Opinion: The National Park Service’s importance

Half Dome is one of Yosemite’s iconic features. The California treasure became a national park in 1890. Photo/LTN file

Whether it’s the grandeur of Mother Nature, or history encapsulated in monuments and battlefields, or wildlife roaming free the National Park Service is there to remind us of our past and future.

It is easy to understand how the Park Service is about our past, especially when looking east toward the National Mall or south to battlefields or west to the USS Arizona.

Our future is reflected in the Park Service because how we treat these treasures says a lot about us as a citizenry. Do we sit by and let national treasures like the Ahwahnee Hotel and Curry Village in Yosemite National Park change names because of a poorly written contract or do we write our members of Congress to tell them we are disgusted by what is happening? Will our actions change the future even if they don’t alter the circumstances a couple hundred miles from here?

Do we say it’s OK for funding for the Park Service to continually be eroded or do we demand these treasures be preserved?

Do we support the Park Service by visiting some of the 409 areas it represents? Do we share memories to encourage others to visit these special places? Or perhaps we buy an annual pass even if we never visit a park.

This agency that turns 100 years old in August continues to evolve, grow and be part of all of our lives. The service is in every state, District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

It’s not just about the 59 national parks. The agency encompasses monuments, battlefields, military parks, historical parks, historic sites, lakeshores, seashores, recreation areas, scenic rivers and trails, and the White House.

Fourteen national parks existed before the Park Service came into being. Yellowstone in 1872 became the first national park – not just in the United States, but also in the world. Twenty-one monuments also existed prior to 1916. President Woodrow Wilson signed the act creating the National Park Service, which to this day is overseen by the Interior Department.

Lake Tahoe News, starting Jan. 25, is going to take readers on a trek to a few of these wonders. Writers are embracing locales that have touched them in memorable ways. The first story is from Carolyn Wright who has visited 33 of the national parks. Hers is as much a photo essay as it is a travelogue about some of those parks.

We hope through our series of monthly stories we connect you to places that perhaps you’ve never been to or we trigger fond memories.

Enjoy the journey.

– Kathryn Reed, LTN publisher

Opinion: SLT – 50 golden years and counting

Publisher's note: ***This is the final article in the series of stories about South Lake Tahoe's 50th anniversary. The other stories may be accessed by going to the top of the page, select Special Projects, then SLT Turns 50.***

By Wendy David

Leftovers are in the refrigerator and the feelings of gratefulness for being alive, having snow, wonderful snow and living in South Lake Tahoe are keeping me warm in spite of the cold temperature outside. We are fortunate indeed.

Fifty years ago today, I imagine many of the feelings were the same, but with a bit more excitement as the city of South Lake Tahoe was born. Happy Birthday South Lake Tahoe. As the only incorporated city in the Lake Tahoe Basin even 50 years later, the achievements of our forefathers are even more momentous and appreciated by all of us whom have followed.

My family came for vacation in June 1973, spent a month enjoying all the outdoor fun that a young family of four could

have. At the end of July, we decided to stay. Staying and making South Lake Tahoe our home meant a commitment to investing in the future of our community. As the years passed we helped as new businesses were started, youth sports were initiated and expanded, bonds were promoted and passed, amenities were added and South Lake Tahoe grew and matured.

Those that came to ski “just for the winter” bought homes, became parents, perhaps started a business and became leaders. Some of those leaders retired and moved to the sunshine. Children grew up. Some stayed and many left. New leaders emerged, loving South Lake Tahoe too, having the same dreams for their children as those of the previous generation. Our past has been celebrated all year as we thank and remember the people, the projects, the accomplishments and the evolution of the last 50 years of our city.

Wendy David

We have learned much in the last 50 years. We have learned that we cannot depend on the gaming industry to sustain our local economy. We certainly know our winter weather, or should I say the absence of such, can be devastating to our economy. We learned we are a community that cares for each other through good and bad times, as evidenced by the way we leveraged our collective resources during the Great Recession and every other recession: through a landslide that closed Highway 50 for months; through the devastation and loss of the Angora Fire; and in the good times we’ve come together to celebrate.

The flight of our middle class as home prices soared and families cashed in on the windfall also changed our community. We lost 25 percent of our school age population and some of our schools closed. Our neighborhoods changed from local, full-time families dominating ownership to having 75 percent of our homes owned by second homeowners. Change is indeed the only constant.

The past is written and the future is yet to be. We are fortunate to be a part of the future for South Lake Tahoe today.

We are fortunate to be more collaborative than ever as we plan for the future. The TRPA adoption of a new Regional Plan that allows for a higher level of cooperation and partnership is leading the way. Douglas County, El Dorado County, the city of South Lake Tahoe and our public and private partners have been working on establishing a Legacy Action Plan together that will guide our future with shared goals.

The city of South Lake Tahoe is an integral leader declaring we are a premier recreation destination foremost. We are committing our efforts and investments in this priority. This goal includes the exciting expansion of our bike trail system and our new community play consortium in partnership with Lake Tahoe Community College. The consortium will add up to three additional fields at the college and renovate the existing soccer field, creating a central sports complex. In addition, we are continuing our progress on the master plan for the renovation of Regan Beach and will be inviting our community to help us envision a new city of South Lake Tahoe Recreation Complex on Rufus Allen Boulevard.

We continue our strong focus of economic development that improves our city. A citywide area plan will provide economic opportunities, and provide incentives toward improving the built and the natural environment. We will revitalize our hotel districts, implement our Tahoe Valley Area Plan,

continue to invest in private and public partnerships while also continuing to restore and protect our neighborhoods and watersheds. We will encourage and incentivize partnerships and projects that will remove development from and restore environmentally sensitive areas.

I am often asked these two questions about being on the City Council. First question: Why did you run? The answer is simple. I have lived in and loved my community for more than four decades and want it to shine as it should. Second question: Are you crazy? Answer: I guess you need to be a little crazy to believe that you can make a positive difference. I extend the invitation out to join in being a little crazy with the rest of us in creating a bright future for our city as we begin our second 50 years.

This city is yours and at 50 years young, even with some of its age showing, and ours too, we have a very bright future together. Here’s to you on your 50th, South Lake Tahoe. Cheers!

Wendy David is mayor pro tem of South Lake Tahoe.

South Lake Tahoe glitters as it turns 50

More than 200 people mingle before the festivities to celebrate South Lake Tahoe's 50th birthday begin Nov. 7. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

"History is what binds us."

That was just one of the sentiments expressed by South Lake Tahoe Mayor Hal Cole on Saturday night as more than 200 people came together to celebrate the city's 50th birthday.

It was on Nov. 30, 1965, that South Lake Tahoe became an incorporated city.

The milestones – some positive, some sad, all critical to the city being what it is today – were captured through video, personal stories, and the written word.

While the city is bound to have more parties at other significant markers, it is at 50 when many of those who helped establish the city are still here to tell their story. Yesteryear's visionaries aren't likely to be around for the 75th celebration. That is what made Nov. 7 special – the past,

present and future were all in one room for a few hours.

A golden anniversary.

It was a night to remember those who had the foresight to strive for incorporation, the recognition that the area would be better off governing itself than being saddled with decisions made 60 miles away in Placerville, and to illustrate what has occurred in these five decades and what is possible going forward.

Thirteen former or current councilmembers attended the festivities at Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel. Members of the Brad Murphy (the first mayor) and Norm Woods (councilman) families were in attendance.

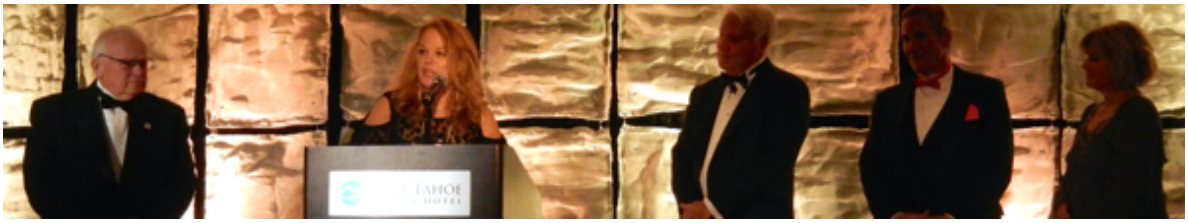
The sold-out event included former and current city staff, as well as a who’s who list of community members.

