Opinion: 1 complaint not worth destroying 30-plus year Lake Tahoe fireworks tradition

By Carol Chaplin

Since 1986, the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority has supported the tourism industry on the South Shore. Events, such as the July 4 and Labor Day fireworks are included in our strategy to increase visitation. During the 30-year tradition of fireworks, we have no history of complaints.

Pyro Spectaculars is one of the best fireworks companies and has gained us national recognition for our display. Their strict clean-up protocol includes a boat sweep with nets and a diver sweep that extends well past the shoot zone the following days. This protocol is not mandated by any regulatory authority and efforts typically result in 20 bags of trash, most of which has nothing to do with fireworks.



Carol Chaplin

After this past July display, we were contacted by the [Tahoe Regional Planning Agency] alerting us to a possible anomaly to the usual debris-free display. Events Manager Mike Frye, who coordinates the pre-event safety meetings with our partner law enforcement agencies, began extensive conversations with Pyro

and with residents who contacted us directly. No contact with the Truxlers was received. Mike engaged with the Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District several times to implement a more stringent strategy for the Labor Day fireworks. In his discussions with Tahoe Douglas, officials indicated that most of the fireworks debris was not from our show.

On Tuesday following the Labor Day festivities, we confirmed that TRPA and LTVA had received no complaints. However, more than 72 hours later, we were contacted by a Nevada Beach area resident who alerted us to a debris situation. No communication from the Truxlers was received. Mike organized LTVA staff, spending hours combing Nevada Beach and cleaning up everything including bottles, cans, bags, etc.

The notice of intent to sue was received immediately after Labor Day, so our assumption is that conversations with attorneys began long before. In my mind, any non-litigious negotiations were likely never contemplated. Our settlement effort was to emphasize LTVA is committed to working with the community to assure impacts from fireworks are mitigated. Our outreach was not fruitful. Subsequent mediation efforts were not successful, and the litigation threatens over $70 million in penalties. Our funds are sourced through lodging tax with the purpose of helping this community thrive after recession and marginal winters. It is a sober and serious consideration the board is faced with to continue draining resources meant for promotion in the direction of contentious and punitive litigation that will ultimately not serve any of us.

The accusation that we have violated the Clean Water Act is one that no other legal body has wanted to consider. Our request for Nevada Department of Environmental Protection to issue a permit was directed back by that agency as a matter for local oversight. The TRPA has not indicated that it is the appropriate agency, nor has Lahontan Water Quality Control Board. In fact, Lahontan released a water quality study in 2001 with no significant results that informed a permit

strategy. While regulatory oversight was what the Truxlers requested, the agency governing oversight disagreed with their contention. It is evident the Truxlers feel that neither Pyro, the LTVA nor the community, for that matter, can be trusted. We disagree.

The March 27 LTVA board meeting was attended by over 100 prominent elected officials, residents and business owners. All were impressive in their impassioned support and echoed the same themes: our community finds resolution through cooperation; our already fragile economy will be crippled by the event cancellation; and the solution is for the Truxlers to find reasonableness and trust and return to the table for productive conversations that result in a lawsuit dismissal and a satisfying remedy to debris on the beach.

How proud I was of our residents. I was reminded how spirited this environment makes us here. We play and work hard. We sacrifice salary and amenities for the rural mountain environment. We are scrappy and happy because of it. Thank you for giving up your personal time to join in the discussion. One speaker asked a telling question: “Who here will help clean the beaches after the fireworks?” All hands were raised. We will all clean the beaches. Because we always have. We clean the trails we run and hike, we teach our children the same. But, perhaps – and this is the silver lining to this mess – we will do it as a unified community and in our own unique Tahoe South way, we’ll make a party of it.

The good news is that Monday finds us back in mediation. The better news would be that we make an agreement to love this lake enough to strike the deal. And that deal will allow our economy to hum strong, our fireworks to burst bright and our beaches to be swept clean. See you all on the beach. I can’t wait.

Carol Chaplin is executive director of Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority.

Opinion: Water bond proposal full of leaks

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

Anthony Rendon, a first-term Democrat from Southern California who chairs the Assembly's water committee, is proud of a water bond issue that he wrote after eight public hearings around the state, calling it "an open and transparent process" in contrast to the backroom deals that had marked previous water bonds.



