

# Opinion: Time to sell the Olympic idea to the people of Tahoe-Reno

**Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the Sept. 29, 2011, Reno Gazette-Journal.***

The return of the Winter Olympics to the Reno-Tahoe area took another step forward last week when officials of the Reno Tahoe Winter Games Coalition confirmed to the U.S. Olympic Committee their interest in bidding for the 2022 games.



That's just one step in a lengthy process that won't culminate until the International Olympic Committee chooses a winner in 2015. Among the other nations that have said they're interested in hosting the 2022 games are Spain, Switzerland, Germany, Norway and Sweden. And Reno-Tahoe might first have to compete with Denver for the U.S. bid.

It's entirely possible that the U.S. won't even bid. The USOC and IOC continue to negotiate over the sharing of TV broadcast revenue. Unless that disagreement is resolved, there will be no bid.

Yet, Friday's announcement is an important milestone that tells the nation – and this community – that Reno-Tahoe is serious about bringing the games back to the area, which last played host to the world's winter Olympians in 1960.

Before the coalition can sell the Reno-Tahoe games to the USOC and then the IOC, however, it's critical that it sell the games to those who live here and will play a major role in ensuring that the event is a success.

# **Opinion: Child's health involves the mind and body**

**By Vicki Barber**

I thought this brief, succinct message from Mental Health America was appropriate, particularly at the beginning of the school year. I could not have said it better, so am sharing the information with your readers. My thanks to John Bachman, behavioral health services director with the El Dorado Community Health Center and Placerville Health & Wellness Center, for bringing this to our attention.

## **Helping children grow up healthy – mind and body**

It is easy for parents to identify a child's physical needs – nutritious and balanced meals; adequate shelter and clothing; sufficient rest and physical activity; immunizations; and a healthy living environment.



Vicki Barber

However, a child's mental and emotional needs may not be as obvious. Good mental health allows children to think clearly, develop socially, learn new skills, build self-esteem and

develop a positive mental outlook.

**These are the basics for a child's good mental health:**

- Give children unconditional love. Children need to know that your love does not depend on their accomplishments.
- Nurture children's confidence and self-esteem. Praise and encourage them. Set realistic goals for them. Be honest about your mistakes. Avoid sarcasm.
- Encourage children to play. Play time is as important to a child's development as food. Play helps children be creative, develop problem-solving skills and self-control and learn how to get along with others.
- Enroll children in an after school activity, especially if they are otherwise home alone after school. This is a great way for kids to stay productive, learn something new, gain self-esteem and have something to look forward to during the week. Or check in on children after school if they are home alone. Children need to know that even if you're not there physically, you're thinking about them, and interested in how they spent their day and how they'll spend the rest of it.
- Provide a safe and secure environment. Fear can be very real for a child. Try to find out what is frightening him or her. Be loving, patient and reassuring, not critical.
- Give appropriate guidance and discipline when necessary. Be firm, but kind and realistic with your expectations. The goal is not to control the child, but to help him or her learn self-control.
- Communicate. Make time each day after work and school to listen to your children and talk with them about what is happening in their lives. Share emotions and feelings with your children.
- Get help. If you're concerned about your child's mental

health, consult with teachers, a guidance counselor or another adult who may have information about his or her behavior. If you think there is a problem, seek professional help. Early identification and treatment can help children with mental health problems reach their full potential.

*Vicki Barber is superintendent of El Dorado County Office of Education.*

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## **Opinion: Women's center thankful for successful event**

**To the community,**

The 12th Annual Sunset Gala Bali Bash hosted by South Lake Tahoe Women's Center at the beautiful Bali inspired home of Dr. Sean Degnan on Sept. 17 was a success.

This event which supports programs and services for people affected by domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse would not have been possible without the support of individuals and businesses in our community who generously made a donation to the gala despite the current state of our economy.

Thanks to the donors listed below, the event raised nearly \$20,000.