It was a night to better understand some of the struggles that have taken place – such as development and redevelopment, finances, the loss of local soldiers, and the Angora Fire.

It was a night to embrace accomplishments – Lakeview Commons, recreation center, environmental stewardship.

It was a night to look at the future – Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care moving into the city limits, Tahoe Mountain Lab building a hub for the untraditional work force, expanded recreation opportunities and a city that will be vibrant when the 100th

celebration takes place.



City Manager Nancy Kerry, second from left, is flanked by the four councilmembers who attended the Nov. 7 party.

Cole touched on four entities that to him have made a profound difference to this area:

· Heavenly – especially singling out how the ski resort was built by locals and had world-class events, and is still integral to the fabric of the city.

· Barton Memorial Hospital – recalling the days before there was a hospital and how it is rare for a community hospital to still be locally owned-operated.

· South Tahoe Public Utility District – for being a pioneer in treating sewage to keep Tahoe blue.

· Edgewood – to the Park family that has been key to Tahoe since the 1800s and is continuing to evolve.

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Notes:

· The commemorative book is available for purchase by emailing Tracy Franklin – tfranklin@cityofslt.us.

· The three-part video shown Saturday night is available on **YouTube**.

Mayor’s arrest brought SLT unwanted notoriety

Tahoe Daily Tribune headlines in June 1989 were all about Operation Deep Snow. Photo/LTN

Publisher’s note: ***This is one in a series of stories Lake Tahoe News will be running leading up to the 50th anniversary of South Lake Tahoe on Nov. 30.***

By Kathryn Reed

June 11, 1989, started out like any other Sunday in the basin – sunny, blue sky, uneventful. Before it was over South Lake Tahoe was making headlines internationally.

Mayor Terry Trupp, 46, his 24-year-old wife Kim (who at one

time was his foster daughter), and 17 others were arrested that weekend on a slew of drug and money laundering charges. Many were South Shore residents. Even more were arrested down the road as the case unfolded.

The display of weaponry, cash and drugs at the South Lake Tahoe police station was impressive.

Stacks of one-hundred and thousand dollar bills were confiscated. Automobiles, motorcycles, jewelry, bank accounts, real estate, and gun cases – all seized – all believed to have been obtained by drug money.

Money was laundered using offshore banks, real estate and local businesses.

It was retired El Dorado County sheriff's Lt. Pete Van Arnum who put the handcuffs on Trupp. (He was working for South Lake Tahoe Police Department at the time.) Both Trupps were arrested at Lake Tahoe Airport where they had gone to pick up friends.

This is one of the biggest stories to happen in South Lake Tahoe in the last 50 years and is certainly the largest criminal act involving a member of the City Council.

Trupp was first elected in 1978 after serving several years as executive officer of the Council for Logic. That was the group opposed to the formation of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. He was re-elected in 1982 and 1986. In 1984, he made an unsuccessful run for the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors.

His last day as a member of the council was July 31, 1989. He had submitted his letter of resignation earlier in the month, on the same day his one-year stint as mayor ended. This negated the recall drive that had been initiated.

Bruce Grego was appointed to fill Trupp's unexpired term.

Trupp initially faced 21 counts, including allegations of laundering $845,000 in drug profits and bringing in 220 pounds of cocaine to Tahoe. He was looking at spending the rest of his life in prison if convicted.

Terry Trupp was in his third term on the South Lake Tahoe City Council when he was arrested on June 11, 1989. Photo/South Lake Tahoe

In August 1990 he pleaded guilty to two counts – conspiracy to launder money and unlawful use of communications for drug deals. On Oct. 11, 1990, he was sentenced to nine years in federal prison.

An Associated Press story at the time said, “(Trupp) said he pleaded guilty because he could not prove it was the fear of death and not the money that motivated him. Trupp read a long, involved statement accusing federal agents of using patriotism, fear, death threats and sympathy for persecuted Jews in coercing him to sell cocaine and launder drug money in the Lake Tahoe resort.”

Trupp was released before he served his full sentence. He later remarried and worked in sales.

He died Aug. 20, 2008, of a staph infection. He was 65 and living in Southern California at the time.

Kim Trupp pleaded guilty to money laundering, which earned her a 21-month prison sentence. She could have faced 10 years behind bars and a $500,000 fine. She was Terry Trupp’s fourth wife. Trupp and his third wife became foster parents to Kim Trupp when she was 14.

In court documents Terry Trupp bragged of laundering money for 20 years.

People in town often wondered where he got his money. While he lived in a modest ranch-style house on Glenwood Way, he did have a Maserati. He had a bit of a pompadour, wore flashy gold chains and unbuttoned shirts. The couple were members of the local Church of Latter-day Saints.

On his 1987 and 1988 financial disclosure forms Trupp reported no income. The 1989 form lists more than $10,000 coming from consulting work for Heavenly Valley Resort Hotel, now the Tahoe Seasons Resort.

He was pro development and one of the leaders of the initial redevelopment efforts in South Lake Tahoe. Much of his campaign money came from the Stateline casinos, some of which he was doing consulting work for while on the council.

At the height of the investigation there were two dozen Drug Enforcement Administration agents and 30 Federal Bureau of Investigation agents on the case. South Lake El Dorado Narcotics Enforcement Team had formed the previous October.

The FBI-DEA investigation, which included U.S. Customs, U.S. Treasury and local law enforcement, was known as Operation Deep Snow. The name for the 20-month investigation came from all the cocaine that was exchanging hands.

S. Lake Tahoe does without traditional city hall

Publisher's note: ***This is one in a series of stories Lake Tahoe News will be running leading up to the 50th anniversary of South Lake Tahoe on Nov. 30.***

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe was supposed to have a designated city hall that would be in the middle of town, not one shared with aeronautical services.

Politics is the easiest answer for why it didn't happen. Plenty of finger pointing has gone on in the last 40 years to prove that no one person is at fault for the building never coming to fruition. But there is still a family who will forever be wronged. They gave the land for a city hall and instead cops and criminals occupy it.

The city is not letting the past stop it from moving forward. There are plans afoot to turn the lobby of Lake Tahoe Airport into a welcome center. This is where the bulk of the city's business is conducted. In the last couple years a "city hall" sign was erected.

City Council meeting locations:
1965 – Tahoe Savings and Loan basement, Highway 50/Takela (now county offices)
1970 – 11044 Fremont St. (old police department near the bowling alley)
1970 – 1275 Meadow Crest, South Tahoe PUD building
1700 D St., (city offices were here; now where buses are stored)
1975 – 2155 South Ave., Alpine Professional Building (old TRPA office)
1021 Al Tahoe Blvd., Lake Tahoe Unified School District office
3064 Lake Tahoe Blvd., art building (now senior center)
1984 – 1900 Lake Tahoe Blvd. (old phone company offices)
2006-present – 1901 Airport Road

Source/Photo: *South Lake Tahoe*

As far as city officials – elected and staff – are concerned, the airport is city hall. With the city deciding commercial

air service is not viable nor will it be pursued, the FAA is fine with South Lake Tahoe using the structure as a city hall and not an airport terminal.

Could there ever be something more? Possibly.

“If we were to ever have a city hall in this community, I think what might provide a good return on the investment for the community is a civic center, not just a ‘city’ hall. A building where Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, city, Tahoe Transportation District, and El Dorado Count would all have staff in the same building, primarily for permitting and licensing, the most common government requests,” City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News.* “For the community members, to be able to go into one building, one location and have joint meetings, get all the information in one visit, greater coordination of information, permit processing and conducting government business would be a huge benefit and good return on the investment.”