Dan Walters

On Monday, his office touted it as "the only current bond proposal that has made it out of its house of origin …" and declared that Tuesday's hearing in the Senate's water committee was the "perhaps final" airing before it reached the Senate floor.

Fat chance.

As soon as Rendon took his seat in the hearing room, he found his handiwork on the receiving end of sharp criticism from the Senate water committee's chairwoman, Sen. Fran Pavley, other senators and representatives of stakeholders in the notoriously fractious issue.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Tahoe can’t afford fireworks lawsuit

By Nancy Kerry

As we all know, the economy and our environment are fundamentally intertwined. If we ever doubted the connection, those doubts should have been erased through the impacts of the great recession on our local economy. We need revenue from tourism to sustain our economy, which in turn helps to fund environmental projects that protect the natural beauty, which draws millions of visitors every year. We cannot have a thriving economy without protecting the environment and we cannot have a beautiful natural environment without money to protect and properly sustain it.

Mr. and Mrs. [Joe and Joan] Truxler recently sued the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority for “failing to obtain a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit” for the fireworks shows that occur each July and Labor Day. An NPDES permit, if required, would be issued by Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board on the California side or the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection if the show were on the Nevada side of the lake.



Nancy Kerry

Ten years ago, Lahontan determined an NPDES permit was not required after monitoring fireworks shows because any impacts dissipated within 24 hours and posed no environmental threat to the clarity of our beautiful Lake Tahoe. The Nevada Department of Environmental Protection issued a letter to LTVA in December 2013 indicating neither an NPDES permit nor oversight of the fireworks show was necessary. Therefore, both agencies in California and Nevada with a duty to oversee environmental protections in Lake Tahoe have determined an NPDES permit is not required or necessary.

Lake clarity has not been negatively impacted by fireworks debris. The evidence of that statement is lake clarity has improved during the 35 years the fireworks shows have been produced. The issue of debris can be resolved through better clean up, community involvement and enforcement against illegal fireworks, but not through a protracted lawsuit. The fireworks show already has both surface and subsurface clean-up procedures in place with a great track record, with the exception of last year. If the show is cancelled, illegal firework use will likely increase, a scary scenario on the heels of the driest winter of record.

We can’t control when Mother Nature doesn’t cooperate, but a manmade impact of this magnitude is simply inconsiderate of the consequences. If the fireworks show were canceled because of this lawsuit, the economic impact to our community would be staggering. Hardest hit would be the underemployed who rely on tips and service jobs to survive. Our city’s General Fund relies primarily on bed tax to fund police, fire and other

essential services, and cancellation of the largest summer event will adversely impact the city's budget.

The city of South Lake Tahoe, while not a party to the lawsuit, has been actively working to facilitate both short- and long-term solutions to this issue. I have spoken to the Truxlers and believe they are seeking reasonable solutions to the issue of debris. However, I have also spoken to their lawyer and believe his efforts to extract excessive fees are unreasonable and could preclude a resolution to the case. At the LTVA's emergency meeting Thursday, there was unwavering and unanimous support calling on the Truxlers to work with the community and not against it by agreeing to solutions for the debris and withdrawing the lawsuit so the show can go on. We need to immediately commence another spectacular show in time for July 4, 2014.

Nancy Kerry is the city manager of South Lake Tahoe.

Letter: Elks help serve at Bread & Broth

To the community,

Bread & Broth's dinner serving at St. Theresa Church's Grace Hall on March 24 was sponsored by the Tahoe/Douglas Elks Lodge No. 2670.

The Elks Lodge Adopt A Day donation of $250 made it possible for B&B to serve a hot, nutritious meal to over 85 guests, provide seconds for those still hungry and give out "take home" servings to be enjoyed by those unable to attend or as a "second" dinner.

Donating their time and great spirit at the dinner were Elks Lodge members Dan Wells, Gary and Toni Wendt, Roger and Jeanne Barragan, Gail Bryan and Jim Plameng. They were a very personable group, speaking with each guest and very genuine in their interactions.

