supply and quality: To provide reliable and safe water distribution, wastewater collection/treatment and recycled water systems.

2. Keeping infrastructure up-to-date and innovative: To make use of any appropriate technology to improve efficiency and ensure infrastructure and other assets are kept up to date/replaced. Renewable energy.

3. Health and safety of our community: To continue to ensure we have appropriate fire protection and the installation of

fire hydrants at 500ft intervals.

**How do you balance the economic situation of the community with the infrastructure needs of the district?:** As a community we have aging infrastructure and a high rate of people living at or below the poverty line. We simply cannot afford to keep raising rates because fewer and fewer people can afford to pay those increased rates. Nor can we simply put off infrastructure improvements or routine maintenance because that will leave a huge unfunded bill for our children resulting in rate increases in excess of 10 percent annually in years to come. If we don't install fire protection infrastructure, we could be putting lives at risk.

To solve these conflicting problems we need to fundamentally change the economic realities of the district. Where possible we need to lower cost and that is why I am proposing the installation of renewable energy on STPUD properties so we can lower our energy bill and use those savings to stabilize rates, accelerate the installation of badly needed fire infrastructure and improve conservation efforts. The business as usual model will eventually result in huge rate increases, but with innovation and forward thinking ideas we can stabilize rate growth, which will not only helps our pocket book, but the environment as well.

**STPUD is often criticized for having some of the highest paid public employees on the South Shore. Any comment?:** Currently $16.4 million or 32 percent of STPUD's budget goes to employee pay and benefits. In the private sector you would want your payroll to be between 15-30 percent and as you can see STPUD is slightly above the high end of that threshold. I will work to keep payroll at a reasonable level while taking care to have great staff moral, which will minimize turnover and keep the high standard of service currently in place.

I work with government agencies from the federal to city level. Agencies with a high employee turnover are slower, less

responsive and impose many unnecessary and expensive regulations onto a project. This is our water we are talking about and we need to ensure a high level of service.

**When it comes to permits for construction, the district has high fees. Do you believe they are fair? Why or why not?**: The district fees have a disproportionate impact on middle and lower income individuals. These fees are only 3 percent of STPUD's revenue but pose a significant barrier to improvements. In my role as a land use planner I have seen projects halted or abandoned as a result of high fees. This has a ripple effect throughout the economy. It results in our neighbors who are in the trade fields being out of work, construction equipment not being sold, a reduction in our property tax base and stops the ability for many of us to improve our homes and businesses. I would work to implement a sliding scale for fees so that every one of us in this community, regardless of income level has an opportunity to improve our home or business.

**Tell us something about yourself that people may not know:** Besides the fact that I like to paddleboard at night with my dog, I love to read. It is enlightening to be able to see things from a different point of view and that really helps in the decision making process.

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# Dalton: Committed to education, community

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***South Tahoe Public Utility District and Lake Valley Fire Protection District a series of questions. We are running the responses in the order received.***

Nancy Dalton is one of two candidates for the Area 4 seat for Lake Tahoe Community College.

**Name:** Nancy Dalton

**Age:** 53

**Job/profession:** High school teacher, mathematics and AVID. I was the department chair the previous two years.

**What boards, commissions, or other experience, including volunteering, do you have?:** I've served on several boards in the South Tahoe area including Soroptimist, High Sierra ASA (Amateur Softball Association), and STAT (Saving Tahoe Athletic Teams). Prior to teaching I was a member of Soroptimist where I served on the executive board as well as chaired a couple of committees. Specifically, I was instrumental in procuring the car and producing the video for A Fighting Chance, the program that teaches our youth about avoiding and escaping abduction. During the 10 years I was on the ASA board we were able to grow the enrollment significantly while improving the fields. The STAT committee was formed to provide funding for the athletic programs at

both STHS and STMS when the district had to make budget cuts. This committee lasted roughly two years as the district decided to restore the funding. One last thing, I worked at the college before I began my teaching career and this insight will only enhance my role as a board member.

**Why are you running for the college board?:** I am completely committed to both this community and education. Serving on the college board is the perfect opportunity for me to demonstrate my passion for public education and the community of South Lake Tahoe.

**Why should voters vote for you over another candidate?:** For the past 10 years serving on the board for the college has been on my mind. At the end of 2015 I decided to run for the District 4 position and have been attending meetings since the first of 2016. This dedication and my experience in serving this community make me an ideal candidate. Also, I am aware of the time requirements of an LTCC board member and have planned accordingly to be able to meet them.

**What distinct experience or competency makes you uniquely qualified to lead effectively as an elected official?:** My service on previous boards, a career in education (including department chairperson), and managing a business with my husband for over 28 years give me a solid background to lead effectively.

**Public agencies have been under scrutiny the last few years for lack of transparency and accountability. What will you do to ensure both?:** I will adhere to the laws governing public boards and board members and conduct myself in a manner befitting a college board member. I will be open, honest and candid about the issues the college is dealing with while maintaining compliance with legal regulations.

**What stands out for you in the current budget that you support and that you would change?:** I support the ISP (Incarcerated

Student Program) and Connect (community education). Both these programs serve the college well. I'm not sure what I would change, however the college is in the process of evaluating all of the programs to see which ones are in demand from the students and I would base my decision on the results.

**Do you support current legislation for $15 minimum wage? Please explain:** Yes, I believe the working class deserves a living wage. Rents in Tahoe have increased substantially over the last few years making it difficult for our residents to find affordable housing and a raise in the minimum wage could make living here more feasible for them.

**Do you support Proposition 55? Please explain:** Yes, I support extending this tax on the highest wage earners to provide funding for education and health care.

**Describe three attributes for a successful board:**

1. Passion: One has to believe whole-heartedly in what they are doing to be truly committed and effective.

2. Vision: Serving students and the community is the number one priority for the college and decisions should be based off of this priority. Always planning for the future and how to better serve our population is key.

3. Teamwork: The entire college needs to work together for the betterment of the community. I am a team player and believe everyone benefits when all voices are heard.

**What are your thoughts about public employee defined benefits?:** If public entities, including the college, want to attract the best employees a solid benefit package is necessary to entice top applicants. However, the benefits need to be fiscally realistic.

**Please explain your position on contracting out work normally done by staff:** Sometimes it is necessary to contract work out

either because current employees don’t have the time to perform the necessary work or the duties needed are temporary. However, I would not advocate contracting out work if it entails reducing current staff.

**What is your 10-year vision for LTCC?:** In 10 years I would like to see the college working with other colleges and universities to offer several four-year degree programs. Also I believe there is opportunity to expand of both the ISP and ConnectEd. Currently the college is exploring the feasibility of constructing dormitories to attract more students from outside the area and this might be obtainable within 10 years.

**What one vote in the last four years that the current board made do you disagree with and why?:** I was concerned about the vote on the community fields. While I completely support the fields, I was discouraged to learn that the most recent plan was not the one implemented due to agency approvals that dated back several years.

**How many meetings have you attended this year for the board you are running for?:** I have attended most meetings since the beginning of the year, approximately 16, and this includes board meetings, study sessions and retreats.

**What do you know about the strategic plan, finances, debt, goals of college?:** Due to my attendance at board meetings I feel I am up to date and informed on what is happening at the college. Specifically, where the college stands in regards to the budget, what the strategic plan is, and the improvements slated from Measure F. Currently the board is looking at projected budgets, ways to increase FTEs, and offering students the opportunity to enroll in a bachelor degree program through Sierra Nevada College.

**Being on a board means working as a team. How will you work with the sitting members for the greater good of the community?:** Coming from an athletic background I am a team

player whose focus is on this community. I have great respect for the current board members and look forward to the opportunity to work with them.

**What should be the three main priorities for the board?**

1. Hire a competent superintendent/president.

2. Fulfill the improvements stated in Measure F.

3. Work within the budget.

**What have you done to make yourself ready to be a board member?:** I've attended meetings since the beginning of the year and met with current and former board members. Also, in anticipation for the responsibilities of being a board member I have adjusted my workload so I can give the position the necessary time.

**What is your opinion about career and technical education at the high school level?:** I'm a strong advocate for career and technical education at the high school and believe some programs could be extended to the college in addition to the ones already offered, specifically the dental and culinary programs.

**What will you look for in a new college president?:** First and foremost, the president should be passionate about public education. They should have ample administrative experience (in all facets) at the community college level and a history of working with the state agencies related to education. Prior experience with supervision of bond measures is necessary as well.  I would also like to see a president that has a management style that works well with the community and employee groups at the college, both certificated and classified.

**Tell us something about yourself that people may not know:** I've lived in South Lake Tahoe for 35 years and have no plans

to live anywhere else, I feel fortunate to have raised my family here and truly appreciate all the beauty and opportunity that Lake Tahoe offers, and I don't like Brussels sprouts.

**As a teacher at STHS, how can the public believe you will represent everyone and not just staff?:** Both the certificated and classified staffs are the greatest strengths at the college and I will represent them fairly. However, I know that there is more to being a board member than just that. Board members need to be responsible to the community and that means working within the budgets and following the correct policies and procedures that govern community colleges. As a business owner, I know how budgets work and will use this insight while serving as a board member.

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# Shearer: Wants to encourage progress in SLT

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John Shearer is running for one of two seats open on the South Lake Tahoe City Council.

**Name:** John Shearer

**Age:** 49

**Job/profession:** Owner/operator of local businesses, boat captain

**What boards, commissions, or other experience, including volunteering, do you have?:** President of nonprofit, Marine Research and Education

**Why are you running for City Council?:** The number one reason I am running for City Council is to encourage progress in our city. I want to help preserve the community and ensure its future. I am not doing this for the money, the status, or the title. I am running for City Council to help make a difference in our community, which I have worked so hard to be a part of and that has given my family and I so much. I believe there is no better place to live and raise your family than Lake Tahoe.

**Why should voters vote for you over another candidate?:** I am businessman, a family man, and invested in the roots of this community. Owning four separate businesses in different industries gives me a broad knowledge of management.

**What distinct experience or competency makes you uniquely qualified to lead effectively as an elected official?:** I understand how to run multiple types of successful businesses and the city is essentially one very large business with many separate entities. Being able to effectively run my businesses gives me an understanding of how to manage separate entities and be able to forecast the future and adapt to change at a quicker pace.

**Public agencies have been under scrutiny the last few years for lack of transparency and accountability. What will you do to ensure both?:** I would treat this position as I operate my businesses, with dignity and respect toward others. I am very straightforward and very honest. I believe in fulfilling obligations that I have committed to and seeing them through in the most honest way possible.

**What stands out for you in the current budget that you support and that you would change?:** I support the transient occupancy tax percentage increase, which will directly fund the recreational sport complex. I strongly believe that recreation is one of our primary focuses in this city and bringing in a complex will allow increased tourism throughout the year.

**Do you support current legislation for $15 minimum wage? Please explain:** I think it is worthy of discussion, however I don’t believe putting all the expenses for an individual’s prosperity solely on the backs of the business owners. You have to work hard to earn more.

**Do you support Proposition 55? Please explain:** I oppose Proposition 55 because it is a premature forecast of change with two years still left in the original Proposition 30, which was written to be temporary. Extending this will affect small businesses and without a defined plan of where the allocated money will actually go. I oppose the extension of Proposition 30.

**Describe three attributes for a successful council:** Honesty, integrity, transparency

**What are your thoughts about public employee defined benefits?:** I believe that if you do a duty to the city, you deserve compensation; however long-term extended benefits after a person has left their employment with the city should be up for discussion based on their time and effort invested.