Something like that, though, would cost millions of dollars. And to be determined is if taxpayers would want it even if the money were available.

The early days

Incorporation was the focus when the city started, not where business would be conducted.

“That subject simply didn’t rise to the level of importance to make it on someone’s agenda,” Laurel Ames said of a city hall. Ames was one of the leaders in getting South Lake Tahoe incorporated in November 1965. “The one big idea that emerged in the first years after incorporation was the need for a convention center. The idea was from John Williams, the first city manager. That history is short. It was proposed for the county campground and I think there was a bond issue, then the people voted it down.”

Del Laine, who served on the council from 1976-80 and 1984-88, remembers a time when the electeds met in what are now the county offices in the government complex where the sheriff's and public health offices are. The council seats were at the same level as the public – unlike today. It was the 1970s, when the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency was just getting off the ground, and a man leapt across the table in anger.

Today, there is always a police officer – often the chief – at each council meeting.

"When the first five (Brad Murphy, Gerald Martin, Eugene Marshall, Norman Woods and Don Clarke) met, it was over dinner and anyone could attend. They would discuss council business over dinner before the formal meeting," Laine told *Lake Tahoe News.*

City archives are incomplete when it comes to listing all the places the council met as well as where city employees worked.

Marjorie Springmeyer at the dedication of her family's

land that was to become a city hall. Photo/South Lake Tahoe

A designated city hall

Marjorie Springmeyer and her brothers, Bill and Knox Johnson, wanted to honor their parents, who were early pioneers in the area. They owned large swaths of land; with the three still having title to hundreds of acres. They decided to give South Lake Tahoe land on Johnson Boulevard (named after their family) for a city hall.

The deed signed June 25, 1967, states, “On or before June 30, 1972, Grantee will construct or will cause to be constructed on the herein-above described real property, one or more office buildings which shall contain office space for the use and occupancy of various basic municipal government departments, services and offices, including by way of example and without limitation, grantee’s building, Planning, and Recreation Departments and City Manager ….”

Instead, a courthouse, police station and sheriff’s office were built on that land.

It didn’t matter that the agreement said if the city failed to comply with the deal, that the title would revert back to the Johnson siblings or their heirs.

“I’ll never get over that deal … how they screwed up our land with the courthouse,” Springmeyer told this reporter years ago.

The courthouse got built because of a 1972 agreement between South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County in which the two entities agreed to build city and county offices on the Johnson land. The county gave the city $1 for the rights to the land.

Springmeyer filed a lawsuit to prevent El Dorado County from

taking over what had been her family's land. She lost the initial lawsuit as well as the appeal. The judge ruled the administrative uses on the land were consistent with the wording of the agreement.

It didn't matter that Bill Johnson was on the Board of Supervisors from 1969-80.

The county agreed to "convey to city an easement for the construction by the City of public offices (sic) building …." In a preceding paragraph the buildings to be located on the acreage included "County offices, County courts, City Council chambers, City offices, County Sheriff's facilities, City Police facilities and other County and City facilities …"

On March 21, 1983, Knox Johnson wrote a letter to the Board of Supervisors saying "there has been perjury committed in the courts" and his family "made a civic contribution". The letter went on to say, "If it's only worth $1, then I should have it."

No one has ever been able say why exactly a city hall never got built. Today there is no space at the government center to do so.

Through the years other locations considered for a city hall include Bijou Community Park and the 56 acres where Campground by the Lake sits.

South Lake Tahoe's city hall is Lake Tahoe Airport. Photo/LTN

Going forward

In March, when the council was devising goals for the next 18 months, overhauling the airport lobby to turn it into a showcase of sorts was discussed. Right now it's hard to know one is walking into a city building. There was also talk of expanding the area to include a welcome center for visitors because coming in on Highway 50 from the west is the main route tourists reach South Lake Tahoe.

The engineering staff is working on a conceptual design and associated costs. Details will come back to the council later this year or early 2016, with the goal of starting the remodel in summer 2016.

The logic to staying at the airport is that the city owns the building. Plus, for 50 years it has survived without a building with the sole purpose of being a city hall so building one now doesn't seem economically logical or feasible.

Not all cities have a distinct, ornate building along the lines of San Francisco's city hall.

"A city hall can't just be a pretty building; it must provide

meaningful return on investment to the community. It should improve how the local government functions, provide new, improved and enhanced services and be a building that encourages civic engagement, promotes community pride of town ownership, provides opportunity for civic, community and cultural events – both art and culture – and opportunities for strengthening partnerships between government and the public," Kerry said.

She is more concerned with providing quality services than the building from which those services are provided.

Even so, the city is on a quest to improve the infrastructure is has and not start from scratch. This means money will be spent at the airport to make sure it functions efficiently for the indefinite future.

"The building is our current city hall and will remain an important asset to the community for many years as so noted in the Airport Master Plan. The airport serves not only air travelers, but also serves community members conducting business with the city," Kerry said.

South Lake Tahoe's 50th parade

South Lake Tahoe celebrates its 50th anniversary with a parade through town on Sept. 19, 2015.

Hundreds gather to celebrate South Lake Tahoe

South Lake Tahoe celebrates its 50 years with a parade on Sept. 19. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

Tears of joy and sentiment. Cheers of happiness and celebration.

In a burst of community pride, hundreds of people gathered Saturday on Highway 50 and Al Tahoe Boulevard leading into Bijou Community Park to mark a picture-perfect day for a parade and party to honor South Lake Tahoe's 50th anniversary.

For most longtime residents and even some newbies, it was one of the city's finest hours, or two, to witness 67 parade entries of floats, walkers, classic cars, fire trucks and appropriately a snowplow make its way through town that morning. Although the official 50th birthday falls in

November, the city and its citizenry took full advantage of clear blue skies and warm temperatures to honor the past, present and future of this resilient mountain town nestled in the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range.

South Lake Tahoe is celebrating the past and future. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“I’ve waited 26 years for this. What a good day to celebrate and see a little bit of history. Look there’s Old Smokey, putting out our fires,” said Kimberly Jamison, who runs the Mailbag at Highway 50 and Tahoe Keys Boulevard.

Jamison has lived on the South Shore for a quarter century and believes the most memorable times are the ones in which the residents celebrate what they share – community spirit.

She was joined on the corner in front of the shopping center where her business is located by a brand-new resident. The group enjoyed the old cars honoring the classes as far back as 1965, the city’s inaugural year.

Mayor Hal Cole spoke of how the city is on a path to making positive improvements. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“We’ve moved a lot, and we’ve never moved anywhere where it’s been so welcoming,” said Jessica Branson. She brought her three children Jonah, 10, Trevor, 7, and Nolan, 6, to the parade route to witness the spectacle. “We love it here.”

Up the highway, Kevin and Sheri Livingston came from Gardnerville and staged themselves near Al Tahoe Boulevard to cheer on their son Daniel. The 14-year-old boy marched in the Civil Air Patrol, a task his parents said he had looked forward to for quite a while.

“He wanted to be involved in a community project,” his father said.

Children who were spectators seemed just as engaged during the parade.

In a demonstration of community pride among three generations, grandma Sandy Jones joined her daughter Samantha Jones with her daughter Kiki, 6 – who attends Sierra House Elementary School, to watch the city throw its street party.

Sandy has lived with her daughter here for 30 years and wasn't going to miss it. The two huddled together, identifying participants as they went by. One of them yelled happy birthday to Samantha.

Mark Allen with Tahoe SUP. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Dance instructor Marcia Sarosik knows so many people, she fell behind her float and group who shimmied to "Dancing in the Streets." She ran down the street with a mock Olympic torch. Sarosik ran a leg of it in 2002 when the torch graced the town on its way to Salt Lake City.