Event sponsors: Harrah's and Harveys Lake Tahoe, Barton Memorial Hospital, Paradise Real Estate, ReliaPro Painters, El Dorado Savings Bank, Creegan Builders, Merrill Lynch and Genasci Stigers Family Dentistry.

Food and beverage donors: Amador Cellars, Applebee's Bar and

Grill, Chevy's, Cork and More, Harrah's Lake Tahoe, La Promesa, Lagunitas Brewing Co., Lakeside Inn, Mandarin Garden, Miraflores Winery, Mont Bleu Casino, Nepheles, Nikki's Chaat Café, Orchid's, Scott Harvey Wines, Sugar Pine Bakery, Tahoe Cakes by Grace, and Tep's Villa Roma.

Silent auction donors: 4 Seasons Soup and Salad, Alpine Eyecare, Andy Eshkar, Apple Mountain Golf Resort, Barbara Gustafson, Brian Walker, Chart House, Cherish Your Moment Photography, Cooper Vineyards, David Girard Vineyard, Dirk Yuricich Photography, Dr. Lipkin Chiropractic, Dr. Lusby D.D.S, Dr. Wenck D.D.S, Ed Cook Crane and Tree Service, Edgewood Golf Course, Egon Kementi, Elements Day Spa, Elevate Wellness Center, Eric Hellberg, Fat City Food Company, Gaialicious and Nourish Life Coaching, Genasci & Stigers Family Dentistry, Harrah's & Harveys, Health Through Harmony, Inn by the Lake, In-N-Out Burger, Interior Motives, Jack Androvich, Jared Manninen, Jarvis Gallery, JF Photography, Jill Sanders, Jodar Vineyards and Winery, Kathay Lovell, Kelly Smith & Dr. Cassidy, Leigh Wayne Miller, Linda LaFavor's Beauticontrol, Lira's Supermarket, Lulu's Hair Design, Marcus Ashley Fine Art Gallery, Melina Wallisch Photography, Mont Bleu Resort Casino and Spa, Mountain Yoga, Nails by Lillian, NJ Thompson, Off the Hook, Overland Meats, Perry Creek Winery, Pilates with Gina, Rearview Miracles, ReliaPro Painters, Reno Truckee Paint Mart, Riva Grill, Russel Ketenjian, Scotty's Hardware, Shoreline Sports, Sierra at Tahoe, Sierra Vista Winery, Simpson's Jewelers, Sorensen's Resort, South Tahoe Parks and Rec, Steamers, Stella Ortega, Tahoe Beach and Ski Club, Tahoe Health Touch, Tahoe Seasons Resort, Tahoe Standup Paddle, The Fresh Ketch, The Ridge Resorts, Vincent Cortis, V's Creative Cooking, Yimmiys, and Zumba Fitness.

In addition, thank you to all who attended and special thank you to Russel Ketenjian who provided beautiful music for the evening and Ramsay Devereux for delighting guests with captivating fire dancing.

**Sarah Sanchez, development coordinator South Lake Tahoe  
Women's Center**

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# **Opinion: Don't change Washoe Meadows State Park**

**To the community,**

Anyone who values open space and concurs with the wisdom of Native Americans that all living things are interconnected should be appalled by what is happening in Washoe Meadows State Park near South Lake Tahoe. California State Parks Department (CSP) plans to downgrade a portion of Washoe Meadows State Park to State Recreation Area in order to pave the way for golf course development. To my knowledge, never in the history of this state has a state park been downgraded to state recreation status.

The Upper Truckee River Restoration Project is being sold as a package deal, tied to golf course development. The final EIR has been released and CSP has stated that their preferred alternate is "a slightly modified version of Alternative 2". Under this alternative the boundaries between State Recreation and State Park land will be reconfigured and nine golf holes will be moved to the west side of the Upper Truckee River. This will fragment the park, disturb currently contiguous wildlife corridors, result in the logging of thousands of trees, destroy wildlife habitats, and diminish the park experience as river access will be significantly altered and more of the park will be bordered by the golf course.