“This is a great way for the Elks Lodge to get hands on and serve the community,” said Roger Barragan. “We love helping those around us.”

Elks organizations invest in communities and meet local need where their members live and work. The Tahoe/Douglas Elks Lodge No. 2670 is a very active and community involved group and Bread & Broth is very fortunate to have them as a sponsor and join our hard working, all volunteer program members in feeding the less fortunate of our community.

For more information about B&B, find us on Facebook.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Letter: Yes on Measure L makes sense

To the community,

Once I popped a bubble filled with carbon dioxide from dry ice and it was very cool! That was at the Tahoe library’s summer program. I love the library. I am home schooled and we get about 75 percent of my books from the library system’s six branches. If there is a book that is in another library, you can get it. I have “The Red Badge of Courage” loaned from Placerville.

All sorts of people use the library for different purposes. I go there almost weekly, and there are reading programs and writing programs. I've seen friends studying and little kids playing with dinosaurs and blocks. All nine of the computers seem to be in use most of the time. Teens can go there for education, for a safe place to go after school and even do homework on borrowed laptops.

Measure L is for continued funding of the South Lake Tahoe library. Vote "yes" on Measure L on the June 3 ballot. It is $20 year. Your taxes will not go up. You will pay what you have been paying for 12 years.

Unless it passes with a two-thirds majority, we do not keep all of the things that we have now. We will have fewer programs, and school kids won't be able to go there most afternoons because the hours might be cut to two days a week. If I could vote, then I would vote for the library. We need your vote for Measure Library.

Sincerely,

Jessie Brown, South Lake Tahoe (14 years old)

Letter: S. Tahoe Chamber supports fireworks

Publisher's note: ***The following letter was sent to Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority Executive Director Carol Chaplin on March 26. It is reprinted with permission.***

Dear Ms. Chaplin:

I am writing on behalf of the South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce,

its board of directors and membership. As you know, the South Tahoe Chamber represents many smaller family-owned businesses within the city and South Shore. The chamber supports economic growth for all segments of the South Shore economy.

The South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce wants to go on the record regarding the following:

1. Supporting the celebration of our nation's independence on July 4;

2. Supporting traditional fireworks celebration as sponsored by the LTVA;

3. Encouraging, advocating and supporting a re-energized and intensive lake and adjacent shoreline cleanup effort to ensure that after the event is over the Lake and shoreline areas are clear of debris and rubbish; and

4. Examine the feasibility for future years of alternative light display options such as laser light shows as used at many entertainment parks across the country.

The traditional July 4 event is an important expression of our nation's independence, and it is an important economic opportunity for the South Shore. I believe that the existing regional and environmental regulatory agencies have demonstrated their commitment to lake clarity and provide appropriate oversight for this event as you documented in your Jan. 18, 2014, letter to the *Lake Tahoe News*.

Sincerely,

George Alm, president South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce

Opinion: Explaining reasons to file fireworks suit

By Joan and Joe Truxler

In November, we made the difficult decision to file a lawsuit under the federal Clean Water Act. We do not want to stop the fireworks; and if the lawsuit is successful, we cannot gain financially. Our only motivation is to protect the lake.

On July 5, 2013, our neighbors in Marla Bay collected over two trash barrels full of fireworks debris that had washed ashore. The next day, more debris appeared. Our 3-year-old grandson found a fuse and brought it to us in his hand. Since then, we have collected over 8,000 pieces of fireworks pollution. It is composed of hard plastic and fuses that are cobbled together with cardboard, paper, string and various types of adhesives. Some pieces were ingested and passed through dogs and coyotes. Many were tangled with dead crayfish. To date, the debris continues to wash ashore eight months after the Fourth. We continue to comb PineWild, Marla Bay and Nevada beaches to pick up the debris by hand.

We never wanted a lawsuit. When the debris began accumulating in July, we contacted several agencies. But the companies responsible for the pollution never responded. Then, it occurred all over again after the Labor Day 2013 fireworks. Again, the responsible companies failed to respond even though they had been aware of the problem since they were contacted by the TRPA on July 8, 2013. Since then, they have declined our invitations to walk the beach, view the debris, and work together to solve this problem, despite the fact that much of the pollution has their name (“Pyro Spectaculars”) printed clearly on it.