**Please explain your position regarding contracting out work normally done by staff:** If workflow exceeds my team's abilities or time constraints, I think it is important to seek professional assistance (under specific guidance) from an outside contractor to ensure the achievement of the goal.

**What is your 10-year vision for South Lake Tahoe?:** I would like to see the recreational sports complex built and fully operational. I would like to see overall progress for current projects within the city such as Heavenly's plans, better parking, and better flow of traffic throughout the city. I would also like to see outdoor sign guidelines so the city is more aesthetically pleasing when driving through it.

**What one vote in the last four years that the current council made do you disagree with and why?:** Vacation rental proposal; I would have liked to see the existing legislation in place actually being enforced versus creating new ones.

**How many City Council meetings have you attended this year?:** None this year.

**What do you know about the strategic plan, finances, debt, and goals of the city?:** Fiscal conservancy, pay attention to current trends and be aware of what may come in the future. Debt is sometimes necessary to achieve goals and increase growth, and refinancing that debt when necessary.

**Being on the council means working as a team. How will you work with the sitting members for the greater good of the**

**community?:** I will practice the same values that I do with my businesses. We all need each other's expertise in order to ensure the best end result possible.

**What should be the three main priorities for the council?:** Economic prosperity, transparency, and accountability.

**What have you done to make yourself ready to be a council member?:** I have worked every single day for the past 30 years in this community and I know what it takes to make things happen and how to make a living.

**What role should government have in housing for residents?:** Providing legislation to regulate aesthetics, sound ordinances, and hold homeowners responsible for overall property maintenances.

**How can the city partner with the school district to improve high school graduation rates?:** The city is always open to new partnerships and is addressing the current needs. Schools are our city's future, and I believe that we have a wonderful school system.

**How can local government support and expand job creation and small local businesses?:** Work in alliance with our community and the Tahoe Prosperity Center. Provide transportation for people to commute in and out of the basin. Provide an online forum or posting page for local businesses to have one location to post jobs, share jobs and employees, and that is accessible to anyone who is in need of a job.

**If you believe in the one South Shore concept, what would you do to further make this a reality? If you don't believe in blurring the state line, why don't you?:** We are one community, where our services frequently cross both lines, if we incorporate the separate entities into one, we could prosper together. One high school. One community from Zephyr Cove to Meyers. I like to think outside of the box and feel that we can find a solution that works best for the community and the

states.

**What are your views on:**

**a: Vacation home rentals:** I believe in vacation rentals and the rules that are currently in place need to be enforced. Three strikes rule, if you can’t manage your property within the current legislation, you shouldn’t have the privilege of operating a vacation rental property.

**b: Loop road:** I believe in it – to increase the synergy, traffic flow, and events so local families and tourists can enjoy the area in safety.

**c: City streets:** City streets are definitely the less glamorous side of government but nonetheless, extremely important. We need to have better maintained roadways with reasonable time-lines for repairs and improvements and not in our peak season of tourism. New street lights should be considered in the heavily traveled back streets for safety purposes.

**d: Relationships with other public agencies:** Collaboration is necessary, but so is accountability. We cannot move forward while everyone is finger pointing.

**e: Recreation:** Increasing recreation with the recreation center complex. Bring back the basics of our city and the history of Lake Tahoe to have a place to host outdoor family recreation.

**f. TRPA defined commodities:** I think it is very helpful to have an agency that is dedicated to preserving Lake Tahoe and its environment, as long it is in collaboration with the best interests of the community.

**g. Transient occupancy tax measure**: I support the increase of 2 percent TOT if the funds are directly funding the new recreation center complex in town.

**h. Sales tax measure:** I support the sales tax increase by one-half percent if it directly addresses the city's "less glamorous" needs.

**i. What do you want the additional sales tax money to go to?:** I support that money be allocated toward road and street improvements, however I support our community and whatever the majority votes on.

**Tell us something about yourself that people may not know:** I own a fishing company, I am a fishing captain, and I don't enjoy eating fish. I would much rather have steak and potatoes.

**As someone who owns multiple businesses on both sides of the state line involving fishing and snowmobiling, what are your priorities – the environment, fair wages, tourism, the consumer or something else? Why?:** All the above. I believe all of these priorities are a recipe for success and they are defined within all of my businesses. We cannot have one without the other.

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# Wallace: Leadership means listening

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Tamara Wallace is running for one of two seats open on the South Lake Tahoe City Council.

**Name:** Tamara LeAnn Wallace

**Age:** 46

**Job/profession**: Retired businesswoman/chamber exec

**What boards, commissions, or other experience, including volunteering, do you have?:**

2010-14 South Lake Tahoe Planning Commission

2003 South Lake Tahoe Lodging Board

2002-03 Citizens' Financial Advisory Committee (LTUSD)

1996-98 President-elect, Charter Secretary Tulare Sunrise Rotary

1999-2008 Past-president, member, Lake Tahoe Kiwanis Club

2004 Volunteer consultant, Leadership Lake Tahoe

2000-Current Coach, South Tahoe Wrestling

2003-05 Past-member, STHS Cheerleading-Parents

Club

2007-Current Teacher, Vacation Bible School, Tahoe Community Church

2016 Volunteer, Vacation Bible School, Sierra Community Church

2004-05 STAT (South Tahoe Athletic Teams)

1997-99 Teacher, KAPOW (Kids and the Power of Work)

1994-96 Volunteer, fundraiser, co-creator, Tulare Battered Women's Shelter.

**Why are you running for City Council?:** This is a way that I have wanted to serve my community for many years. However, I have been ill for a long time, so was our oldest son. We also adopted a special needs child. I devoted my time to my family for the last few years because that was where I was most needed. From 2010 to 2014, I was able to serve on the Planning Commission. Through that I was further convinced that the City Council was where I wanted to be. Now that my health has been improving for over a year, our son's illness is completely at bay and our adopted child is 5 years older, I am now ready to serve in this capacity. I believe that the council must serve, not rule our community. Further, I have been fortunate enough to have a few really incredible mentors in my life, one of whom recently passed. He taught me many things, including: working with public-private partnerships, how to disagree without being disagreeable and that economic development in a community is a high tide that raises all ships.

**Why should voters vote for you over another candidate?:** My life's experience has just led up to this point. I have been working and volunteering in a community setting for the last 27 years either through fate or design I have been able to work for and with people who believe in their communities.

Those who have sought their entire lives to improve where they and their family live. This example has been invaluable to me. I believe that I have become one of those people. Four out of five of my children still live here (I'm still working on the fifth). Every one of them grew up trying to make a difference in their town. Citizens in this community, too many times, have had to go back and reverse what the council has done. I want to be a part of getting it right the first time.

**What distinct experience or competency makes you uniquely qualified to lead effectively as an elected official?:** I participated and graduated from a six-year program called the Institute for Organization Management (UCLA and USD). This was an in depth, immersive program that included executives from organizations such as the Trial Lawyers Association, the California Lumber Association as well as chamber of commerce executives, executives from every type of association and organization. We were taught budgeting, business law, media relations, building coalitions, strategic planning, business ethics, how to effectively use technology and effective listening, to name a few. As a result, I made a network of friends and colleagues all over the Western United States, as well as Washington, D.C., who are involved in forming public policy in their communities.

My specific plan for leadership is to listen. Listen to the voters, listen to the experts and listen to my heart. I'm experienced, but not infallible, there are many people who may know more than I do about any given subject. I plan to listen and follow my own moral compass. I intend to vote on the issues the same way each community member would vote if they were given the same information as I, and are trying to do the right thing for the right reasons. These are the guiding principles by which I live and intend to serve as an elected official. There will be hundreds of issues to discuss with the public, fellow council members and staff, so the process by which I arrive at decisions is how I would like to be judged.

By using proven techniques of public policy decision making I hope to improve my skills and to become a part of a good decision making body.

**Public agencies have been under scrutiny the last few years for lack of transparency and accountability. What will you do to ensure both?:** I've taken classes and seminars on government ethics, including the FPPC rules and the Brown Act. If I and the council follow these guiding principles, it should ensure an open and honest meeting process. Something specific I would watch for is to make sure any closed session meetings would be noticed with the most specific language possible so the public can know what's happening, as much as legally possible. One of the main reasons the Brown Act was written is to avoid what are commonly referred to as "daisy chain meetings." Those are when council members discuss items in a linear fashion (one member to another, to another and so forth) without all being in the same room under a "noticed meeting." That is still considered a meeting and the public is excluded. This is against the Brown Act guidelines.

Accountability can be measured through the wise use of the public's dollars.

**What stands out for you in the current budget that you support and that you would change?:** My answer to both parts of this question is the same: road repairs and public safety. I support each of these and wish to increase the amounts each line item receives as much as humanly possible.

**Do you support current legislation for $15 minimum wage? Please explain:** That is a state/federal legislative issue and not one that the City Council will likely vote on. I believe that we need as many high paying jobs in our community as possible and the best way to get there is to attract businesses that pay well, in addition to reducing taxes and regulations that keep businesses from paying those higher wages. Every dollar taken by government is one less dollar

paid to an employee. Businesses have only so much income. For instance, Australia has a $25 minimum wage, their prices are reflective. Part of the problem is the difference between "minimum wage" and "living wage." A living wage is, by definition, what a person makes that can support them/their family. However, a minimum wage is just that: the minimum amount that a person is paid for certain types of entry level jobs.

**Do you support Proposition 55? Please explain:** Again, this is more of a state issue. Maybe I should run for state Senate or Assembly – ha,ha!

I support education. My daughter is a teacher, my husband is a substitute teacher and former school board member, and my son is school district employee working on his teaching credential. I believe in public education. The part of Prop. 55 that disallows any funds going to administration is good. The language that allows the local boards of education to have discretion is also good. However, I support small business and the limits ($250,000 single filers, $500,000 joint filers and $340,000 head of household) are right where most small businesses lay, or would like to. Please remember these are gross dollars, not net. As I stated above, the more taxes that a business has to pay results in less available to their employees and in their own communities.  It doesn't have to be an either/or situation, by improving businesses they in turn pay more taxes on that increased volume which then benefits the government.

**Describe three attributes for a successful council:** Honesty, respect, teamwork. I believe this is self-explanatory.

**What are your thoughts about public employee defined benefits?:** I think that the PERS system is a good one. So I hope that the PERS administrators disengage in their fiscal shenanigans. So when benefits are promised to an employee that should be considered a solemn promise. I also like some of the

“cafeteria-style” benefits programs that allow employees, public or otherwise, to choose where their retirement dollars are held.

**Please explain your position regarding contracting out work normally done by staff:** If a job can be done better and/or more efficiently and for less dollars, then I am all for contracting out some services. For instance, there are often jobs that are not ongoing. If a position is created within the city to accomplish that job, when the job is completed the city is beholden to an employee for the long term. So, it makes sense to evaluate short term position tasks. However, sometimes a current employee has a better understanding of a situation and can perform the job most efficiently. Sometimes an outside contractor is better able to do this. As a situation presents, it should be taken on a case by case basis. I’m for whatever saves the taxpayers the most money in the long run.