It's not too late to get involved. A public hearing, to approve redrawing the boundaries between State Park and State

Recreation Area will be held at 9am Oct. 21 at the Lake Tahoe Golf Course. Please attend and help us preserve Washoe Meadows State Park. If, like me, you can't attend a 9am meeting on a work day, please write to: California State Park & Recreation Commission, P.O. Box 942896, Sacramento, CA 94296-0001, Attn. Louis Nastro, Assistant to the Commission; or email him at [LNastro@parks.ca.gov](mailto:LNastro@parks.ca.gov).

Restore the river and preserve Washoe Meadows State Park.

Sincerely,

**Krissi Russell, South Lake Tahoe**

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## **Opinion: Recognizing Heavenly's gift to Bread & Broth**

**To the community,**

Bread & Broth would like to again thank Heavenly Mountain Resort for the continued support in our Adopt-A-Day of Nourishment Program.

Volunteers from Heavenly help Bread & Broth volunteers serve those in need a well balanced nutritious meal. The team at Heavenly has been very generous in their efforts all year to help our cause.

Bread & Broth is able to continue its mission of feeding the hungry of South Lake Tahoe in large part because of the generosity of the local community. A \$250 sponsorship covers the cost of food and beverages for the approximately 100

people who visit each Monday evening.

To find out how your family or business can Adopt A Day of Nourishment, contact Connie Blue at [midwest2tahoe@yahoo.com](mailto:midwest2tahoe@yahoo.com) or (530) 544.4945.

**David Smith, Bread & Broth volunteer**

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# **Opinion: New accusations are reason to legalize online gambling**

**Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the Sept. 21, 2011, Reno Gazette-Journal.***

If federal prosecutors are right, poker players who looked to the Internet hoping to make some easy money were taking a bigger gamble than they thought.

There have been lots of stories of cheaters working in boiler rooms to beat too-trusting players. When you can't see what's happening in front of your opponents' computers, anything is possible.

But, in a revised lawsuit filed Tuesday in New York, the feds said that one of the most popular online poker sites, the now-closed Full Tilt Poker, wasn't even a legitimate Internet casino. Rather, the lawsuit alleges, it was a giant Ponzi scheme, using the players' money deposited in Full Tilt accounts to pay off company owners and board members. Among those who profited by receiving millions of dollars from the accounts, the lawsuit alleges, were several well-known professional poker players.

Full Tilt already was facing money-laundering charges, and the federal government seized its bank accounts. But players who'd made deposits with the website and were hoping to get their money back once the charges were settled now appear to be out of luck.

**Read the whole story**

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## **Opinion: S. Tahoe's business model doesn't work**

**To the community,**

The city manager on the issue of snow removal is irrational, and it goes hand-in-hand with keeping a 25 percent general fund reserve at this time. It's like a miser who hoards money when his house badly needs repair.

The city manager is in the process of revealing his true self. He is an arrogant, haughty man. Thus, he dictates. Temps will be hired as the



Bill Crawford

council wrings its hands.

The city manager's business model is a hypothesis that cannot

be tested for validity. It is only an idea that is subjective. Who will measure its success or failure?

What's going on in our city government is like a soap opera. You cannot believe it.

Oh, well, rage is dead.

**Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe**

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## **Opinion: Barton Health offers a helping hand**

**By Dick Derby**

Barton Health, along with its affiliated healthcare facilities, treated more than 165,000 patients in 2010. With a population of 21,403 in the city of South Lake Tahoe and 181,058 residents in El Dorado County, Barton continues to serve the community and visitors alike. While, businesses in and around the lake accommodate "locals" by providing free services and discounts, Barton has done the same for years with free or low cost prevention screenings, wellness seminars and through our financial assistance program called Helping Hands.