The elder Jones reflected back on the past, recalling small, homespun parades in the late 1980s at Tahoe Valley. The youngest said she liked the present day, filled with ribbons and balloons. Kiki waited patiently for her cousin Emerson Hawkins, 9, to walk with the Lake Tahoe Vikings Pop Warner contingent.

The camaraderie in the community was unmatched.

"I like that everybody comes together here. We've gone through a lot in South Lake Tahoe," said Julie Incopero, a resident of

40 years who sat in a beach chair with her sheltie dog, Buddy. Incopero listed the Angora Fire of 2007 that ripped through 254 homes and the abduction of Jaycee Lee Dugard as a child as examples of a community in catharsis. She also mentioned appreciating how the community supported her when her daughter McKenzie got a blood cancer and needed help.

Some things you don't forget.

Apparently, members of the community didn't fail to forget how cycling guru Tom Wendell worked tirelessly to make the community more bike friendly.

As the parade resulting from the hard work of former Councilwoman Brooke Laine emptied out into the city's Bijou Community Park, dignitaries and bike advocates took the opportunity to dedicate its new bike park to a man who was undaunted in his pursuit to pass on the two-wheeling legacy – Tom Wendell.

Ted Wendell brought many people to tears with his

tribute to his brother, Tom, for whom the Bijou Bike Park was dedicated. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Wendell died a few years ago, but now his legacy lives on in the center of town in the shadow of the pine trees he rode through along with other destinations and journeys that exemplified his coveted life in South Lake Tahoe.

“Welcome to our new bike park,” City Manager Nancy Kerry said to hundreds of people gathered for the formal unveiling. The park represents a maze of gnarly jumps, banks and turns that mark a turning point in public-private partnerships for the city embracing its recreation-oriented heritage and future.

“This is the most significant recreation opportunity we’ve had in years,” Mayor Hal Cole told the attentive crowd of several hundred people. “This city is on a mission to make this town first class in recreation.”

Cole labeled the park a “perfect place to put his name” when speaking of Wendell.

The mayor was followed by the ever-so humble Assistant Public Works Director Jim Marino, who couldn’t seem to accept his award and instead dedicated his honorary plaque to his fellow city employees. He waxed poetic in speaking of the park, calling it a venue of “flow” that represents the “flow in life.”

Apparently, there’s no stopping the city now.

The park was billed as a training place for athletes as well as an ideal hangout for youngsters wanting to master the art of two-wheeling like life-long BMX advocate and city Recreation Coordinator Lauren Thomaselli, who also received an award, and city Parks and Recreation Commissioner Peter Fink, who pedals the talk of cycling. (He and his wife, Karen, did an 8,000-mile cross-country trip years ago.)

The parade was the length of four football fields. Photo/Susan Wood

“This is what a citizenship can do,” Pete Fink said, while looking out at the park.

Councilman Tom Davis, who has spent several years serving the city, called the project “your government at its finest.”

To those close to the subject, the bike park was long in coming – a project that prompted many to want to pick up and shovel to see it happen instead of sitting as a ream of paper on a shelf.

And no one knows that better than Ben Fish, who is president of both the Tahoe Area Mountain Biking Association and Bijou Bike Park Association. Fish held up a rough sketch he drew in 2011 to show what can happen when you take an idea and hand it over to a visionary like Kerry, an open-minded city council and building types like Marino. He received more than a plaque and bike socks for his efforts. His wife, Amy, wheeled out a

new bike on behalf of TAMBA. She was in tears when she honored his dedication with the gift.

Just as attendees were on the edge of heart-tugging sentiment, Wendell's brother, Ted, took the microphone and reduced many to tears in discussing his brother Tom's tenacious efforts to "do the right thing" by his community and support all things and venues that were bike friendly. Wendell, who Cole describes as "a gentle giant," showed up at countless meetings with a smile and charm.

"He never wavered from his convictions, whether they were popular or not," Wendell said of his brother, Tom. "He was always trying to make things for the better."

The brother listed things that Tom did to exemplify passion and pursuit of outdoor recreation – including his Zen-like time on his mono ski, surfing longboard and his bicycle billed as his most treasured possession.

"He was always in the present. He had that gift, and he shared it with everyone," Wendell said.

Brutally heart-warming, Wendell said he'll remember Tom's favorite lines: "C'mon, the best part is the uphill," "What ropes? Sorry sir," and "That looks pretty safe, doesn't it?"

Tom Wendell had an adventurous spirit that didn't go unnoticed. And now it's being passed on.

Ted Wendell told the crowd he came down to the bike park and ran into a young rider who called the course "so totally sic," meaning awesome.

It was as though Tom was there between the trees as the city of South Lake Tahoe moves into another half century, cultivating recreation advocates of a new generation to take part.

Ted Wendell reminded everyone, "Tom would say: 'Be the change

you want to see.’”

S. Lake Tahoe creates recreation opportunities beyond what Mother Nature provides

Bijou Park is a continual work in progress with the focus on locals’ recreation desires. Photos/Jessie Marchesseau

Publisher’s note: ***This is one in a series of stories Lake***

Tahoe News will be running leading up to the 50th anniversary of South Lake Tahoe on Nov. 30.

By Jessie Marchesseau

The mountains, forests and lake surrounding South Lake Tahoe serve as a playground, of sorts, for residents and visitors. However, it’s hard to hold swim lessons in a lake that sometimes has waves and often feels like ice water. Beaches are more convenient and enjoyable when they offer parking spaces, restrooms and a cold beverage. It’s easier, or at least more comfortable, to have a family picnic when there are picnic tables. And hoping it gets cold enough to freeze the water in the marina doesn’t make for a consistent ice rink.

So, while South Lake Tahoe may inherently offer a variety of outdoor activities, the natural environment is not an adequate substitute for traditional public parks and recreation facilities. During the last 50 years, the city of South Lake Tahoe has taken on the task of creating and maintaining public recreation opportunities the environment cannot.

The first city park was Regan Beach. Construction began in 1959 when it was dubbed Lakeshore Park, before South Lake Tahoe was even incorporated. The city acquired the park not long after its incorporation in 1965. Ever since, the city of South Lake Tahoe has made a continual effort to create and maintain public parks and recreation facilities.

After 50 years of planning and implementing, the current South Lake Tahoe parks and recreation facilities are as follows:

Regan Beach is due for another upgrade.

Regan Beach

Location: the intersection of Sacramento and Lakeview avenues

Size: 2.5 acres

Original construction date: 1959

Regan Beach is the city of South Lake Tahoe's oldest beach facility, acquired by the city in the mid-1960s. A tot lot playground was added to the park in the summer of 1970. It was constructed almost entirely with donated hours and materials.

In the '70s, lifeguards were regularly on duty during the summer months at Regan Beach, as well as many of the other beaches in town. The city, however, stopped hiring lifeguards after California's Proposition 13 impacted public funds in 1978.

Later, in 1984, the city started the ball rolling on a six-

year, $1.6 million renovation project at Regan Beach.

Three years later, the beach gained an additional 100 feet of lake frontage when the city spent $425,000 on an additional half acre of lakefront land. With water levels much higher than they are now, the retaining wall and lakeshore were badly eroded and in poor condition. Significant erosion control work was completed on the existing park and the newly acquired shoreline. The restoration project also included new walkways, stairways and fencing.

By 1989, the playground equipment was old and worn, so it was replaced, and a sand volleyball court was also added to the park.

Funding for this six-year project came from a number of sources: Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board provided almost $445,000; the city of South Lake Tahoe, nearly $200,000; California Tahoe Conservancy, $855,000; and $100,000 in state bond funds.

After that major project, not much happened at Regan Beach until a dog water park was added in 2009.

Now, the park is once again in line for a major remodel. The building that houses the bathrooms and concessions has a leaky roof and is in a state of serious disrepair, and the retaining wall is once again crumbling. What exactly is in store for Regan Beach has yet to be decided, but planning is in the works. City Manager Nancy Kerry hopes to have between $1.5 million and $2 million to dedicate to the project.