**What is your 10-year vision for South Lake Tahoe?:** I see a community that my granddaughters can grow up to raise their own families. I see a community that when our youth go away for school, they are economically able to come back. I want a community with decent housing that families can afford and one that is safe and has a well-staffed police force. I would like to have a community that has good paying jobs and good schools. I envision a community that has a built environment that is as beautiful as the natural environment. I see a community that is so beautiful that when people come to visit, they refuse to leave. I desire a community that is governed by people who make decisions for the right reasons, not for what’s politically expedient. This is the community that I hope to bring about and leave to my children and children’s children.

**What one vote in the last four years that the current council made do you disagree with and why?:** Charging for parking in neighborhoods and tourist areas. This was repealed via Measure

P in 2014.

Citizens and businesses already pay for the use of the parking spaces and streets through their taxes. Why should they or their customers then pay to park in the spaces and on the streets they have helped purchase. It’s really that simple.

**How many City Council meetings have you attended this year?:** I have been to two or three meetings in the last year; however, I watch almost every one of the meetings on the public service channel. It was off the air for a while so I relied on either going to the meetings or talking to those who attended. Over the past 18 years, I have attended countless council meetings. In addition, as a planning commissioner, I attended council regularly. I also receive emails from the city clerk regarding ongoing issues at/in the city.

**What do you know about the strategic plan, finances, debt, and goals of the city?:** Quite a lot in the macro. I am currently trying to get more into the micro of these issues. For instance, with regards to finances, debt and budget, the city’s debt service is in the 22-25 percent range and if they bond the funds that may become available with the sales tax initiative it will increase to over 30 percent (these are ball park figures). In addition, the original redevelopment is still hanging over the city’s head. There is still significant transfer of property tax from other entities to help pay down this debt, the utility district’s portion is around $500,000. More debt should be taken on with great trepidation and seriousness, if taken on at all. I may be off by a little, but am studying diligently so as to be able to hit the ground running, if necessary.

I have read all the information that was made public with regards to the city’s goals and strategic plan as they were decided on. However, again I am studying these issues in more detail now that I am asking to be a member of the council.

**Being on the council means working as a team. How will you work with the sitting members for the greater good of the community?:** The community expects their council members to get along if possible. For years now there have been personal arguments that I have watched with disgust just like other citizens. One drama that I have seen is the fight over who will be mayor. The strong city manager style of government in our city is such that the council is the "what" and the city manager is the "how." However, as small a city as we are somehow whoever is selected as mayor, who is there simply to chair the meetings, gets a big head. They then try to implement their singular agenda for the city. That causes friction among those who also wanted to be mayor. It also causes friction when the "mayor" gets too heavy handed with the other council members and especially the staff. I personally refused to chair the Planning Commission a couple of times because:  first of all, I was too new to that board and did not think I should lead until I understood all the issues. Secondly, I did not need the accolades. We are small fish in a small town. We should not think of ourselves as rulers, but rather as servants. The other reason councils argue is that they have honest disagreements over the right policy to follow. That is OK and I think healthy. That is why they have five council members and not just one. There is a way to disagree without being disagreeable. Listening without interrupting, asking questions instead of making accusations and not grandstanding in front of the public are common sense ways to avoid embarrassing arguments.

**What should be the three main priorities for the council?:** Long-term financial stewardship of the public's money: Each council should try to leave the city and next council in better financial shape than they found it in. That would include not taxing the businesses and projects to the point that they decide to live/build elsewhere. That is especially important since we have another state next door that can compete for our businesses and families. I have refused to

accept the City Council salary of just under $1,000 a month. Hopefully that will set a good fiscal example. We are not rich. But we have lived for many years within a budget. I do not put others down for accepting the salary. However I was one person who felt that after making the employees cut back that doubling the council's own pay was not a nice statement that was made to the public and the employees.

The second would be leaving a legacy of infrastructure such as improved roads, buildings and public facilities that match the beauty of our natural environment.

Provide a safe community with decent housing prices for all who live here. In essence, we need to create a community that draws our children and their children back to a place they can afford that feels safe from crime and natural disasters such as the Angora Fire.

**What have you done to make yourself ready to be a council member?:** This question is a little like question No. 4 above regarding my experience on boards. I will refer you to all those boards and commissions listed in that answer. However, I will expand my answer in another way.  I haven't just been interested in the City Council. I have attended school board meetings, scores of community forums, utility district meetings, county Board of Supervisor meetings, TRPA meetings, lodging board meetings, forums like the housing forum put on recently by TRYP, and many more local meetings. At the state level, I have attended meetings in both Nevada and California. I went to the same high school as former Nevada Gov. Kenny Guinn in the central San Joaquin Valley. We had mutual friends. As the main staff person for Leadership Tulare I set up meetings and tours of the California state Capitol where we met with our elected representatives and then later came back to work for or against bills that affected our businesses. At the federal level, I have flown to Washington, D.C., about a dozen times. The subjects of the trips varied from attending congressional hearings on MTBE in our Tahoe groundwater and

Senate hearings and private meetings with Sens. Boxer, Reid and Feinstein regarding the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act as well as meetings with Congressman Gibbons who later became the governor of Nevada and Congressmen John Garamendi and John Doolittle on issues regarding the United States Forest Service. One of the most important efforts that I supported was to have our California state Sen. Tim Leslie, his aide Michael Applegarth and several local fire chiefs from around the lake put on a forum at LTCC with Sen. Feinstein and Congressman Doolittle about preventing wildfires. Unfortunately the bureaucratic wheels moved too slowly at Lahontan and TRPA so we were not yet ready to prevent the Angora Fire that happened prophetically just a short time after Sen. Feinstein loudly declared that the agencies had better get out of the way or they would be held responsible for a terrible conflagration! I was also invited and attended an international conference sponsored by Green Peace in Moscow, Irkutsk and Lake Baikal Russia on how to create a thriving business economy in an environmentally sensitive place. We traveled with Ed Gee from the USFS in our group. We also met with a group of bankers from Russia regarding how to fund business ventures without involving the government. We still have some contact with the people we met. I regularly receive emails from lobbying firms from both sides of the political spectrum in the U.S. capital on strategies mostly for the Western States and the very complex issues that are interwoven around water and land use. Finally my experience working with Economic Development and land use planning gave me a good understanding of how to create proper visually appealing yet profitable business districts. As a member of the Western Association of Chamber Execs that is made up of seven states including Hawaii. We learned how California’s economy was interwoven with many other countries, almost as if it was a separate country, because of our being one of the largest economies in the world at that time. Many of the trips started out with controversies. I saw how compromises and mutually beneficial agreements can be worked out without

shouting and back stabbing. Some of the trips were when I was an invited observer and others were where I was a needed participant. For instance I worked as part of a group who wanted to build a “build to suit” industrial complex that revolved around using agricultural products (50 of which net approximately $5 billion in the aggregate in Tulare County alone) and milk since our area had more dairies and cows than the entire state of Wisconsin. I drew the short straw on the trip to Italy, France and the Netherlands, but was our emissary to Oregon and Washington to attract different users of Tulare Ag products. Our industrial park was highly coveted, in the sense that we used very savvy financing techniques to build it. It has become a prime location for manufacturing butter, creams, including a Haagen Dazs ice cream plant, food packaging materials and many more. All of the tenants brought in primary year round jobs. They also worked to support each other and the community. What we didn’t do was tax the new businesses and charge fees which would have caused them to look elsewhere.

**What role should government have in housing for residents?:** I must be honest and tell you that I believe, based upon my life experiences, that government has a tendency to mess up more things than they fix. It was TRPA, in reaction to the table games and the 1960 Olympic Games who have made our town a museum of the 1960s. By freezing building, the supply dropped and the demand increased causing a rise in prices. It was done mostly out of true concern for the environment but the science as to what was really causing water and air pollution at the lake was not accurate then. “There is science and there is political science.” As studies were done over the past 50 years there was often a finger on the scale tipping the study results toward not allowing homes and businesses to be built. In the mid-1970s about 200 homes were being built per year on the South Shore. When the CTRPA (the precursor to TRPA) hinted that they might soon stop all building, over 2,500 homes were thrown up in a very short amount of time with little regard

for stream sediment or any other environmental degradation. So then the agency was able to say, “See, we told you there were too many houses being built, we’ve got to stop all building!” In the urge to find a way to stop the building the agency came up with items (now called commodities) that could be metered out to control building. These imaginary commodities were things such as sewer units, TAUs, square footage formulas and many other things. Decibel levels, while a real measurement, were used in such a way that their scientific studies found that commercial jet airplanes just happened to need to be at just a few decibels below what a commercial jet could possibly stay under. It took longer to get a permit to build a garage than it took to win World War II. Now, in my opinion, government needs to get out of the way. I believe that there can be a positive meeting of the minds among all the governments on the South Shore to lower or eliminate the fees for builders who will build homes that are dedicated for single family, owner occupied residences. That also meets all environmental thresholds. The project is the fix. None of us is smarter than all of us. That is certainly true in my case. But, if we can generate enough public pressure on TRPA, STPUD, Lahontan, the county supervisors, city building department and many more agencies then we will be able to lower costs. That will raise the supply which will allow our children and families to stay here in our beautiful city.

**How can the city partner with the school district to improve high school graduation rates?:** [Superintendent Jim] Tarwater and the board of education have gone a long way toward that goal by building trade school programs that teach students how to be mechanics, welders, accountants and dental technicians, to name a few. Not every student plans to go to a four-year college or university. In addition, our society and our community need the trades. One idea that I have heard is to reinstate the ski hill they have below the football field. Students who could ski during P.E. would most likely stay in school during the winter. Other students could learn how to

become lift technicians/mechanics. In other words, making school fun for upper classmen as well as being useful for getting a job in this town. I also believe that Mt. Tallac High School and its amazing staff have done wonders with getting at risk students to complete their education. Kudos to them!

**How can local government support and expand job creation and small local businesses?:** As it is right now when a person wants to open a business here, some – not all, of the planners and counter people do not see themselves as advocates but rather almost like police officers. Time after time, I have been told by new business startups that they have been put through the wringer in order to get started. The fees are sky high and the agencies don't foresee problems in order to help point them out so it takes them longer and costs them more. This is especially true for seasonal businesses, for instance an ice cream truck or bicycle shop. Fees should only be the amount that it costs the city to process the application. In some cases the fees are charged based on 10-12 hours of staff time, when the same work could be done in the private sector in as little as two or three hours. In addition, the city should provide a checklist of items that must be done and how to do them for new residents/ business people. Our agencies are scattered all over our town, in places that no one would ever expect them to be. We should have a list of available locations where businesses could possibly lease/buy and pitfalls to watch for. Simply put, the city should treat them like a relative that they always liked and who wants to start a business. No Catch-22 situations should be allowed. It has been ironic to see former planners from local agencies who decide to go into consulting or private business. Only then do they realize what the time delays and costs can do to a business that has signed a lease and is having to pay out money without any income. I am very familiar with how to make businesses feel welcome and how to assist them. It was my former job to assist and encourage economic development. It

was a very enjoyable thing to be involved in and it is gratifying to go back and find the businesses I recruited still in operation.

**If you believe in the one South Shore concept, what would you do to further make this a reality? If you don't believe in blurring the state line, why don't you?**: In many ways there is one South Shore. The birds, bees, deer, fish and bears do not know that there is a state line. Fires, earthquakes and storms don't see the line either. However, with human beings there is a state line. The economy and the governments draw a distinct line. We do not have gaming on the California side of South Lake Tahoe. Our wedding license laws are different. Our business license fee in California is different than the gross margins tax in Nevada. Nevada doesn't have a state income tax and California does. The Nevada side has more large corporations than the California side. Most of the school children are on the California side. The state Legislature meets every other year in Nevada and California's almost never stops meeting. The drug laws are different. Probably most important is tax dollars generated on one side of the line and paid for by the citizens of same, should not be used to benefit the other side. We pay a lot of taxes in our society and the state/county/city we live in should/must benefit from the proceeds.

