

Opinion: Outlining importance of school superintendent

By Stephen A. Jennings

As we begin a new school year, I'm filled with a sense of enthusiasm and nostalgia. As you know, I have announced my retirement, which will be effective at the end of February, so I won't be completing the year with all of you. But that certainly doesn't change the fact each new school year is an exciting time for us all.

The search process for my replacement has begun in earnest, and as we go through this procedure it has come to my attention that many of you may not know exactly what a superintendent's job entails. I thought I'd take a few minutes to let you know what I do – and what my successor will be doing – in this very important position.

I think of a superintendent position as very similar to a CEO of a corporation. In the business world, a CEO is responsible for everything that takes place in his or her organization. So it is with the superintendent, and in our case, this corporation has a \$50 million budget with more than 400 employees. Our business and our passion is learning.

While every day brings a variety of tasks, encounters and challenges, my primary responsibility – in everything I do – is to ensure student learning, so that students may discover their abilities, embrace their talents, and explore their passions.

There are several key components to managing a school district. First and foremost of course is the educational and programming component, my primary focus each and every day. This is closely related to the financial factor: ensuring we have the appropriate resources to support our educational

programs is of utmost importance. Closely connected is the Human Resources component: we must ensure that we have the most highly qualified staff members and that they have proper working conditions and the appropriate environment to ensure learning at the highest level possible.

I also oversee many additional factors, such taking care of students who have special needs, as well as facilities, transportation, and other district departments—all components that relate to or support our learning community. Finally, ensuring that the district is following the appropriate procedures and regulations is perhaps as important as anything else I handle, because if this is not done, the educational and financial components can be compromised. It is a tightly interrelated system.

The school board is in place to set the policies for the district; this governing board – in our case a group of five people – hires the superintendent to make sure the policies are appropriately followed and that learning is taking place every day.

In many ways the superintendent is the face of the district, both within the community as well as outside the community as county or statewide business is conducted. Every day, a superintendent must focus on meeting the evolving needs of the students while providing the tools and the leadership for staff to provide the highest quality education. It's a challenging job but also extremely rewarding, and I'm honored to spend the last six months of my career in education here with you all at TTUSD. Let the school year begin.

Stephen A. Jennings is superintendent of schools for Tahoe Truckee Unified School District.

Opinion: Financial acts of kindness help LTCC students

By Melonie Guttry

Philanthropist Jessica Ledbetter continues to support Lake Tahoe Community College programs and students with her recent gift of scholarships. In 2008, Jessica gave a major gift to create the Ledbetter Terrace in memory of her parents Bev and Bill Ledbetter. She continued with a second major gift to revitalize the Lake Tahoe Demonstration Garden. The much-needed improvements included a refurbishment of the Interpretive Center, which is now named in memory of her sister Erica Faye Ledbetter.

Ledbetter's support didn't stop there as she came forward in August with third major gift, a scholarship also in the name of her sister Erica Faye.



Melonie Guttry

Jessica wanted to help LTCC students. Ledbetter's gift will provide scholarships to 12 women. This comes at a particularly good time with community college fees increasing from \$17 to \$24 a unit this fall. For a full-time student enrolling in 12 units, that's an \$84 per quarter increase not including books and class materials. For many students, this increase could be the difference between graduating on time or putting school off to work and save money.

“I was very excited because I can finish my degree in sociology this year,” said Ana Guzman, an Erica Faye Ledbetter Memorial Scholarship recipient. “I am very thankful for this scholarship and so is my family. I feel very honored that I was chosen.”

Karen Jaimes said, “I was actually very surprised and kind of relieved because I needed the money. I wasn’t sure I could enroll in the fall. If I met Jessica in person I would tell her it’s a great honor to meet such a generous person who helps the community and after I am finished I would like to give back to the community.”

Ledbetter’s commitment in supporting Lake Tahoe Community College and our students is a shining example of investing in our community. The 12 students she is helping this fall will enroll in classes knowing they have support from someone who cares about their future. Not only does an education last a lifetime, but to many students a scholarship is also the gift of a lifetime. Imagine the motivation Jessica has created with her gift of education.

For more information or do make a donation to the annual fund, contact Melonie Guttry at (530) 541.4660, ext. 245, email guttry@ltcc.edu or via regular mail: LTCC Foundation, One College Drive, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150.

Melonie Guttry is executive director of the LTCC Foundation.

Opinion: Suggestions to save

South Tahoe money

To the South Lake Tahoe City Council,

Councilmember Bruce Grego returns the \$937.50 to the city that the grand jury said was unlawful to receive.

No conference money for the City Council. Council takes the same cuts in benefits as city employees. No PERS for councilmembers. No line item in budget for the City Council.



Bill Crawford

Reduce the number of city paid holidays.

No city manager's gas allowance of \$500 a month. No gas allowance for city attorney.

No city employee dines at city expense.

Itemize monthly all budget transfers in and out of accounts.

Warrants to be in council packets for the public to see.

No hiring of outside lawyers and consultants. Staff is the expert(s).