Park amenities:

- Large grass area
- Beach
- Large parking lot
- Observation deck
- Food and drink concessions (Memorial Day through Labor

Day)
- Restroom
- Playground
- Sand volleyball court
- Picnic tables
- Dog water park.

Lakeview Commons has transformed recreation opportunities in South Lake Tahoe.

El Dorado Beach-Lakeview Commons

Location: the corner of Highway 50 and Lakeview Avenue

Size: 2 acres

Original construction date: 1968

Unlike other parks, El Dorado Beach is not actually owned by the city of South Lake Tahoe. It is part of a 56-acre parcel owned by El Dorado County for which the city signed a 55-year lease in 1968. El Dorado Beach is only 2 of those acres, the remainder lies across the street where the campground, senior center, museum and county library are located.

The city has been almost continuously making small changes and improvements to El Dorado Beach since the lease was signed in 1968. But the first significant improvements started in 1974 when bathrooms were installed across Lakeview Avenue from the beach. The boat launch and tunnel were also proposed that year and then subsequently constructed in 1976 for $380,000, mostly funded by a grant.

Like Regan Beach, El Dorado Beach once had lifeguards on duty, but that practice was also abandoned in 1978.

In 1988, the city purchased a 2.2-acre parcel off of Harrison Avenue where an old motel stood. Over the course of the next 15 years, the building was razed, oil tank mitigated and the property restored to a state suitable to build a parking lot on. The project was funded with $1 million from the California Tahoe Conservancy.

In 1989, Frank’s at the Lake, a concession cart opened at the beach. After that, a concession cart or trailer was stationed at the beach each summer; though no permanent concession structure existed until the Lakeview Commons project was completed more than 20 years later.

The boat ramp was redone in 1991, thanks to $313,000 from the California Boating and Waterways Commission. The commission also agreed to nearly $450,000 in grant money for the construction of the parking lot across the street in 2002, the same year the city put in a new 200-foot retaining wall. The parking lot was completed in 2006.

But all of these improvement projects were minor in comparison to the Lakeview Commons project which broke ground in 2010. The $6 million project funded by the CTC took nearly a decade to get off the ground, then ran into a legal snag soon after construction began. The project was stalled for a short time, but resumed and, in all, took just less than two years to complete.

Finished in 2012, the Lakeview Commons project included extensive landscape and stone terracing, retaining walls, a ramp for beach accessibility, restrooms, improved walkways, general landscaping and an improved picnic area. This was the first portion of a much larger project to improve the entire leased 56 acres.

Amenities:

- Bike trail
- Two parking lots
- Sandy beach
- Food concession
- Kayak and water toy concession
- Boat ramp/launch
- Floating dock (not currently in use due to low water)
- Large picnic area, including tables and BBQs
- Large grass area
- Restroom
- Swim area (non-boating).

The pool at the rec center is popular year-round.

South Lake Tahoe Recreation Complex

Location: 1176 and 1180 Rufus Allen Blvd.

Original construction date: 1975

In 1972, El Dorado County granted the city of South Lake Tahoe the title to 15.48 acres on which to build a recreation center. Plans for the center were drawn up and revealed to the public in 1973. By the summer of 1975, the people of South Lake Tahoe had a $1.8 million recreation and swim center.

The center consists of a 25-yard indoor pool with a retractable roof for the summer months, a weight room, locker rooms, a gymnasium-multipurpose room, kitchen, offices and various smaller multipurpose rooms.

An ice skating rink adjacent to the center was proposed that same year, but the proposal failed due to deed restrictions imposed by the county. At that time, the city was sponsoring a

public ice rink in the Tahoe Keys Marina, but the existence and quality of ice was entirely dependent on weather. An ice rink near the rec center was later included in the parks and recreation master plan of 1977. However, it would be another 20 years before the area saw the likes of an actual ice skating rink, and 25 before South Lake Tahoe had an ice arena.

It was not until 1995 that the construction of an ice skating rink on the land adjacent to the recreation and swim center was finally approved. The city agreed to a 30-year lease with the Tahoe Ice Skating Association for the 1-acre parcel. A new outdoor rink was built and opened in January 1997. It closed in March of that year due to warm weather and did not reopen the following winter. The lease was revoked, and the rink sat idle and barricaded for years.

In 2001, construction began on the indoor ice arena. Doors opened in May 2002. The ice arena was remarkably successful, and the city ran it until they were forced to downsize in 2011. The arena was leased to outside operators and continues to thrive. In 2013, it became home to a Junior A hockey team, the Tahoe Blue.

The recreation and swim center has undergone various maintenance projects over the years: new fiberglass in the pool, new retractable roofs, energy upgrades such as lighting and heating systems, roof repairs, new weight room equipment, and more. A playground, sand volleyball court and basketball court were installed outside. However, in the 40 years since it was built, the center has not received any extensive renovations. The building is dilapidated and much of the equipment and amenities are sorely outdated. This is why the recreation and swim center has earned a spot on the city of South Lake Tahoe’s new parks and recreation master plan. No decisions have been made yet as to what will happen to the building, but discussions are under way.

Amenities:

- Recreation and swim center
    - 25-yard indoor/outdoor year-round swimming pool
    - Locker rooms/shower facilities
    - Multipurpose gymnasium
    - Kitchen
    - Various meeting rooms
    - Crafts room
    - Weight room
- Ice Arena
    - Indoor ice skating rink with bleachers
    - Food concessions and eating area
    - Ice skate rentals
    - Locker rooms
- Outside facilities
    - Outside mini park/playground
    - Outdoor sand volleyball court
    - Outdoor basketball court
    - Picnic area.

Golf has been played in South Lake Tahoe for nearly a

century.

Bijou Community Park and Golf Course

Location: Park – 1201 Al Tahoe Blvd.; Golf course – 3464 Fairway Ave.

Size: 153 acres

Original construction date: Park – 1992; Golf course – 1920

In 1982, the city of South Lake Tahoe purchased 153 acres from the Johnson family for $371,000. Most of the acreage was undeveloped meadow and forest land, but the 9-hole golf course on the property had been in use since 1920 when both the greens and the tees were made of sand, and the fairways were mowed with a horse-drawn mower.

Knowing they wanted a park aimed at residents more than tourists, the city began what would be nearly a decade of planning. In 1988, a sign was installed at the entrance of Bijou Park reading “the beginning of something wonderful in our community.” Park construction began in 1990, and when it officially opened in 1992, nearly 5,000 people showed up.

Bijou Park is a cornucopia of recreational activities. It seems facilities are continually being added at the request of the community. Most recently, a bike park has been under construction. The bicycle park, consisting of pump tracks, a BMX track, a terrain park and a kids’ learning facility will take up about 5 acres of the park. It will join a skateboard park originally built in 1996, and rebuilt in 2008. Next to that is the basketball court which was retrofitted to also be a roller derby rink.

Back in 1994, a park maintenance staff member proposed the idea of a disc golf course at the park. He was given permission to set one up on a trial basis. By 1995, 27 disc baskets made of plastic drums and old street sign poles had

been installed. By 1998, each hole had an official tournament-approved basket. Disc golf is now one of Bijou Park's most popular activities.

A 40,000-square-foot dog park, opened in 2008, now occupies a portion of land where an archery range once existed. The dog park was such a success, a separate dog agility course was installed in 2013.

It seems Bijou Park, more than any other city park, is a frequent the recipient of private donations of time, labor, money and materials. Citizens passionate about their recreational activities have been given opportunities at Bijou Community Park and stepped up to the challenge.

A great deal of fund raising has been conducted for Bijou Park projects. For years throughout the '90s, a Bijou Community Park gift catalog circulated so people could easily purchase gifts for the park. This resulted in more than $200,000 in gifts. Soroptimist, Kiwanis and Rotary clubs donated money and built picnic shelters. Tens of thousands of dollars were collected in private donations. The local Lucky grocery store donated $8,500. While the city and state still contributed a combined amount of more than $1 million to the project, the amount of community involvement and generosity is impressive.