**What are your views on:**

**a: Vacation home rentals:** What I believe is the issue with VHRs is lack of enforcement. The VHR code on the books for many years was simply not being enforced. When that issue came to a head, the City Council chose to update the code with stronger penalties, higher fees, etc. Now it has become apparent that no enforcement was added, which was the main problem to begin with. What I believe the council should have done (and still can do), in addition to beefing up enforcement, is deal with the underlying issue – zoning! If we were to zone the different neighborhoods with maximum

densities for VHRs, long-term rentals and owner-occupied homes, this would solve most of the problem. However, if there is not a strong enforcement arm to the new zoning rules, it will fail just as other pseudo solutions have. It has been found that our under-staffed and over worked police force is simply unable to provide enforcement for VHRs, I would suggest an outside security force that can respond in a timely manner to the non-violent issues and they could contact the police for issues with greater need for their services. (i.e., noise complaints would go to the security force/service, domestic violence and vandalism would be directed to the PD).

**b: Loop road:** My opinion on the loop road is this: I think we can accomplish many of the items that would be addressed by redirecting the highway, without spending $100 million-plus. We want a more bikeable, walkable area – lower the speed limit to 25 mph, which is a nationwide standard in business districts. As for traffic congestion, I don't believe that the loop road will solve this issue in any of its incarnations. However, one community member wisely suggested synchronizing the traffic light system; I believe this would be a huge improvement to congestion. Based on the current option being discussed, I don't see how moving a congested highway away from the business district and into a neighborhood with families is a good alternative. Not to mention, our community is in a housing crisis and although TTD has said that they wouldn't break ground until housing is replaced, they have also said that they are also allowed to negotiate with the displaced families and individuals for rent subsidies, in lieu of replacement housing. This is a much easier option for them, not to mention a quicker one. What makes us think that they won't push for the subsidies and forego all new housing just so they can break ground as soon as possible? They have already been accused of being less than honest in North Shore with regards to the housing element there. There is some speculation that their housing solution involves moving the displaced families/individuals into a remodeled Kingsbury

Middle School. How can they think this would be a viable option? Imagine being the descendant of a family that built a cabin in the area affected. This cabin houses not just your family, but your history. Your only two options are to move across state line and live in a converted school, or take your subsidy and possibly find another home that simply does not have your history in each nook and cranny. Apart from this, I simply believe that the voters should be making this decision. The council needs to decide how to define “the city,” is it the staff, the council themselves or is it the citizens who live here? If they believe it is the citizens, then they should let them decide. Fifteen hundred voters signed to demand this issue be put on the ballot, why then would the city not let them have their say. I say again, council members are servants not rulers.

**c: City streets:** City streets need to be completely redone every 40 years, ideally much more quickly in snow country. When all is said and done with the money available and possible new funding sources, this is not even close to being feasible in the city’s current financial situation. The average mile of road costs $1 million to redo. We have about 400-plus miles of roads in the city. If we were to use the $100 million from the loop road (which will only build about one mile for that project), we would be a fourth of the way there ($1 million = 1 mile, $100 million = 100 miles, one-quarter of the city’s streets). It would certainly have a greater impact on the citizens. Even if the sales tax measure on the Nov. 8 ballot passes and the money is bonded (which would increase the city’s debt service to an estimated 30 percent), there would only be about $40 million to overlay the 400 miles of roads in the city. At this point we are on a collision course. This can has been kicked down the road for too many years, but I would be surprised if this continues, especially if I am lucky enough to be elected.

**d: Relationships with other public agencies:** There has

appeared to be a problem in this area also. While I'm not privy to all behind the scenes negotiations, I have seen a couple of public disagreements with other agencies that have not worked out well. One breakup has been the joint powers authority (JPA) that was created to provide superior and consistent safety services. I'm not going to describe each side's points on this breakup and public disagreement. Another dust up was when the city decided unilaterally that they could simply charge a franchise fee to the South Tahoe Public Utility District in the estimated amount of $500,000 per year. This was dropped quickly because it is not legal. The point is that getting along with others should be a goal of the organization from the top down. A wise man once told me, "By the time you have met the third jerk of the day, go look in the mirror." I think there is needed improvement when it comes to inter-agency spats.

**e: Recreation:** Our locals are recreation nuts, especially the millennials. But all of we locals ski, hike, workout and play every sport we can and just as important, so do our guests. I'm assuming that you are asking about the recreation TOT tax on the ballot. The lodging association is a proponent probably for two reasons. One would be to not have the city gobble up TOT for a non-beneficial reason that doesn't help the industry. The other would be that sports dollars can be huge. For instance our small South Tahoe Wrestling Club hosted a state tournament. Seven hundred wrestlers and their families came for three days. That tournament alone filled many motel rooms and restaurant seats. The proposed rec center will be built to host many other types of tournaments. My personal preference would be to have a private company be in charge. That being said, Lauren Thomaselli, the current Recreation Department head, is as good as anyone out there. But, she will eventually retire. It has been proven all over the country that private for-profit operators do a better job overall in operating ice skating arenas, and other recreation facilities. One last thought. We do have private gyms that would have to

compete with a government subsidized center. Perhaps some of the things they do best should be left to them.

**f. TRPA defined commodities:** They are made up out of thin air and are an end justifies the means item. Of course we want to protect our lake. I have certainly been a major supporter of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act. However, it is time we all were honest with each other. The TRPA and enterprising developers can use the sale of these commodities such as tourist accommodation units (TAUs) to make money.

**g. Transient occupancy tax measure:** I am a past secretary of the lodging board. The issue of TOT increases often came up. The state and national associations have verified studies that prove as the TOT costs went up, the number of guests went down. For instance the city of New York raised TOT to 18 percent. Tourism dropped so hard and fast that they had to rescind the tax. I point this out because there is obviously a point at which a city can overtax the guests. As an operator/manager of several small properties, I saw the sticker shock. It is not a bottomless well. As I said above, the lodging association does believe they will see a benefit from this tax because of the sports teams coming here with their families. I believe the tax will pass because the public likes taxes that another person will pay. That being said, I think that the threshold has been reached after this. If we continue to go back to this well, then we will start to see diminishing returns.

**h. Sales tax measure:** I sure wish that previous councils had done more to fix the roads in the past. They have joked that the utility district and other entities that do work in the city streets are the city’s road repair program. That is because when any other entity digs even in a fairly small portion of a road, the city has them repair as large of a section as possible. The public may think that Caltrans and the city are doing the work. Our city streets are in terrible disrepair. It is very disappointing that those who want funds

for affordable/workforce housing and those who have lost their Volkswagen in a pothole are pitted against each other on this ballot. Both things are desperately needed.

**i. What do you want the additional sales tax money to go to?:** In a previous answer I pointed out that all the governments could lower their fees in order to stimulate lower priced homes for renters. That can't be done for road repairs. So if I have to vote for a tax rather than raise income to the city by increasing sales for businesses. I would say put it to roads. I'm still looking for my Jeep in a pothole on Eloise Street.

**Tell us something about yourself that people may not know:** In keeping with my long wordy answers to your many questions, I think two things might be not known. My great-great-grandfather, Joseph Alexander Grassel, was a soldier in the German army just as things started heating up in the Third Reich. I'm told he was in the secret police (not to be mistaken for the SS). He and his fellow soldiers were asked to start persecuting the Jewish people starting with the more wealthy shop owners. He took a stand and refused to persecute those families. Joseph Grassel was soon arrested and put into a box car and sent away into the very same type of prison that he had refused to send the Jewish people to. The prison was one of the more famous death camps. It was called Dachau. Joseph died there. Some of his possessions were reported to have been kept. On Sept. 11, 2001, while visiting Washington. D.C., I decided that I was going to go to the Holocaust Museum's archives in Alexandria, Va., to try to retrieve his things. But first we had a meeting with Congressman Doolittle. On the way to the Capitol building that morning we heard that a plane had flown into one of the twin towers. At that point we didn't know what type of plane nor did we have any idea what kind of damage was caused. But our cab driver knew. He even suggested that it might be Osama Bin Laden. Just as we were shaking the congressman's hand the second plane hit the

second tower. The congressman believed we were at war and his aides immediately whisked him away. Weird World War II air raid type alarms were going off. The guards were standing, arms at the ready, in every hallway. Our group of four was scared down to our toes. We worked our way out of the building and found a retaining wall about 70 yards in front of the Capital. We could hear the slow whine of a jet engine. We got down behind the wall and waited for what we were sure was going to be the blast from the collision. Other tourists copied what we did. It became quiet. We stood up and then the plane hit the Pentagon where we had been the day before. We then walked about 15 blocks across D.C. to our hotel. We heard other blasts that car radios said were government targeted buildings blowing up. Later we learned that the blasts were from sonic booms from our Air Force jets flying at top speed to protect the city. It didn't feel real. We drove by the Pentagon the next day to see that the plane had caught on fire again. It took some time to get word to our kids and parents that we were OK. We often thank God for those brave passengers of United 93 that went down in Pennsylvania. They fought the hijackers and saved our lives.

**You have said that the majority of the council has tried to silence the minority. Please explain this and use specific examples:** Actually, that is not what I said. I'm copying here exactly what I wrote.

"When a staff member is mistreated or abused by an elected person there are legal mechanisms is place to deal with it. They are very clearly defined for a reason because in the past the majority has tried to silence the minority. Before I am possibly misunderstood again, I don't believe that is the case here."

My point was that the majority silencing the minority is why the laws were put into place.

# Byer: DCSD priorities – budgets, strategy, curriculum

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Keith Byer is one of two candidates for Area 3 of the Douglas County School District.

**Name:** B Keith Byer

**Age:** 53

**Job/profession:** Certified public accountant (Texas)

**What boards, commissions, or other experience, including volunteering, do you have?:** Tahoe Douglas Rotary Club member and board of directors member, have routinely volunteered at

various fundraisers at lake schools, Junior Achievement-Moscow board of directors, KidSave (charity focused on placement of older orphans) Moscow fundraising chair, Anglo-American School of Moscow School Board for eight years (member of board and member of finance committee).

**Why do you want to be on the school board?:** I believe parents need a strong voice on the school board and that I can build consensus from diverse viewpoints.

**Why should voters vote for you over another candidate?:** I am a parent of a recent graduate of Whittell and a current student of Whittell. I am currently active in support of the local schools. I have deep experience in budgeting and strategy development in both business and a school setting. I am a resident of Douglas County.

**What distinct experience or competency makes you uniquely qualified to lead effectively as an elected official?:** I have over 30 years of professional experience, with an emphasis in finance, working in diverse groups toward a common goal. I believe boards need to provide strong governance and bring a balance to the diverse stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, administration, and tax payers) points of view.

**Public agencies have been under scrutiny the last few years for lack of transparency and accountability. What will you do to ensure both?:** I believe Nevada has open meeting rules for a very valid reason and conversations and debate of key issues need to occur in this open forum. When issues are discussed and decided outside public meetings, distrust arises. Often organization leadership (CEO, superintendents, etc.) bring decisions before the board for ratification rather than discussion. Boards must understand both the pros and cons of a decision, which takes time and transparency.