Helping Hands was designed to assist South Lake Tahoe area residents. In the past few years, many families and individuals have suffered from the ongoing recession, endured lay-offs, both big and small business owners have closed their doors, lost insurance, have high insurance deductibles or work two jobs to provide for their families. At Barton, we are attempting to relieve some of the financial burden of medical

bills with our Helping Hands Program.



Dick Derby

The Helping Hands Program provides financial assistance to local area residents who do not qualify for programs such as Access for Infants and Mothers, County Medical Services Program, Medi-Cal, Medicare, Nevada Medicaid, Douglas County Social Services or the Victim of Crime Program.

A major misconception is that financial help is only for those in the lower income brackets, but most of Tahoe's middle class is eligible for some level of discount. The program works on a sliding scale of annual income and family unit size. Even patients with insurance may be eligible for a lower rate. For more information on Barton's Helping Hands Program policy, go online to find a copy our financial assistance policy.

Examples of those who may eligible for a discount:

| <b>Number of people<br/>in household</b>       | <b>Annual<br/>household<br/>income</b> | <b>Eligible<br/>discount</b> |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Family of 4                                    | \$89,400                               | 25%                          |
| Retired Couple                                 | \$51,485                               | 50%                          |
| Single mother with<br>2 children               | \$55,590                               | 75%                          |
| Family of 4 w/<br>high insurance<br>deductible | \$55,875                               | 100%                         |

In addition to the Helping Hands program, Barton offers primary care and specialty physician services at the Barton Community Clinic using a similar sliding scale based on annual income and family unit size. This allows Barton to continue the tradition of offering preventative care, family planning and services for the ill or elderly at little or no cost to qualifying patients.

Barton Health is a nonprofit healthcare system, and as a part of our mission, we strive to deliver safe, high quality healthcare to our community through accessible health programs, including wellness lab draws, health fairs, lectures and discounts on our services for those who qualify. We provided more than \$4.2 million in charity care in 2010, which was as a result of providing low-cost options through our Helping Hands Program. Barton Memorial Hospital is here for our community and staffed 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week, for emergency care.

As the largest employer in the city of South Lake Tahoe, we are proud to employ more than 900 employees. At Barton we work together to provide consistently exceptional care to our employees, visitors and the community at large. As a nonprofit hospital, Barton provides emergency medical services to our visitors and community members without regard of their ability to pay, in addition to offering the Helping Hands Program mentioned above. Our physicians, nurses and staff specialize in pediatrics, women and men's health, emergency care, rehabilitation, orthopedics, general and specialty surgery, and serve the youngest patients in our Family Birthing Center to the oldest patients in our Skilled Nursing Facility. Prevention and education programs are developed and maintained to benefit the public and we provide leading-edge technology, necessary medical equipment, recruitment of the best and brightest physicians in the nation, and cover general operational costs such as food service, housekeeping, facility maintenance and improvement.

Barton Memorial Hospital's healthcare fees are less than a majority of California hospitals. As a rural facility, with the only emergency department and birthing center in the area – amongst many other critical medical services, we are here to serve our community. As businesses and government programs continue to struggle through these tough economic times, my hope is that individuals and families alike take advantage of our Helping Hands Program. We are here to continue to provide the best medical services and fulfill patients' needs right in their own backyard.

To find out more about Barton's Helping Hands Program, go online, call (530) 543.5908 or email [patientaccts@bartonhealth.org](mailto:patientaccts@bartonhealth.org).

*Dick Derby is vice president of finance at Barton Health. He is also the past president of the South Lake Tahoe Rotary Club, a board member of California Hospital Insurance and is a member of the Health Care Financial Management Association.*

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## **Opinion: S. Tahoe explains why it does what it does**

### **Open letter to the community:**

At the Sept. 15, 2011, special City Council meeting to discuss the city's projected \$5.2 million deficit, several members of the community made statements during public comment that could be construed as fact and thus, need clarification. But first, some background on the framework of the proposed fiscal year 2012 budget and the need to eliminate a \$5.2 million projected deficit.