As for the golf course, a concessionaire ran it until 1990 when the city parks and recreation department took it over. It was still a fairly rudimentary course at that time. Over the next two years, they purchased maintenance equipment, installed a sprinkler system, planted grass, resurfaced greens with Astroturf and planted trees. The small course became more playable, more popular and profitable.

Amenities:

- 9-hole golf course
- 36-acre park
- 27-hole disc golf course

- Skateboard park
- Sand volleyball courts
- Basketball court/roller derby track
- Fenced dog park
- Dog agility course
- Outdoor fitness course
- Historic railroad exhibit
- Restrooms
- Concession facility (not always open)
- Two covered gazebos with barbecue pits and picnic tables
- Playground equipment
- Bike park (currently under construction)
- Open meadow land open to the public.

Linear Park parallels Highway 50; providing more than just a sidewalk.

Linear Park

Location: along the north side of Highway 50 from Wildwood

Avenue to Pioneer Trail

Size: half mile

Original construction date: 2000

More of a greenbelt than an actual park, Linear Park lies between Highway 50 and the Tahoe Meadows subdivision. In 1996, the city began talks with the property owners of Tahoe Meadows to create a mutually agreed upon plan that would both allow the city to create a bike path along that stretch of the highway and provide a buffer zone between the road and the private properties.

The land, which stretches from the Holiday Inn to McDonald's, is 2,700 linear feet. The agreement required the city to build a Class 1 bike trail on the property, but also build a fence separating the park from the subdivision, install lighting and landscape the entire area.

Possibly the most notable feature of the park is the white statue of a Washoe woman. The statue, created by artist Arnold Aragon was installed on the property in 2000. The statue's pedestal later began to crumble and was replaced by the now-defunct Core 24 Charities in 2005. The group also planted 1,000 daffodil bulbs around the new pedestal. A plaque was installed by the city explaining the meaning of the Washoe woman statue in 2009.

Even small parks require maintenance, and in 2013, Linear Park was completely redone, a project costing more than $500,000.

Amenities:

- Bike trail.

Bonanza Park offers people near the Y a place to play.

Bonanza Park

Location: 1209 Bonanza Ave.

Size: 1 acre

Original construction date: 2012

South Lake Tahoe’s newest park, near the Y, was once a rundown hotel. Edgewood Companies, in an effort to acquire more tourist accommodation units for their Edgewood Lodge project, purchased the property and transformed it into a public park. The city was granted ownership of the park, and Edgewood Companies was granted the tourist accommodation units.

Amenities:

- Large grass area
- Walking path
- Playground equipment

- Half-court basketball
- Horseshoe toss
- Picnic tables

Building and maintaining parks in South Lake Tahoe is a non-stop process of planning, funding, building and planning some more. But the results of these efforts have provided the community with places to gather, places to play, places to learn and even more places from which to enjoy our beautiful surroundings here in South Lake Tahoe.

Redevelopment keeps redefining S. Lake Tahoe

Having the gondola at Heavenly go from the village to the

mountain transformed the skiing and tourist experience on the South Shore. Photo/Heavenly Mountain Resort

Publisher's note: ***This is one in a series of stories Lake Tahoe News will be running leading up to the 50th anniversary of South Lake Tahoe on Nov. 30.***

By Susan Wood

Resilience, humility, irony. This describes the state of redevelopment in South Lake Tahoe from the early days of Virginia Slims commercials to the mid-1980's burst of tourism to today's absence of California government in sanctioning the way to finance change.

As the city this year celebrates its 50 years in business, the look and feel of this mountain town next to the largest alpine lake in North America reflects a state of flux in the last half century.

A hint of early, unofficial redevelopment came about in the 1960s upon Squaw Valley bringing the Winter Olympics to Lake Tahoe. The South Shore city accommodated the perceived influx of visitors by building rows of motels along the major thoroughfare, Highway 50. Right or wrong, the infrastructure in many respects stayed planted for decades.

Before ceasing to exist three years ago as a result of the 2011 Budget Act, state redevelopment agencies had been around since 1943 as a mechanism for growth for cities. But most at that time relied on federal funding. It wasn't until 1952 that cities got into the swing of using the state's money to fund such ventures – eight years before the Games arrived in the

Tahoe area. Talks were even under way in July 1966 of building a convention center on Happy Homestead property, a proposal that never materialized, albeit how easy it seemed to build back then.

In the early ’60s, building required an 8½ x 11 site plan and power permit. Now, reams of paper and a bankroll are necessary for construction on most projects.

Then in the mid-1980s, a group of moving and shaking city officials realized that to compete, ironically with places like Vail for tourism dollars, South Lake Tahoe would need to reinvent itself. When the city’s planning department saw “what was coming” as community matriarch and former city Councilwoman Del Laine pointed out, efforts were under way by officials to get on the improvement track.

“We realized we could improve on what we had,” Laine told *Lake Tahoe News.*

There were meetings and more meetings in 1987, some as far away as the League to Save Lake Tahoe’s home base in San Francisco. Along with the lake’s regulatory watchdog Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, the League’s environmental advocacy leaders were at least curious about what redevelopment could do for the city on both sides of the town from north to south.

Today, current projects are still in the works from the Y’s just approved Tahoe Valley Area Plan to the Stateline area’s constantly evolving condominium hotel-retail project where a convention center was once planned on 11 acres bordering Cedar, Stateline and Friday avenues, and Highway 50.

At this time, the notion of the environment and economy working in harmony was what kept the redevelopment wheel in motion.

“South Tahoe would have been in the same shape as other failed tourism communities,” former City Attorney Dennis Crabb said,

while also listing Seaside near Monterey and Jackson in the Gold Country as other examples.

A pretty lake wouldn’t have been enough to maintain a pristine environment and an economy full of potential. With McDonald’s on Lake Tahoe Boulevard flooding every year because of a lack of storm drainage infrastructure and motel owners seeking more business to sustain them, citizens appeared eager for something to change.

“Motel owners were going to get bailed out, and that was salvation,” Crabb said, while also building a case for nearby retailers tacking onto the gravy train.

Steve Kenninger with KOAR, developers of Embassy Suites and what is now called Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel, and then South Lake Tahoe Mayor Neva Roberts in 1990. Photo/South Lake Tahoe

Nothing worth doing comes easy

After the city incorporated in 1965 and the lake was legally divvied up by jurisdiction in 1970, the town was in desperate need of reinvention.

Kerry Miller, the city manager who arrived in June 1987, remembers redevelopment's humble beginnings like they were yesterday.

"The Tahoe basin came off a three-year building moratorium, with the League's legal challenge of TRPA, and we realized that as a result, the economy suffered and tourism suffered," Miller said from his home in Folsom.

In days long before its flagship ski resort owned anything here, Vail continued to develop during the lake's moratorium. The Colorado town's achievements cut into ski area tourism, and Tahoe faced a visitation drought down the road that would make the recession from a few years ago look like happy days.

"It became likely Tahoe as a tourist destination would not be able to compete," Miller told *Lake Tahoe News.*

City staff prepped some plans. An agreement was struck with the state Attorney General's Office. Measure C, which passed in November 1988, put transient occupancy tax in city coffers – 10 percent across the town, 12 percent in project areas. And what a project area South Lake had, resembling an oversized barbell from one side of town to another. The South Tahoe Redevelopment Agency zone spans 173 acres from Herbert Avenue to Stateline Avenue. Later on, the zone leapfrogged to Harrison Avenue at midtown near El Dorado Beach and at the Y.

In the late-1980s, all approvals were reached, movement was made to secure bond financing and the land assembly came together starting with Lake Tahoe Vacation Resort at Ski Run Boulevard.

"The citizens were involved during the entire planning process," Miller said.