**What stands out for you in the current budget that you support and that you would change?:** Douglas County has made and will

continue to make investments in technology. I believe they should leverage that technology to hold costs where possible. They must also leverage the benefit of that technology by providing training to teachers and evaluating the teachers on technology integration. I also note that Kingsbury Middle School was recently sold after many years on the market. When KMS was closed, promises were made that monies raised from its sale would be invested back in the lake schools. I want to ensure that happens.

**Describe three attributes for a successful board:** Transparent governance with members who fully understand the issues upon which they vote. Giving voice of all stakeholders. Strategic vision driving actions and expenditures.

**What are your thoughts about public employee defined benefits?:** Most voters saw their employers move away from defined benefit programs toward defined contribution programs many years ago. I believe we must move that way as well. You cannot properly budget for defined benefit plans as the costs depend on future events such as increases in life expectancy, interest rates, and health care inflation. Defined benefit plans can be used to hide the true costs of employees. Taxpayers must know the costs they are incurring each year to avoid surprises that build up. We cannot leverage our future for the current. We have seen municipalities go bankrupt partly in response to unfunded defined benefit pension and health care plans. Such situations do not benefit anyone including the educators who rely on bankrupt plans.

**Please explain your position on contracting out work normally done by staff:** I do not have strong positions on this matter but I believe the board has a fiduciary responsibility to spend taxpayer money wisely. I am not averse to contracting work out, but believe you must have very strict service definitions to ensure the work is done correctly and that competitive bids are received.

**What is your 10-year vision for the school district?:** The school has a formal strategic planning process, which is now under way that obtains inputs from all stakeholders. I value this input and believe we should approach this process with an open mind and no preconceived notions. That said, my focus is preparing our kids for the work force of the future. This will require technology skills.

**What one vote in the last four years that the current board made do you disagree with and why?:** The current board was under significant financial pressure due to a reduction in state funding and has not kept up with required maintenance. The taxpayers are now being asked to fund this maintenance backlog via a special bond proposition. This bond may be rejected by voters, which will intensify the pressure on future budgets. At the end of the day, we work for taxpayers and parents.

**How many school board meetings have you attended this year?:** 2

**What do you know about the strategic plan, finances, debt, goals of the school district?:** I have read the strategic plan, budget and other publicly available documents and have a basic understanding of their contents. There must be direct linkage between the strategic plan and the budget. You will only achieve what you are willing to pay for. Linking money and objectives create honesty and transparency.

**Being on the school board means working as a team. How will you work with the next board for the greater good of the community?:** I have a great deal of experience working with diverse groups of people and finding common ground to move forward. Strong schools build strong communities.

**What should be the three main priorities for the board?:** Budgets, strategy, curriculum

**What do you know about Common Core? What is your opinion about it?:** I believe Douglas County and the state of Nevada are

completely capable of managing their own schools. I do not believe federal funding should be tied to Common Core and the decision to adopt Common Core should be left to states and school districts as well as the pedagogy chosen to teach their curriculum. I believe parents will demand challenging curriculum for their children if provided control of their schools.

I do believe in limited standardized testing to identify schools that have a large proportion of students unprepared for college or the work force. When these issues are detected, I believe we must look at root causes. Schools may be failing their mission; but, societal factors may be failing our schools. Limited standardized testing can bring focus where focus is needed.

I do not believe we should allow personal information about students outside a school district. Our kids have a right to privacy and as minors cannot waive that right.

**What is your opinion about career and technical education at the high school level?:** I believe this training is vital to our students, our local businesses, and our community. Many trades have shortages of labor and many tradesmen create small business. Lastly, trades expand our students' opportunity to make their home here in Douglas County.

**Do you support the expansion of charter schools? Why or why not?:** No one can be trusted to act in the best interest of students more than parents. I support school choice be that public schools, home schooling, or charter schools. We should have enough charter schools to meet the demand for charter schools. I welcome arguments from those who believe charter schools harm public schools but need strong evidence to override parental choice.

**The lake seems to be underrepresented. Do you believe this is true? Why or why not?:** The allocation of board seats seems

quite fair to me so I don’t think it’s an issue of underrepresentation. If elected, I will represent every student in Douglas County and expect the other board members to do the same. I do not believe there is inherent bias against the lake schools. I think we have an issue that lake school enrollment has dropped and school administration has reacted. Some of this enrollment drop is caused by the lack of affordable housing at the lake which may be partially remedied as the developer who recently bought KMS may build up to 400 units. But part of the enrollment drop is self-inflicted. The board failed to continue a program, without explanation, that encouraged South Lake Tahoe students who wanted a small school environment to attend Zephyr Cove and Whittell.

The fact that your parents choose to live at the lake should not affect where you go to college or what trade you practice: that should be determined by your ambition and abilities. I believe there needs to be a minimum curriculum available to every Douglas County student and that we should develop innovative ways to deliver that curriculum. This could be e-learning, expansion of the relationship with South Lake Tahoe, development of programs with LTCC and WNC, adding key teachers, and other solutions. Several lake school parents spent hours of their valuable time looking at solutions. After more than a year, they have not had a response from the board or the administration.

**If you answered yes to the question above, what will you do to change the underrepresentation? If you answered no, what will you do to change the perception?:** I believe the board and administration should spend more time talking and listening to lake parents. When you look at expenditure per student, we spend significantly more per lake student than valley student; but expenditures per student isn’t how you get into the best universities or trained as a welder. The cost per student is higher because of higher facilities and operating costs. Every student in Douglas County must have an education system that

allows them the opportunity to reach their full potential. If we fixed curriculum, we'd fix most of the perception issue. I would ask the superintendent to write articles, as needed, in the lake schools newsletter discussing administrative and board decisions which have a direct effect on the lake schools (past examples of such would be teaching staff reductions and art program eliminations). I would also encourage her to spend a few days each month in an office at the lake engaging lake parents, listening to lake teachers, and interacting with lake students. If you've ever done this, you know just how special our schools are.

**Tell us something about yourself that people may not know:** Many, many, years and pounds ago, I ran a marathon in under 5 hours. I've flown over 2 million miles, been to over 70 countries, and lived in 4 countries on 3 different continents. I've been a repeat guest lecturer at the University of Texas in business applications and want to teach in high school or college after I retire. I've had articles published over 30 times and contributed to 4 books on doing business in various countries. My high school class was less than 30, similar to Whittell.

**You have said you want more technology in schools. What kind of technology and how do propose to pay for it?:** I believe that every student must have a base competency in technology. Mechanics, truck drivers, and lawyers all use iPads. The high school will be providing every student a Chrome Book that I believe is a sufficient platform but they must integrate the technology into the classroom. As to paying for it, I believe leveraging technology could save money in some areas such as textbooks, reproduction costs, etc.

Douglas County is blessed to have generous businesses and engaged service clubs. I would like to see the school seek relationships with businesses and service clubs in the area to garner support of select programs in the school. You can see the generosity of GE in the Douglas County Community Center

and the generosity of Tahoe Douglas Rotary in Kahle Community Center. Attend any meeting of a local Rotary, Kiwanis, Optimist, Soroptimist, or Lions Club and you'll see their money evidence their passion for education. I believe if the school could create a vision, we'd find the sponsorship. As only one narrow example, I believe if the school created a program to engage girls in STEM, we could find engineers in the local community to serve as mentors.

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# Long: Wants to be a voice for new ideas

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Ted Long is running for one of two seats open on the South Lake Tahoe City Council.

**Name:** Ted Long

**Age**: 78

**Job/profession**: Attorney, lecturer, professor of economics and law

**What boards, commissions, or other experience, including volunteering, do you have?:** Prior council member, planning commissioner, past president League of California Sacramento division, two time chairmen of LAFCO four-year member, LAFCO and elected to state board, city rep to LTVA, and member of the Eisenhower Foundation, cities and the urban crises panel. Over the past 50 years I have served on over 25 boards and commissions. On the local level I was a past treasurer of the Art League, served on Latino Affairs Committee. Sponsored local soccer season, worked with TRPA on affordable housing and served six years on the El Dorado County Food Bank board.

**Why are you running for City Council?:** To be a voice for the "little guy" to represent the citizens' of the city and to provide a voice for new and different ideas.

**Why should voters vote for you over another candidate?:** My qualifications, the relationships I have created that will serve the city, my willingness to put in the extra time and the policies I support.

**What distinct experience or competency makes you uniquely qualified to lead effectively as an elected official?**: See answer 4. I have been an advocate for change and equality for over 50 years.

**Public agencies have been under scrutiny the last few years for lack of transparency and accountability. What will you do to ensure both?:** Public disclosure and holding public meetings I would like to see a third monthly meeting held to discuss issues and to bring various departments for the public to interact with.

**What stands out for you in the current budget that you support and that you would change?:** Priority needs to be infrastructure and reestablishing community police and fire departments. We need a review of the recreational facilities for repair and update.

**Do you support current legislation for $15 minimum wage? Please explain:** Yes, corporate profits are at an all-time high. The spirit of democracy demands that the wealth be fairly distributed. As we look at other countries we clearly see that employees can receive a livable wage and working conditions while companies grow. I recently completed a tour of German factories and saw fairness work.

**Do you support Proposition 55? Please explain:** Legislating personal behavior like this has never worked. Probation is the best example. There is already a robust trade in marijuana we need to regulate and tax, the funds committed to raising the standard of living for the poorest.

**Describe three attributes for a successful council:** Skill (qualifications), concern and availability. A willingness to use the platform to expand the city's relationship with other cities, state and federal officials, like the work I did with the League of California cities.

**What are your thoughts about public employee defined benefits?:** Public employees deserve a good benefit program, at least on par with private programs. They must also face the problems and issues that confront all employers and have programs they can depend on.

**Please explain your position regarding contracting out work normally done by staff:** Only when extraordinary requirements would require it.

**What is your 10-year vision for South Lake Tahoe?:** Roads repaired, economy booming and several new low and work force housing projects under way. We need to develop our

relationship with the high tech industries, this will bring real jobs to the area. I propose a committee be formed and visit the Silicon Valley to determine exactly what it will take to get those that can work anywhere do our town.

**What one vote in the last four years that the current council made do you disagree with and why?:** Mostly the internal bickering and the general attitude that I hear about in their willingness to listen to all views, more then a few have told me that they do not think the council listens. I am proposing a third, non-official meeting each month just to talk and interact on the issues of the day.

**How many City Council meetings have you attended this year?:** I believe four, I do watch on TV as well.

**What do you know about the strategic plan, finances, debt, and goals of the city?:** I understand the economic development issues, the refinance of debt and I am not sure what the effects and alternatives are to the abandonment of redevelopment in the state.

**Being on the council means working as a team. How will you work with the sitting members for the greater good of the community?**: I am very clear that to get something done you need support of others, I will work to earn and deserve that support. I have demonstrated some ability in being selected as foreman of the grand jury, elected to the state board of LAFCO, two times selected as its chairman and my leadership role with the League of California Cities.

**What should be the three main priorities for the council?:** Roads, community spirit and affordable housing.

**What have you done to make yourself ready to be a council member?:** History of involvement, follow local issues.

**What role should government have in housing for residents?:** A livable home is as important as any other freedom we have. I

believe that inadequate or non-existing housing is a key issue in the cause of many of the other problems we have. We provide public support if your home is damaged by natural disaster, why not if you can't afford it?