Under the Clean Water Act, private citizens like ourselves

cannot gain a cent if we win in court. We hope to stop or minimize the pollution washing up on our beaches, protect the lake, and begin a public discussion about the strong protection that an enforceable Clean Water Act permit will provide. If we are successful, decisions on how to clean up after fireworks shows will be public—not something left to private parties or us.

The beauty of Tahoe's water is vitally important to our community, to our businesses, and to our visitors. Because we value these things so highly, we filed suit to protect the lake from needless pollution and assure a public process to address pollution from future fireworks shows.

Joan and Joe Truxler live in Zephyr Cove and have filed a lawsuit against the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority.

Letter: Heavenly works the Bread & Broth line

To the community,

In honor of St. Patrick's day, members of Heavenly Mountain Resort's mountain operations wore green and served corn beef and cabbage to Bread & Broth's dinner guests on March 17.

Thanks to the Adopt A Day sponsorship by Heavenly Mountain Resort and the generous donation of the corn beef by the Knights of Columbus, all those who attended the dinner at Grace Hall got a taste of the customary Irish dinner.

Representing Heavenly's mountain operations were Dave Hager, snowmaking manager; Todd Rudis, grooming manager; Kyle

Henderson, grooming supervisor; and Mike Thomas, terrain park manager.

They were an energetic crew. HagerD described their involvement as an “experience of a lifetime and a chance to pay it back.” Thomas also added that it was “eye-opening to see this type of outreach in the community.”

Bread & Broth acknowledges that the meal service we offer to the community can only be realized by the generosity of our many donor and sponsors. Heavenly Mountain Resort and their employees are monthly participants in B&B’s Adopt A Day of Nourishment program and their involvement in the program is greatly appreciated.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: Calif.’s middle class disappearing

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

California’s economy is recovering from its worst recession since the Great Depression – no doubt about that.

But its recovery is very slow, very geographically and socioeconomically uneven, and exacerbates the decline of a once-vibrant middle class and the evolution of a distinctly two-tiered society.

Sure, there is plenty of opportunity for those with the educations, creativity or technical skills that the post-industrial economy rewards handsomely and their success spawns demands for low-skill, low-pay service workers.

But what about the middle class? What about aerospace craftsmen, automobile assemblers, petrochemical plant operators, movie industry technicians and myriad other well-paying occupations that accompanied California's rise as a major economic power in the 20th century?

Read the whole story

Opinion: Meat production a huge user of water

By James McWilliams, New York Times

California is experiencing one of its worst droughts on record. Just two and a half years ago, Folsom Lake, a major reservoir outside Sacramento, was at 83 percent capacity. Today it's down to 36 percent. In January, there was no measurable rain in downtown Los Angeles. Gov. Jerry Brown has declared a state of emergency. President Obama has pledged $183 million in emergency funding. The situation, despite last week's deluge in Southern California, is dire.

With California producing nearly half of the fruit and vegetables grown in the United States, attention has naturally focused on the water required to grow popular foods such as walnuts, broccoli, lettuce, tomatoes, strawberries, almonds and grapes. These crops are the ones that a recent report in the magazine *Mother Jones* highlighted as being unexpectedly water intensive. Who knew, for example, that it took 5.4 gallons to produce a head of broccoli, or 3.3 gallons to grow a single tomato? This information about the water footprint of food products — that is, the amount of water required to produce them — is important to understand, especially for a

state that dedicates about 80 percent of its water to agriculture.

But for those truly interested in lowering their water footprint, those numbers pale next to the water required to fatten livestock. A 2012 study in the journal Ecosystems by Mesfin M. Mekonnen and Arjen Y. Hoekstra, both at the University of Twente in the Netherlands, tells an important story. Beef turns out to have an overall water footprint of roughly 4 million gallons per ton produced. By contrast, the water footprint for “sugar crops” like sugar beets is about 52,000 gallons per ton; for vegetables it’s 85,000 gallons per ton; and for starchy roots it’s about 102,200 gallons per ton.

Read the whole story