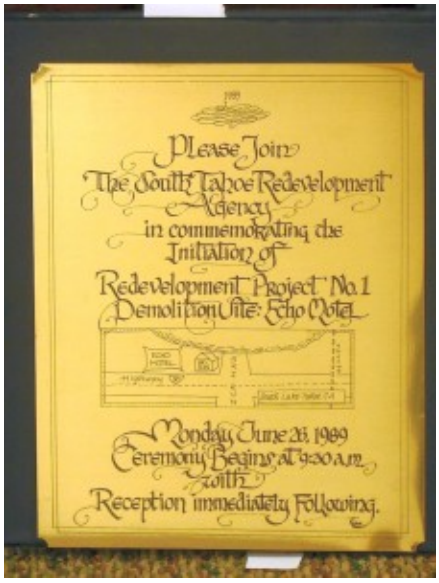
Sure, there were naysayers but “surprisingly not a lot,” the former city official added in a tone that seemed to almost surprise him.

“People had objections. There were people bemoaning the idea of change. But it was overwhelmingly positive. The town looked dated. Tahoe’s beauty ‘no matter what’ had a dated quality to attracting visitors,” he said.

Eminent domain – the government-sanctioned taking of property for improvements to alleviate blight, in its truest sense – represents the all-encompassing main objection to redevelopment. But bringing fair market value and a relocation plan to the table for the displaced seemed to ease the pain somewhat, and citizens were ready for a change, Miller recounted.

Improvements were being made, but then “a funny thing happened” as the city endorsed the KOAR company’s plans for what was Embassy Suites bordering Stateline. The Gulf War in 1990 literally dried up the financial markets. The post-war recession “fatally affected” redevelopment for three years, Miller went on to say.

After the economy started to recover and Embassy Vacation Resort opened at Ski Run in 1995, the movement paved the way for a concentrated effort to go into the Park Avenue Project on the other side of the street bordering Stateline.



Redevelopment in South Lake Tahoe began in earnest in the late 1980s.

The birth of Heavenly Village

The major redevelopment undertaking resulted in Heavenly Village with its two Marriott timeshare condominium properties, 120,000 square feet of retail run by Gary Casteel who at the time owned the Factory Stores at the Y, a city transit station and parking garage, and a $25 million gondola built by Heavenly Mountain Resort in 2002.

Project 1 didn’t come without hitches and glitches. It demonstrated a sign of ultimate, stubborn resilience from the private and public sectors – almost to a fault.

First, the city Redevelopment Agency siphoned off $7 million from the general fund to finish the 110,000-square-foot project – a watershed moment announced at a meeting in May 2003 when the council got a wakeup call on monitoring its accounting department. The tab was financed and refinanced, thus raising the debt service in 2006 to $112 million to be paid over three decades. The city even paid out $12 million in legal fees associated with the $250 million project flanked by the Grand Summit and Timber Lodge.

Redevelopment was a lot like gambling – one, which paid off ultimately when considering, delayed tax-revenue benefits. The property once assessed at $15 million when the plan was adopted in 1988 had increased more than 20 times on the El Dorado County tax rolls according to statistics from a decade ago. Its value mushroomed then at $346 million, up $100 million from when the complex was completed.

Moreover, Heavenly's parent company at the time – American Skiing Co. experienced a dive in its value on the stock market to the point shares sold for less than $1. The plummet resulted in a delisting from the New York Stock Exchange. It was the beginning of the end. At one point, it was doubtful the gondola would even get built.

To the rescue, Vail Resorts ended up buying the town ski resort a few years later – and has since poured millions of dollars into capital improvement projects.

Yet another hurdle to overcome, parking turned out to be an albatross of an issue. The money-losing $6 million garage turned into $9 million for the city. Parking at the gondola turned into a debate and debacle for years. Visitors either clogged the side streets until the city implemented a two-hour limit in the surrounding area to urge motorists to park in the garage or parked at Harrah's back lot or at what was the Crescent V shopping center next door. The latter resulted in aggressive parking monitors ticketing visitors or in some cases grabbing their arms.

Something needed to give. City officials got creative, offering deals for parking in the garage, validation agreements with retailers and a turning of the cheek from the major casino in what was happening in its back lot.

Concrete and rebar constituted “the hole” for years until Owens Financial consolidated the properties and began incrementally developing the site. Photo/LTN file

The other side of the coin

Parking could still be an issue as one looks at the current Project 3 across the highway. Talk about evolution. The changing of management hands alone resembles a cross between a card game and a chess tournament. Harveys casino, then Marriott, then Lake Tahoe Development Co. – the latter run by a small, local development duo – was once in line to build the city’s largest proposed project once estimated at $410 million.

Upon breaking ground in 2007, the triangular-shaped project area on the lake side now called the Chateau Project where McP’s Tap Room serves as an anchor was supposed to house a major hotel and 200,000-square-foot convention center. The city was due to own the monstrous facility according to the ever-changing Owner Participation Agreement between the city and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

One challenge after another ensued.

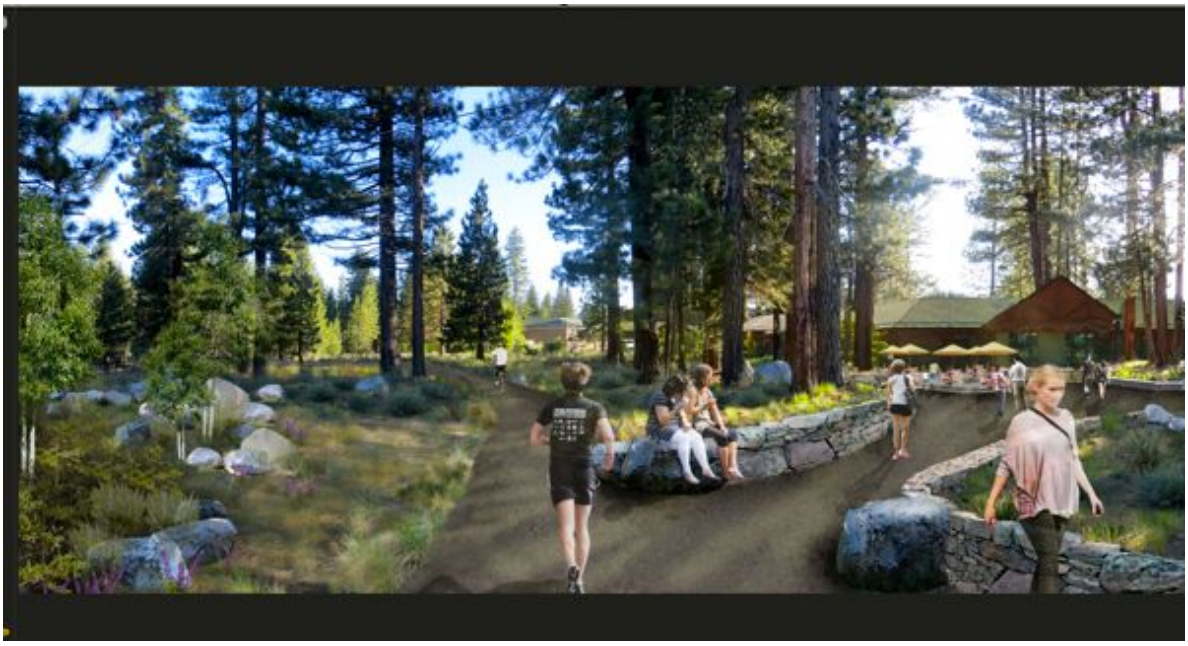
Displaced and bought-out business operators kept the city in and out of court through the years. Legal fees mounted, with some business owners having better results than others.

At least Jim Hickey, owner of the former Union 76 gas station, came out ahead of the game.

“I thought everything was fair in the long run. I wished it would’ve happened a little faster, but I know the project was big. It took several months to close the deal,” Hickey, now an Internet marketer, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

All in all, there was the harsh reality that convention centers went out of style, a warning Charlie McDermid from Holiday Inn Express warned the city about when he waved a hotel-trend magazine at a heated City Council meeting years ago. Financing for the evolving hotel-condominium idea dried up.