**How can the city partner with the school district to improve high school graduation rates?:** To be available to assist, to be a role model. To find mutual areas of interest and to develop them. We must also expand our role with the college. For example if we are successful in making our city the best place for high tech work, then the college might look to courses that support that career.

**How can local government support and expand job creation and small local businesses?:** By supporting the business community, provide affordable housing and demonstrate and share community spirit. By reaching out, there are thousands that can work anywhere, why are they not here?

**If you believe in the one South Shore concept, what would you do to further make this a reality? If you don't believe in blurring the state line, why don't you?:** I think it is a realty, we need to work together, we have a lot more in common than that which could separate us, we must remember that with current technology the entire world is a smaller place.

**What are your views on:**

**a: Vacation home rentals:** I support private property rights and respect the needs of residence for safe and sane neighborhoods. This issue can be resolved.

**b: Loop road:** Not sure yet, on the surface I like the idea of a mall or walking space I also want all the residence protected with replacement housing.

**c: City streets:** High priority, needs work

**d: Relationships with other public agencies:** My involvement

with many as a member and leader demonstrates my recognition of their importance and the need to work together. I consider the post as councilmember an important introduction into other organizations. This is where you build relationships and get support for your city.

**e: Recreation:** Number two job of the city.

**f. TRPA defined commodities:** I understand the reason behind them but feel that they slow potential growth and the solving of housing issues. I have seen major shifts in TRPA's view and a willing to work together. Higher quality development means better environmental controls.

**g. Transient occupancy tax measure:** Support, as long as the funds are spend to address tourist needs and problems.

**h. Sales tax measure:** Not sure yet, my principal concern is the use of the money.

**i. What do you want the additional sales tax money to go to?:** If done, to housing and support a growing economy.

**Tell us something about yourself that people may not know:** I mean well and want to work for the greater good. I believe that open, honest discussion will lead to solutions. I believe that if something is not working you need to try something else, not just do it over and over.

**How will you be a different council member compared to when you served before?:** I believe that I have mellowed and have become more open. I certainly have learned a lot in the past years.

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# Yosemite – a place for everyone

**Publisher's note:** ***This is one in a series of stories about the National Park Service, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2016. All articles may be found via the Home Page, select Special Projects, then National Park Service 100th.***

The grandeur of Yosemite is captivating no matter the season. Photo/Yosemite Hospitality

**By Joann Eisenbrandt**

I grew up loving Yosemite.

I first went there in the 1950s, well before 4 million people visited it each year. It was the best place of my childhood. Every summer, my father, mother and I spent my father's vacation camping there. We set up our campsite in Camp 14, alongside the Merced River and just across a big meadow from

Camp Curry. You could walk out from amongst the closely spaced pines of the campground and stand in the meadow in waist-high grass and look up at the chiseled face of Glacier Point. Or walk across the roadway and through Camp Curry's grizzled old apple orchard and parking lot to the popular ice cream vendor's window just around the corner from the Camp Curry cafeteria.

Every evening, just before dark, we'd put on our light sweaters and stand in the meadow to watch the Fire Fall. A massive fire built atop Glacier Point 3,200 feet above was pushed over its steep face. "Let the fire fall," the echoing call went out as it cascaded down the black and gray granite in a swoosh of blazing embers. The Fire Fall was permanently discontinued in 1968.

During the hot summer days, my mother and I would climb down the sandy banks to the cool Merced River and float downstream on large Army-green air mattresses. They smelled strongly of hot rubber, so we covered them with colorful beach towels. I always fought getting out of the river, even though my mother never failed to remind me what a long hike back upstream it would be. Guided horseback rides from the nearby stables came down a well-trodden path that followed the river's edge. It was a narrow strip of powdery hot dirt full of stones churned up by years of pounding hooves and punctuated by often-steaming mounds of equine droppings.

My parents loved hiking and climbing and had done a lot of it in Yosemite before I was born. They were fearless. They'd scaled the rope ladder up the back side of Half Dome and gone up the steep trail that twisted from the valley floor to the very top of Glacier Point. They'd scrambled over the massive boulders beneath the bridge below Yosemite Falls all the way up to where the waterfall hit the riverbed. I still have my father's Kodak camera and the crisp black and white photos of their adventures that it recorded.

Half Dome from Glacier Point. Photo/George Thomson

I hiked up the 4-mile trail from the valley floor to the top of Glacier Point with my parents. The start of the trail is flanked by monstrous boulders, big as buildings, flung there carelessly by the glaciers that carved out Yosemite eons ago. It was so steep for me that there were many times when my father had to literally push me up to the next plateau. The view from the top was breathtaking. I still compare it to looking over the rim of the Grand Canyon. You can’t imagine what it is like from photos. You have to be there.

We also left Happy Isles and made it all the way up the 7-mile Mist Trail to Vernal and Nevada Falls. It is called the Mist Trail because the mist that rises up as the two falls plunge precipitously down to the rock-strewn riverbed below covers the twisting trail of carved rock steps in a shroud of wet fog and makes it terrifyingly slick. My parents told me that when they hiked the trail years before it was even worse. I found that hard to believe.

In the early 1970s, I moved to Oakhurst in the southern Sierra just outside Yosemite's southern entrance and was reintroduced to the park as an adult. I reconnected with places from my childhood like Wawona, the Ahwahnee, and Camp Curry. In March 2016, a trademark dispute between Delaware North, Yosemite's outgoing concessionaire, and the National Park Service brought ownership of those iconic names into question. Delaware North had trademarked them and other park names and wanted the NPS to buy them back for an estimated $51 million. The Park Service disputed the amount, and decided to change the names of these places, at least temporarily, when the new park concessionaire, Aramark, took over.

New place names don't change the fact that enduring memories of Yosemite stretch back for generations. I certainly have my family memories, and I was lucky to share the even-earlier memories of Eleanor Crooks.

I first met Crooks in the late 1970s when she was already in her 80s. She lived in Ahwahnee, in the Sierra foothills outside Yosemite on a hilltop overlooking a sweeping pine and oak-filled valley. I was writing an article about Wawona for a local lifestyle magazine. She welcomed me warmly into her home. She was relatively petite, but had a lively presence, with the sparkle of youth still in her eyes.

Crooks was the daughter of William Sell. Sell was the first telegraph operator in Yosemite. At the request of Henry Washburn, one of three brothers who owned the Wawona Hotel, Sell built and ran the Ahwahnee Tavern, a rest stop for travelers going into the Yosemite Valley in the late 1890s and early 1900s.

No matter what it’s called, there is something magical about this lodge at Yosemite. Photo/Yosemite Hospitality

Crooks offered me tea and we sat down at a small table in her sunny kitchen to talk. She told me about her years growing up at Ahwahnee Tavern. In 1903, when she was about 7, President Theodore Roosevelt stopped there on his way to meet John Muir in Yosemite. Crooks remembered it as if it were just the other day. She described the chief of state as impatient, yet friendly. She recalled her mother’s dismay when one of Roosevelt’s aides ate all the carefully prepared cookies while the president was out back washing up with the ordinary folks.

Despite all their elaborate preparations, Roosevelt didn't stay the night, but instead rode on the same day, preferring to camp outdoors with Muir in the Mariposa Grove of giant sequoias just inside the park's southern entrance.

Crooks took horse-drawn stage rides from Ahwahnee into Wawona in what she called a "mud wagon." These open wagons had that name, she told me, because in wet weather, by the time the passengers arrived at the hotel, they were often so covered with mud as to be almost unrecognizable. "Toward evening," she remembered, "we arrived at the hotel, with the fountain in the center as it is now. The stage drivers drove up to the steps of the hotel with a great deal of pride. The porters, who were all older men, took the passengers down, dusted them off, and then conducted them up the steps into the lobby."

"On the porch," she continued, "the women associated with the hotel would be sitting in their fancy clothes awaiting the arrival of the tourists." After dinner, there would be singing and sometimes a dance in the dance hall. The next morning, the guests would tour the Big Trees and then continue on down into Yosemite Valley itself.

John Muir was an advocate for the creation of national parks well before his 1903 trip to Yosemite with President Roosevelt. In 1890, Yosemite National Park was established, but was under the control of the state of California. Muir was unhappy with the protection the state was giving Yosemite's unique ecology and began publicizing the need to better protect it. Muir's1903 Yosemite trip with Roosevelt convinced the president to remove the park from state control and make it a protected National Park in 1906.

Many things have changed in Yosemite since then. When I first lived in Oakhurst, a day pass was $5 and an annual pass was $15. Park rangers often let locals they knew pass through for free with only a friendly wave. A seven-day Yosemite vehicle pass is now $30 in summer and an annual park pass costs $60.

Those older than 62 can purchase a lifetime pass for just $10. The most important things, however, have stayed the same.

The Long White at Wawona. Photo/Yosemite Hospitality

I visited the park hundreds of times, and found that you don't have to go down into the valley itself to find wonderful places. Wawona is just eight miles or so inside the southern entrance. My favorite place in the park, it was first settled in 1856 by Galen Clark, who had come west to make a fortune in the California gold fields. He built an overnight lodging facility called Clark's Station which he later sold to the Washburn brothers. Henry Washburn's wife named it "Wawona," an Indian word for big trees.

All the historic buildings at Wawona have names: the Main Hotel, the Long White, Clark's Cottage, Washburn Cottage and Hill's Studio among them. The past that Eleanor Crooks lived is still there. The bubbling fountain full of lily pads and the circular driveway leading up to the Main Hotel's long covered porch are reminders of that quieter time. The nine-hole golf course, established in 1918, still stretches out

along the meadow across the road from the hotel. You can relax on the expansive green lawn alongside the Long White which houses the pro golf shop on the bottom floor. I liked to lie on my back in the cool grass, looking up at the massive redwoods towering above me. I can still hear the clicking of the metal golf cleats on the stone paths leading up to the golf shop and the muted laughter and splashing of those in the white-fenced swimming pool set into the lawn just above.

Down the road from the Wawona Hotel is the Pioneer History Center, accessed via a covered bridge over the Merced River. Beyond it are the Wawona stables. I loved riding, but I was poor. The trail guides worked for the Yosemite Park and Curry Company in summer, but were wranglers in nearby valley communities the rest of the year. In a move that would set modern-day risk managers' teeth on edge, they let me muck out the stalls, rub down the horses, fill the water trough and do other chores in return for free trail rides. The best rides were the night rides under a full moon. The heat of the summer day had been replaced with the refreshing coolness of a high-elevation evening. The trail winds from the stables alongside the Merced River, past the back of the hotel and up the hillside. The crisp night air carried the sounds of glasses clinking and the soft laughter of visitors sitting on the hotel's inviting covered deck.

We would cross the highway, ford a small stream, then come back toward the hotel along the far side of the meadow and the golf course. Through the trees in the moonlight, you could see the herd of mule deer that make Wawona their home grazing contentedly on the lush green of the golf course. They barely looked up as we passed.

The actual community of Wawona is private land totally surrounded by Yosemite National Park. It has its own post office, several grocery stores and The Redwoods, a privately owned rustic resort near the end of North Chilnualna Road, a sharp right turn just beyond the Wawona Hotel. The food there

was hearty, fresh and fabulous. I hear it still is. Just a ways up the road is the parking lot for the trail to the top of Chilnualna Falls. It’s a quick hike to the lower falls, but all the way to the top is a steep, twisting trail through lots of gnarly brush that does its best to reach out and grab you. It’s an effort, but worth it.