- **In December 2010 a Citizen Survey was conducted of the community and resulted in the following:**

- o 85 percent indicated the city was headed in the wrong direction. In fact, the city of South Lake Tahoe ranked last among 267 other cities surveyed in this category. The survey clearly indicated the City needed and in fact was required, to make significant changes.



Tony O'Rourke

- o As a result of the survey, the City Council developed and adopted a Strategic Plan, Business Plan and Five-Year Financial Plan to head the city in the right direction. The Strategic Plan includes initiatives to improve our failing infrastructure, become fiscally sustainable, focus on economic development, strengthen partnerships and improve the public's trust.

- o The Five-Year Financial Plan identified average budget deficits of \$3.4 million between FY 2012-2016 and the need to reduce city expenses to "live within our means" but also invest in the community's aging infrastructure by proposing \$25 million to make substantial improvements to city roads and infrastructure over the next five years.

- o As a result of the Five-Year Financial Plan, the City Council adopted a Reorganization Plan in March that cut city expenses by \$10.2 million over the next five years and also included eliminating six senior management positions (redevelopment director, division fire chief, assistant parks and recreation director, public works director, assistant city

manager and police captain). Subsequent to the reorganization plan, the fire chief resigned and the position was frozen. The savings realized by eliminating and freezing these positions is over \$1.2 million per year. Three of the remaining directors were tasked with taking on the collective responsibility of these vacated positions and received an average 10 percent raise to so do (police-fire chief, community services director and finance director).

- o The proposed FY 2012 budget reorganization includes the elimination of up to 26 positions and contracting out for certain services. These actions will result in \$1.7 million in FY 2012 savings and \$2.5 million per year thereafter. The majority of these savings are from the fire and police departments reducing senior command hierarchy with little or no impact to front-line services.

- **Does the city use temporary employees for snow removal?**

- o The city has always hired seasonal (temporary) employees for snow removal because snow is a seasonal event and seasonal workers supplement the fulltime crews. Snowplow operators must possess specific qualifications for operating snowplow equipment. The city maintains a fulltime workforce of the most experienced workers to provide supervision oversight and training of snowplow drivers.

- **What is the source of the city's projected FY 2012 \$5.2 million deficit?**

- o \$1.8 million payment to the state of California to continue the city's redevelopment activities.

- o Decline in revenue due to the protracted economic downturn.

- o Escalating expenses, including employee salaries and benefits, which represent 65 percent of all operating expenses.

- **City of South Lake Tahoe has no plans to close the senior center or reduce recreation programs or services.**

- o In fact, the city is currently exploring additional service enhancements and programs. All current programs including the nutrition program, which is currently administered by El Dorado County, will continue without interruption. A letter from the mayor confirming no plans to close the senior center was posted at the center Sept. 19, 2011.

- o In addition, the city has no plans to eliminate or reduce other recreation programs or services. The city is exploring alternative service delivery options, which could potentially provide cost savings and enhanced programming.

- o In addition, the city's housing low-income programs will continue as they are, with no change in services to the low-income population impacted.

- **How does the city perform in terms of its collection of transient occupancy tax and vacation home rental fees?**



Click on image to see in full.

- o In the past several years, one of the impacts of the economic downturn has been an increase in delinquent transient occupancy taxes. The City has strengthened its revenue collection efforts for those lodging businesses who fail to pay the TOT owed to the city by utilizing a number of measures including, subpoenas and/or seizures of records, audits,

property liens, business shutdown, payment plans and other legal actions. The city has successfully collected or established court-ordered payment plans in most of these cases. As a result, the amount of delinquent TOT has decreased by 51 percent.

o Vacation home rentals pay both TOT and permit fees. The annual permit fees have remained consistent throughout the recession and TOT from vacation home rentals has increased over the last two years. However, to strengthen the enforcement of the required annual permits and payment of TOT, the city established a task force consisting of staff from the police department, Legal and Finance departments, and a local property management firm that rents VHRs. Their efforts have resulted in increased collaboration between the police community service officers, residents and neighborhood teams to identify VHRs operating without a permit, and in increased TOT reporting requirements for VHRs beginning next quarter.