With no performance bond in place for the city, L.T. Development Co. led by Randy Lane and John Sherpa consequently filed for bankruptcy. Rebar and concrete marked what was affectionately referred to in town by locals as “the hole in the ground” – much to the embarrassing dismay of the city.



The Tahoe Valley Area Plan has passed the regulatory hurdles and now awaits investors to transform the area along with the city which intends to create a green belt.

It’s a new game in town

But current City Manager Nancy Kerry, an idea activator, was not going to let this blemish lie unattended on her watch.

Even as the state pulled its support for redevelopment a few years ago, staff and L.T. Development Co. negotiated with Tahoe Stateline Ventures, a subsidiary of Owens Financial, for it to buy the parcels in the project area and with tweaked plans go forth with a scaled down version of what was to happen across from Harveys.

The 32-unit condominium project, absent a traditional hotel now, is now proposed with a pool, 19,477-square-feet of retail space (a third of its original size), streetscape improvements and public fire pits.

A little modesty never hurt anyone.

Owens Financial chief Bill Owens describes his undaunted dedication in three words: “Location, location, location.”

What keeps him interested sounds almost in line with what the founding fathers and mothers of redevelopment had in mind.

“I believe South Lake Tahoe has been maligned in public perception because of the older properties not being redeveloped. A lot of (business operators) don’t want to bother. We need this. You can walk to gaming, walk to the lake, walk to a ski resort. There are very few places on Earth you could do that,” he told *Lake Tahoe News*, adding working with the city has been “a pleasure.”

One could say he’s a visionary like Kerry.

He doesn’t wince at challenges. And between planning staff’s early caution led by Jim Marino about parking and sometimes dangerous pedestrian movement across the highway, there could be more issues. A Heavenly employee was hit by a motorist crossing the street in that area about a decade ago, severely injuring her.

There are the other considerations.

Owens would prefer not to have to deal with the slopes of the roofs as dictated by TRPA guidelines issued in 2007 for the project now estimated to cost almost half as much.

“(The roof slope) makes it more expensive to build, but it’s not something I can’t live with,” he told *Lake Tahoe News.*

But that’s all in a day’s work to people on his side like Joe Stewart of SMC Contracting. The contractor is a tour de force for building in the redevelopment area, namely the Park Avenue project, so he knows the drill.

It’s a good thing. Between a changing proposal, shrinking competitive market, nagging recession and no redevelopment agencies in 400 communities up and down the state, this isn’t easy.

“Heavenly Village was built with redevelopment funds. This one has zero public funds. In some cases, it makes the project go slower. I think the redevelopment agency was a huge benefit across the street. We should be lucky it’s built,” Stewart told *Lake Tahoe News.* “I feel like Bill Owens certainly stepped up and did something no one else would do.”

In August, Stewart expects the groundbreaking of the second phase.

All this is music to the ears when it comes to the last of the “redevelopment” oriented projects for civic-minded Paul Bruso, who has owned and operated Ernie’s Coffee Shop for decades.

Bruso was one of the early pioneering citizens to spearhead a plan for a remodeling of the Y where his restaurant he's retiring from sits.

The Tahoe Valley Area Plan has undergone its own jerks and grinds as it makes its way into the future. It's come to the forefront with issues over building height, project area and former Councilman Ted Long's apparent push to spearhead taking over the plan from the citizen's group years ago, elevating the debate.

But when all was said and done minus Long's sarcastic "thank-you-very-much, we'll-take-it-from-here" attitude, Bruso said he's pleased with how the plan is materializing.

One thing he would like to see is better lighting.

"People who visit want to get out of their cars and walk. We want them to feel safe," he said.

Overall, it's "a good plan," according to the restaurateur.

"It's like (the city has) been thorough in what people want. They took all the necessary steps," he said. "The whole idea is this town is going through a beautification process. Unfortunately, the Y is the tail of the dog."

Women play significant role in SLT's 50 years

Publisher's note: ***This is one in a series of stories Lake Tahoe News will be running leading up to the 50th anniversary of South Lake Tahoe on Nov. 30.***

They buried Norma Thayer on a Saturday afternoon in May. She died in November 2014. She was interred with 17 friends and relatives remembering her and her 64 years at South Shore.

They gathered to lay her in the ground next to her daughter, no fuss, sharing memories of the extraordinary woman she was, but they left out one groundbreaking mention. Thayer was the first woman to run for the South Lake Tahoe City Council.

Norma Thayer

In the initial election in 1965 19 men ran for office, the top five each serving six-month terms as mayor. In 1967 the election was conducted for the first full four-year terms. Fifteen men and Thayer were on the ballot. Thayer didn’t succeed in her effort, but she didn’t come in last.

Nine years passed without a woman candidate. In 1974 Pat Lowe was elected. Lowe displayed a very practical turn of mind. It was her idea to set out left turn lanes in the neighborhoods and to place dry wells throughout the city to drain the annual floods. She went on to election as supervisor of El Dorado County, unfortunately succumbing to cancer before she could complete her second term.

As her colleague Laurie Ames recalls, “Pat spoke truth to power.” Today a portion of the bike trail is dedicated to her

memory.

Del Laine as mayor of South Lake Tahoe. Photo/City of South Lake Tahoe

Del Laine was elected in 1976, serving two terms. Other women serving two terms were Neva Roberts (1982-1990), Margo Osti (1990-1998), Judy Brown (1996-2004), and Kathay Lovell (2002-2010).

Brooke Laine was elected to one term in 1998 and appointed to fulfill the two years remaining (2013-2015) on Claire Fortier’s term (2010-2012).

Lovell served three terms as mayor. Del Laine, Roberts and Brown all served two terms as mayor. Osti, Brooke Laine and Fortier served one-year terms as mayor.

Angela Swanson was elected to a term, retiring in 2015. JoAnn Conner (2012-2016) and Wendy David (2014-2018) currently serve.

Several other women stepped up to run, including Joan Currie, Gail Sanders, Linda Mendizabal, Joy Curry, Adrian Gooch, Elizabeth Hallen and Alice Jones. And Norma Thayer.

If you add those candidates up, 19 women have been willing to serve, of which 11 were elected, while 103 men ran the race, of which 33 were elected.

But it isn't just numbers that matter, it's what contributions were brought about. Neva Roberts initiated the competition that gave us the city flag, but what she more reveres are the people who came to her when they felt unheard by others. Her strong advocacy gave a handicapped woman a variance from CTRPA strictures and put a stop sign in Al Tahoe to provide a sense of safety for a neighborhood.

Margo Osti is proud of getting the Clean Tahoe program established, as well as working on affordable housing issues.

Standing fast for the gondola redevelopment plan and the vacation rental ordinance are tops on Judy Brown's list of "yes!" Now after her council terms she continues to offer strong guidance as a member of the city's Planning Commission.

Brooke Laine is proud the ice rink is an asset for the city, something she fought for, and she values her commitment to the public ownership of the city parking garage, which will be a financial asset for the city within a decade.

Kathay Lovell, then mayor of South Lake Tahoe, speaks during an Angora Fire meeting while state and

federal officials look on.
Photo/Kevin Chandler

Kathay Lovell, the only woman to serve three terms as mayor, worked hard to bring about Lakeview Commons, standing tall every hour to push for its completion. She was also the voice of calm during the tragic Angora Fire in 2007.

Claire Fortier delayed retirement until she could cast a strong vote for the revised Regional Plan update – a plan long in negotiation and diligently guided to fruition with her support as chair of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board.

JoAnn Conner takes pride on helping to revise city regulations to be friendlier in maintaining and attracting businesses, and to helping improve recreational facilities regionwide.

Wasting no time carving out an area of strong interest is Wendy David who has stressed mental health and community well being as her focus.

– Compiled by Del Laine