Another great “outside the valley” experience is the Mariposa Grove of giant sequoias. To get there, you take a right immediately after you enter the park from Highway 41. Centuries-old monarchs like the Grizzly Giant, the California Tunnel Tree and the Fallen Monarch make the trees that dot Wawona’s verdant lawn seem like sticks. One winter, I took a guided snowshoe hike with a small group from the Grove’s parking lot up to the Mariposa Grove Museum and back. I had imagined it as effortlessly gliding across the snow and certainly easier than my one failed attempt at downhill skiing at Badger Pass in a blizzard. Snowshoeing, it turned out, was more labor-intensive than I’d expected. What I remember most, apart from how badly my legs hurt, was the intensely bright blue sky, the shards of snow dropping down without warning from the branches stories above us and the absolute stillness.

The Mariposa Grove is undergoing a renovation now so full access to these wonders of nature won’t be available until spring 2017.

The Yosemite of 2016 is still the same spectacularly beautiful place I remember. There are 800 miles of trails in Yosemite and while the valley, Yosemite Falls and Glacier Point are always going to be crowded, there are many places that are not. If you can avoid arriving mid-day in summer or on weekends or holidays and enjoy the park during the shoulder seasons instead, the crowds will be less. Under the Merced River Plan, a comprehensive plan adopted in 2014 to protect the Merced River’s Wild and Scenic status, reduce congestion in the park and enhance the visitor experience, changes are starting to be made. Meadows and riparian habitat are being

restored, species like the red-legged frog are being reintroduced, riverbanks protected and traffic circulation patterns and parking sites reconfigured.

The best thing you can do to protect the park and have a memorable experience, Yosemite's public information officer Scott Gediman told me is, "Once you get to Yosemite, just park your vehicle and leave it. Ride a bike, hike, walk, or take the shuttles." There's a "hikers' bus" to take you from convenient locations on the Valley floor to more remote hiking or climbing destinations and then bring you back. YARTS, the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System, offers public transport to Yosemite from Merced, Mammoth Lakes, Sonora, and just recently from Fresno, including the Fresno airport.

Once you wind your way north up and out of the valley, through Crane Flat to White Wolf, Glen Aulin, Tuolumne Meadows, Lembert Dome or Tenaya Lake, you find a different Yosemite—what I think of as the hardcore camper/hiker/climber's paradise; Yosemite without frills or most urban amenities. The scenery there is starker, with bent, stunted trees from the high-elevation winter winds and giant slabs of granite butting right up to the road with boulders of all sizes strewn about atop them.

Beyond that is the park's Tioga Pass exit. From there, the Tioga Road plummets from 11,000 feet to Highway 120 below. The Tioga Road closes each year after the first serious snowfall and doesn't open again until late May or early June. One year, I drove from Oakhurst through Yosemite to Tahoe on the very first day the Tioga Road reopened after its long winter nap. The road was clear, the sky was blue, but the air had a bite to it. The still-melting snowpack created hundreds of streams splashing down enthusiastically from every high place; even down the steep banks and granite outcroppings alongside the road. Tuolumne Meadows was lush and wet, still covered with small patches of snow. In summer, there is a store made of thick canvas walls erected around a metal shell. It comes down

when Tioga Pass closes each year. All that was there that day was the empty platform and a parking lot devoid of cars.

Across the road from the store is a meadow dotted with boulders—another legacy of an ancient glacier's trek. In summer, it's a great place to sit and eat lunch. On this day, dozens of ground squirrels sat perched atop the rocks. They had abandoned their burrows to enjoy a day in the warm sun, scampering back and forth, enjoying their privacy while it lasted.

To me, Yosemite is more than the best-known and often busiest national park. It's an old friend. While the fact that it has become entangled in 21st century politics bothers me, it doesn't change what makes Yosemite so special.

In July, there was hope of movement in the trademarked names dispute. Delaware North, the NPS and the park's current concessionaire, Aramark, were working together to try to arrange a mediation schedule and hopefully avoid playing the dispute out all the way in the legal arena. Aramark is involved in the mediation but is not a party to the lawsuit. They asked the court to put off the next step in the legal process to allow them time to set this into motion.

A joint status report on Aug. 18 indicated that attempts at mediation failed. It told the court that the parties had "… engaged in preliminary settlement discussions and have extensively discussed the possibility of non-binding mediation, but have not reached agreement on mediation at this time. The parties do not believe that settlement is likely at this time." Yosemite PIO Scott Gediman was asked to comment on the change, but told *Lake Tahoe News,* "Yosemite National Park does not comment on pending litigation."

For me, the Wawona Hotel will always be the Wawona Hotel. Camp Curry will always be Camp Curry. I hope to get back to Yosemite sometime soon. I know that the things I could do when

I was younger may no longer be options and that I will have to find a new set of special places there. But whether you choose to climb the rope ladder up the back of Half Dome, take a rugged backcountry hike from Tuolumne Meadows, hang off the face of Cathedral Peak, or just dangle your feet in the frothy waters of the Merced River, Yosemite graciously accommodates you. That's exactly what a National Park should be—a place not just for some, but for everyone.

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# Mentally ill suspects test law enforcement

**Publisher's note:** ***This is one of several stories about mental health issues in the Lake Tahoe Basin that will be running through October. The other stories may be accessed from the Home page under Special Projects, then click on Mental Health.***

**By Susan Wood**

El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury has learned personally there is no magic pill in terms of eliminating mental illness on our streets and in the judicial system.

Even with her steely resolve, calming demeanor and steady hand on the gavel that delivers justice in South Lake Tahoe, Kingsbury – who serves behind the bench of Behavioral Court among other disciplines – couldn't save her sister from a debilitating struggle with bipolar disorder.

She knew the fatal result of her sister's well being when she got a call from the coroner in Sacramento a few years ago.

"It was heartbreaking," Kingsbury told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Like many, Kingsbury has seen her fair share of people "out there screaming and yelling and pushing shopping carts" barely able to hold onto some semblance of reality.

That's just how cunning mental illness is. Throw in alcohol and drug addiction, and the problem grows like it's on steroids.

"Often there are substance abuse issues. That's when it becomes difficult because you need these people to detox to get to the root of the problem," the longtime judge explained.

Medication can only go so far. With bipolar disorder, aka manic depression, the pharmaceuticals have side effects that prompt many afflicted to want to avoid them. The period of elevated mood counters the down times enough that some people suffering from it don't want to end the up feelings.

"They hate the lows and love the highs," Kingsbury said.

In the 1980s, the bulk of psychiatric hospitals in California closed, leaving the mentally ill to fend for themselves on the streets. When they're brought in, often from an episode with police, they can get an assessment and substance abuse help if necessary.

Transitional housing, including the few units available in South Lake Tahoe, provides for stability in the community for those just seeking another chance at life.

“Without the housing, a lot of folks will do OK for a while then things will go south,” Kingsbury said.

**Jail is not the housing answer**

“Do you know what the largest psychiatric hospital is?” El Dorado County Undersheriff Randy

**El Dorado County Undersheriff Randy Peshon recognizes the difficulties his deputies have with suspects who have mental health issues. Photo/Provided**

Peshon asked rhetorically, answering: “State prison.”

“There is no easy answer. Part of the problems we face is the money we have for mental health is in a silo – some people might not fit the criteria,” said Peshon, who worked in the county jail in South Lake Tahoe for years. He now works in Placerville as second in command.

Peshon has viewed the double-edged sword of the mounting

issue. Medical privacy laws have become stricter, while the stigma attached to mental illness has increased. The burden lies heavily on law enforcement trying to quell or at least reduce the perplexing problem.

“If law enforcement is aware somebody is suffering from mental illness, we have officers who are trained in crisis intervention,” Peshon said. “A lot of these situations are brought on because these people go off their meds.”

From the county jail and mental health to the state court system and local beats of police and sheriff’s departments, government continues to wrestle with the crisis.

In many cases, some refuse help. In others, the help fails to go far enough. Some are unaware of the assistance available – and sometimes, the system works for those who work it.

The highs and lows of fighting the good fight are as dramatic as the ups and downs of those struggling with mental illness.

Statewide, there are 112,300 people in California prisons, the Public Policy Institute reported. Last year 83,280 people were in county jails. Estimates are that 15 percent of those incarcerated are mentally ill.

In the entire state, California hospitals have about 7,500 beds, the Los Angeles Times reported in a recent study. The vast majority of these beds – 92 percent – is filled by patients from the criminal justice system and is no longer available for those in need of civil commitment. Only 600 beds are available for those just checking in, to say for example, to help themselves.

In other words, someone suffering from mental illness is apt to fall into law enforcement’s lap to gain safe harbor.

**Officers want more tools**

The lack of safe places to go represents a tough quandary for

police officers who see the most unpredictable members of society who may either hurt themselves, loved ones or even those who may be passing by.

About a decade ago, a man who appeared to have a psychotic break stood in the middle of the street between the Taqueria and the former *Tahoe Daily Tribune* building and threatened to shoot himself in the head. At times, he laid down as if surrendering but kept a gun in his hand. Bystanders gathered around, exacerbating a pressing issue for police.

South Lake Tahoe SWAT Police Officer Brandon Auxier remembers the episode and points to it as just the tip of the iceberg in what police see almost daily.

“It’s a constant problem. We pick them up then sometimes Barton does not have any beds, and they’ve had to travel hundreds of miles,” Auxier said, adding he’s noticed more calls lately resulting in “5150s.” This term of condition relates to five-point restraints on the person who is suffering a mental breakdown.

“In the last couple of years, we’ve seen an increase,” the officer told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Many of those afflicted with mental illness are homeless. And with the popularity of the new winter warming center in the city, one can see there is a demand for a safe place for these people.

Auxier, a 13-year officer, has seen several repeat calls for those who are endangering themselves or others and create a scene. He’s part of a crisis intervention team, which prompts welfare checks on those who go through the county Mental Health program. Once a case is developed, restrictions abound on what caseworkers can do or say because of confidentiality issues.

**Balancing the law of the land**

And there lies a dilemma for law enforcement.

South Lake Tahoe Police Chief Brian Uhler would like to see more allowable communication between mental health caseworkers and police given the tenuous situations officers and the public are placed in when the call comes in.

***"When we know the situation, we can have empathy and some patience."***

***– South Lake Tahoe Police Chief Brian Uhler***

“It’s a huge issue. The expectation is for us to manage or know a mental health breakdown. When we know the situation, we can have empathy and some patience. The issue is we face laws that prevent health care professionals from even talking to us,” Uhler said. “I’ve learned that even if we had the psychiatrist involved, we could not even confirm if this person is a patient. So we’re stuck out there with no help from the mental health community even if they want to help. It takes a change in state law.”

Law enforcement has a balancing act dealing with these calls.

Officers need to turn on a dime in terms of showing control and strength, while gently switching to empathy and heightening their listening skills.

When they pick these people up, some cases end well over time between bringing in the courts, transitional housing, medications, caring loved ones and police welfare checks.

But others break the hearts of officers – especially after they get to know the people behind the case numbers.

El Dorado County sheriff’s Sgt. Michael Yarbrough empathizes with Chief Uhler on wanting to gather as much information as possible on someone struggling with mental illness creating a threat in public.

He’s seen his fair share of crises as Officer of the Year honored by the National Alliance of Mental Illness.

Like Auxier, the county sheriff’s department recognizes Yarbrough as spearheading the county sheriff’s response through the CIT program. After all, he had three years on the police force on the rough streets of Stockton before landing in South Lake Tahoe in 1997.