• **Some people have suggested increasing taxes and fees to help the budget gap.**

o In the December 2010 survey, 70 percent of residents indicated they would not support any residential tax or fee increases. In addition, increasing taxes to avoid reducing expenses is a burden the taxpayers shouldn't have to bear. We need to cut our expenses as far as possible first, demonstrate our ability to perform at a level satisfactory to the citizenry and deliver results before asking more of the taxpayers.

o We are exploring other revenue enhancements including utility cut fees, business licenses fees and vacation home rental permit fees, but even an increase in one or more of these fees would generate several hundred thousand dollars, which is about 4 percent to 6 percent of the \$5.2 million deficit.

- **Retiree health benefits**

- o Retirees are provided the same health plan upon retirement as current employees at an average cost of \$14,000 per retiree or \$1.9 million annually. Retirees will continue to receive the same health care plan as active employees. In an attempt to control costs, employees are meeting to make health plan design changes that reduce costs by increasing health plan deductibles, changing the network provider and additional cost containment measures. The percentage retirees pay toward their premium, if any, will remain the same. Health care costs the city \$5.2 million annually and currently consumes 18 percent of the city's operating costs. To become fiscally sustainable, health care costs need to be better managed.

- **How sound is the city's general fund reserve policy of 25 percent?**

- o The City Council adopted a general fund reserve policy that requires no less than 25 percent of its general fund operating expenses be set aside in undesignated reserves, which equates to approximately three months (or 25 percent) of regular general fund operating expenditures "to provide for temporary financing for unanticipated extraordinary needs of an emergency nature; for example, costs related to a natural disaster or calamity, economic recession, or an unexpected liability created by Federal or State legislative action."

- o The Government Finance Officers Association recommends a council-authorized policy that, "should be assessed based upon a government's own specific circumstances... at a minimum, general-purpose governments, regardless of size, maintain unrestricted fund balance in their general fund of no less than two months (or 16.6 percent) of regular operating revenues or operating expenditures." A March 2009 survey conducted by members of the League of California Cities determined an average reserve policy of 27 percent of general fund working capital existed among the approximately 80 cities

that responded to the survey. In South Lake Tahoe's case, given the tourist-based nature of our economy and the lack of economic diversification, the 25 percent reserve policy standard is prudent given the discretionary nature of tourism and its general volatility verses more economically diversified cities.

Based on the measures the city has taken, the proposed FY 2012 budget, as well as the projected budgets for FY 2013 to FY 2016, are balanced, prudent, and responsive to the needs of the community.

Appreciation is expressed to the entire city staff and to the City Council for providing the leadership and strength to prevail in these challenging times and move the city in a direction that is sustainable and successful.

Sincerely,

**Tony O'Rourke, South Lake Tahoe city manager**

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## **Opinion: Chamber thankful for help with leadership program**

**To the community,**

Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce and the Leadership Lake Tahoe Task Force would like to offer a special thank you to Aston's Lakeland Village for providing transportation and meeting space for this year's Leadership Lake Tahoe class.

Leadership Lake Tahoe lasts through June 2012. Twenty-five students are taking part in an intensive 10-month experiential program to provide information, strategies, contacts, and

opportunities for personal and professional growth. Program topics cover key leadership issues and

skills including leadership orientation, public safety, economic development/redevelopment, government (Nevada and California, city and county), media/communication, environment/transportation, health care, social services/community resources, education, and tourism. Additionally, participants will take part in small group projects that will benefit the community.

**Emily Abernathy, chamber event coordinator**