Yarbrough said it’s tricky dealing with the mentally ill. Officers need to maintain that sense of control but show it in

a kinder, gentler way. Communication – verbal and non-verbal as in body language – is key.

“It’s a different way of controlling, but you’re still in charge,” he said.

With “off-the-wall” individual behavior, Yarbrough has been trained and is experienced to see the body language and hear the responses of the subject of the call to be able to tell whether someone is undergoing a mental breakdown.

There’s such a new perspective in law enforcement to deal with these calls.

“It’s social services driven now,” Yarbrough said, comparing the situations to the old ways of handling a call where officers would just pick up the parties and throw them in jail to simply get them off the streets.

“Sometimes it would take six hospital visits before (the subjects) get it or for their families to get it,” he said.

El Dorado County sheriff's Sgt. Michael Yarbrough is a leader in his agency when it comes to handling mental health issues. Photo/Susan Wood

Now officers are known to approach an individual with care, passing out pamphlets mentioning resources. Yarbrough reached in his desk drawer and quickly got out a county mental health brochure labeled "Guidelines for calling 911" in the event of a mental health emergency. Within the pamphlet, there's even a script a family member may use to call in a mental health crisis at home. Also included is a list of critical phone numbers of resources.

The sergeant understands the call often doesn't end with one response.

If he doesn't have the answer, a member of a multi-disciplinary team that serves as a local think tank in dealing with mental health cases may have it. The think tank involves law enforcement, county jail, Mental Health Department and Barton Memorial Hospital.

The need is overwhelming. In three years, Yarbrough has seen 1,500 reports go through the system.

"It took some time to get (the caseload) managed," he said.

He analyzed the cases to determine who would be best served by regular visits among his officer force. The dozen deputies who may go out on the welfare checks count medications, sit down with the subject for some positive reinforcement and talk to family members to get a sense of how the person is doing. They also keep an eye on whether clandestine substances appear.

"I'd say about 70-80 percent involve drugs and alcohol," he said.

Yarbrough has become so keenly aware of the human condition he's become an expert in the topic. He's been invited to speak

about the programs at a mental health conference in September in Sacramento.

“I can’t give enough credit to the whole collaboration. (The sheriff’s department) wouldn’t be able to do this on our own,” he said.

Beyond the agency resources, Yarbrough relies heavily on caring, knowledgeable family members.

Mental illness is a tricky condition to deal with because it comes with a stigma and emotions attached. Sometimes family members are reluctant to say something or intervene because they’re afraid of offending the loved one.

California AB1424, signed into law in 2015, requires any person who is authorized to have a person taken into custody for involuntary treatment consider available relevant information about the historical nature of the person’s mental disorder.

Upon the CIT visits, waivers are signed enabling family members to make critical decisions on the subject’s behalf. There’s a long questionnaire asking for information detailing the loved one’s historical condition, with a list of phone numbers to contact in the event of a crisis.

Yarbrough sees the slow-moving legislative changes as long in coming and necessary to a person’s well being because there is no easy fix.

“Why do we think the brain is the only thing completely immune to illness?” the sergeant asked. “That’s the hardest thing for people to understand.”

**Help for those who help**

The need to assist the mentally ill on the streets prompted retired San Rafael police Officer Joel Fay to make a business out of training officers to handle their calls.

The Marin County town has a plaguing homeless population with many classified as mentally ill.

“I thought: ‘Where do these people go?’” he said.

He found a way to balance being a police officer and psychologist.

“I knew that police needed to change the way we respond to calls,” he said. “For me, it was kind of like a mission in life.”

He moved into the field of psychology before fully retiring from the force five years ago. He contracts with counties to bring his specific expertise to their law enforcement units.

El Dorado County, which included Yarbrough, is among the jurisdictions that hired Fay’s business to assist them.

Fay trains the officers to look for signs of psychotic behavior such as the subjects reacting to other stimuli. There are clues of what to look for – whether they “see” the officer, can they feel the officer’s presence and do they comply with requests. If they can’t meet any of the criteria, there are other forces at work in the subject’s brain.

“At that time, the officer knows to slow it down and make them come around to their way of thinking,” he said.

There are also telltale signs of depression the psychologist trains officers to look for.

“There are things to say to work with these people. I tell (the officers) that it’s important for you to stay calm,” he said. “I tell them to pretend like it’s someone you know.”

Fay admits it takes a while for law enforcement to change their frame of mind on dealing with these types of scenarios.

“The goal of the training is to show how to use less force and

for officers and the citizens to get hurt less," he said.

Granted, the approach sounds simple and inroads are being made to treat the mentally ill differently. However, there are still cracks in the overall system.

Fay was empathetic to Uhler's complaints about not having enough information to keep all involved safe from harm. He echoed the chief's sentiment about the need to change the laws.

"There are so many road blocks. One problem is the law requires a person to be in imminent danger to get some help," Fay told *Lake Tahoe News*. "It's very frustrating because frequently we're not allowed to collaborate."

**Mental health on the case**

Sabrina Owen, the manager of the county's mental health programs, sympathized with law enforcement wanting more information readily available on mental health cases. However, she reminded that privacy laws override the need to find an easier way to deal with public displays from those afflicted with a mental illness.

"It's nice that family members can always call. We can take phone calls all day long and take information, but we can't acknowledge a case or give it out unless a patient signs a consent form," she said.

Nonetheless, the programs set into place seem to be working if one looks at the numbers.

Despite what law enforcement projects, mental health evaluations between jurisdictions in the city and county have trended downward in the last few years.

The sheriff's department in South Lake Tahoe reported 543 cases assigned to subjects for 2014; 501 in 2015; and halfway through 2016 lists 187.

South Lake Tahoe 5150 evaluations number 404 in 2014; 381 the following year; and to date this year show 160.

Owen attributes the drop in statistics to the combined efforts of the CIT consortium and other similar programs.

The mental health professional views the well-being checks as a tried and true way of keeping a careful eye on people who face the very large swings in life's ups and downs.

Owen strongly supports the idea of intensive case management. This means tracking the subject's medication, meeting with the person and urging family and group therapy.

"And in respect to law enforcement as first responders, (the mentally ill) would just like to know someone cares," she said.

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# Bay Area seashore exudes national treasure

**Publisher's note:** ***This is one in a series of stories about the National Park Service, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2016. All articles may be found via the Home Page, select Special Projects, then National Park Service 100th.***

Northern elephant seals sun themselves on the beach near Chimney Rock. Photo/Jessie Marchesseau

**By Jessie Marchesseau**

POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE – As a native Montanan, I grew up nowhere near a seashore. I was a teenager before ever even laying eyes on the ocean. Though I have since visited it numerous times, I don't think it will ever cease to be a wonder to me: how so much beauty, life, power and even destruction can be combined into this one body, living, yet not living.

This summer, in observance of the 100th anniversary of our National Parks System, my husband and I decided to seize the opportunity of a recent three-day weekend to explore one of our nearby, and perhaps lesser-known, national treasures.

Just a few hours' drive from Lake Tahoe we took in the sandy beaches, beautiful yet violent ocean waves, rolling coastal

prairies and diverse wildlife of Point Reyes National Seashore.

One of just 10 national seashores within the National Parks System, Point Reyes is the only national seashore in California. In fact, it’s the only one on the West Coast, the other nine lying along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts.

The dairy building on the Historic Pierce Point Ranch was once the center of a thriving dairy business. It remains preserved within the Tule Elk Reserve at Point Reyes National Seashore. Photo/Jessie Marchesseau

These seaside preserves comprise a relatively small portion of the more than 400 sites which make up the National Parks System. And at just 70,000 acres, Point Reyes may seem almost tiny next to a 750,000 acre park like Yosemite. But the 80 miles of undeveloped coastline encompassed by Point Reyes National Seashore offers visitors an experience every bit as intriguing, delightful and awe-inspiring as one would expect

from a national park.

Whitewater waves more than 6-feet high crashed onto the shores at Point Reyes Beach while we enjoyed a picnic lunch on the sand, onshore winds ruffling our hair. A washed up log was a makeshift picnic table as our niece and nephew crawled in and out of a driftwood “fort,” our three dogs digging holes in the sand and hunting for crab carcasses at our feet.

As dog owners, we always enjoy our adventures a little bit more with furry family members at our sides, and Point Reyes proved to be pleasantly dog-friendly, at least as far as national parks are concerned. It offers three dog-friendly beaches accessible by car or foot, even more if you choose to boat in. Printable maps clearly depicting dog-friendly locations are available online, and the park ranger I chatted with at the Bear Mountain Visitor Center was more than happy to highlight the locations on my free park map where I could explore with my four-legged friends. They do ask you to keep dogs on leashes, clean up after them and stick to the designated areas. But with miles of seashore designated dog-friendly, we had plenty of room.

Point Reyes Beach is just one of the beaches in Point Reyes National Seashore which allows dogs. Photo/Jessie Marchesseau

Most of the beaches at Point Reyes are not swimming beaches. Dangerous, often pounding surf and rip currents deem much of the water unsafe for venturing in. Moderate temperatures and steady winds typical of Northern California beaches don’t exactly beckon for bikinis and board shorts anyhow. But the sand is soft, and the views outstanding.

Piling back in the car, our next stop was Elephant Seal Outlook. The northern elephant seal is perhaps the most iconic of the 80 species of mammals known to reside within the boundaries of the national seashore, which also includes the water and land a quarter mile off shore. From the outlook, we peered down on two dozen elephant seals sunning themselves on the beach below and even a few pups frolicking in the water. The cooler temperatures and gusty winds were clearly not affecting their afternoon.

The following day we ventured to the north end of the park in search of the only animal which may rival the seal in its

iconic status within Point Reyes: the tule elk. Once nearly extinct, tule elk at Point Reyes now number more than 400. At the far northern end of Point Reyes National Seashore, spanning a small peninsula called Tomales Point, is the Tule Elk Reserve.

Growing up in the Rocky Mountains, I know elk can be somewhat elusive animals, but upon reaching the reserve, we spotted three bull elk and one cow almost immediately. Continuing on to the designated parking area, we set out on a short hike in search of more. This proved not only a welcome opportunity to stretch our legs, but a chance to stroll through fields of wildflowers, pink, purple, yellow and white, and admire the picturesque coastline below, passing birds, butterflies and caterpillars along the way.

We were soon rewarded with the view of a small herd of elk, stopping to quietly observe as the majestic animals grazed contentedly on a grassy hillside. Returning, we had thought our luck pretty good on the day’s elk-viewing excursion. But driving out of the reserve we came upon yet another herd, this time all cows and calves, dozens of them so near to the road I felt I could walk out among them without an elk so much as noticing. I did not, however, and only invaded their privacy with my camera lens.

Our weekend coastal adventure was rounded out with a stop at pet-friendly Kehoe Beach and visits to a few historical locations within the park including the Historic Lifeboat Station, Point Reyes Lighthouse and the Historic Pierce Point Ranch, all glimpses into the colorful past life of Point Reyes.

In the end, I was glad we chose this as our national park trip of the summer. To have a place like Point Reyes National Seashore celebrating and preserving this awe-inspiring aspect of our earth right out our back doors is an amenity well worth taking advantage of. The size and location perfect for a quick

weekend trip, the overall experience both relaxing and invigorating. Perhaps my favorite part though, was being able to enjoy it with family, both two-legged, and four.