Declare the Redevelopment Agency bankrupt. TOT belongs in the general fund. Tear city credit cards up.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: South Tahoe PUD sets the record straight

By Dennis Cocking

The board of directors of the South Tahoe PUD, going back to 2006, has made its position crystal clear on the purchase of Lukin's Water Company. It has been discussed many times in open session, has been part of annual public budget presentations, has been reported on by the local media, and has been discussed in the district's quarterly newsletter. It is not confusing nor is it a secret. But, just for the record, here it is again.

The district has never sought to buy the Lukins Water Company. The district's board of directors has taken the position that the district had no interest in purchasing the Lukins system if the cost of upgrading the system would be borne by the district's current customers. If a funding mechanism, other than the district's customers, could be secured, the district would consider the purchase.



Dennis
Cocking

Before Sept. 30, 2011, the district will be submitting, after consultation and agreement with Lukin's Water Company and the city of South Lake Tahoe, a pre-application for a California

Department of Public Health consolidation grant. This grant would allow for purchase of the system and funding to construct the necessary improvements to provide adequate fire protection in the current Lukin's service area. Should the pre-application make the first cut, we would be invited to submit a full application. This grant process is a very competitive one and many hurdles must be cleared before the district could be awarded the grant.

If the district were to be successful in obtaining the grant, it would be impossible, due to the conditions and controls the state places on grant administration, to use the funds for any other project or "other expenses." It just can't happen. Nor can any entity, including the state of California, "force" the district to purchase anything. No such mechanism exists.

The district has mutual aid water interties with Lukins, Tahoe Keys, Lakeside Mutual, and Edgewood water companies that provide two-way emergency water supply. Lukin's Water Company recently had water supplied through such an intertie due to a pump failure within their system. Lukins does not receive free water; they are being charged the same rate as any other water user. Since these interties are for emergency water supply, no connection fees apply, since water can potentially flow both ways. This arrangement is not unique to STPUD; it exists virtually everywhere within California. This type of operational information is very easily obtained with a phone call or, in many cases, with a visit to the district's website.

Finally, while I am dispelling rumors, district employees never have nor never will receive free water and sewer service. It is considered a gift of public funds and is expressly forbidden by law.

Dennis Cocking is public information officer for South Tahoe Public Utility District.

Opinion: Rules to follow during hunting season

By Armando Avina

With hunting season upon us, and increased citizen concern regarding target shooting in congested areas, the Washoe County Sheriff's Office would like to remind residents of county ordinances governing discharge of firearms in congested areas.

Washoe County Code 50.094 to 50.154 states that it is unlawful to discharge:

- * any gun, pistol, or rifle, with the exception of shotguns, air rifles, or BB guns, within 5,000 feet of an occupied dwelling.
- * Shotguns, air rifles, or BB guns within 1,000 feet of an occupied dwelling.
- * a firearm from, upon, over or across any federal or state highway or any county road or highway.
- * a firearm within a Nevada State Park, unless otherwise designated by the administrator.
- * Within the jurisdiction of the U.S. Forest Service, it is prohibited to discharge a firearm in or within 150 yards of a residence, building, campsite, developed recreation site or occupied area, or across or on a National Forest System road or a body of water adjacent thereto, or in a manner or place whereby any person or property is exposed to injury or damage as a result in such discharge, or into or within any cave.

If shooters follow those parameters; they are generally allowed to shoot in any area not designated as a “no shooting” or “congested area.” It is important to reiterate three key points:

A “congested area” is a geographic location where discharge of any firearm is prohibited. Because congested areas are generally densely populated, it has a high risk of personal injury.

A “restricted congested area” is a location where residents must be a minimum of 1,000 feet from any occupied dwelling. In restricted congested areas, residents are allowed to discharge shotguns, air rifles and BB guns. A person is not allowed to discharge any gun, pistol, rifle or any other firearm in this area.

A “non congested area” is a location where residents must be 5,000 feet away from an occupied dwelling. In these areas they may shoot guns, pistols, rifles, shotguns, air rifles, BB guns, or any other firearms.

With that in mind, the Washoe County Sheriff’s Office takes residents safety very seriously. Last year, the sheriff’s office received numerous complaints by homeowners, hikers, bicyclists, and off road vehicle enthusiasts in the Caughlin Ranch area concerning recreational shooters who discharged firearms close to residential areas. The Washoe County Sheriff’s Office, with assistance from the Washoe County and Reno Roads Departments, posted congested area signs and maps warning that shooting in a congested area could result in heavy fines.

Residents are encouraged to practice safe shooting in established and lawfully authorized and licensed rifle ranges, gun clubs or shooting gallery’s.

If citizens have concerns about activity that may be illegal, or dangerous, they should immediately call the Sheriff’s

Office at (775) 832.9276.

Armando Avina is a deputy with the Washoe County Sheriff's Office.

Opinion: Habitat for Humanity volunteers working the South Shore

To the community,

The South Lake Tahoe branch of Habitat for Humanity of El Dorado County had three projects this summer season. "A Brush with Kindness" is a program designed to help folks who cannot care for the exterior of their property. Minor repairs, paint and basic landscaping is provided, with the owners participation.

We have 20-plus volunteers available to help, and the local response to financial, services, and physical assistance is what makes the program work. Any donated funds are spent exclusively in South Lake Tahoe.

Thanks to all who helped.

Work will resume next spring, and we will be accepting applications until then.

For more information, call (530)541.4654 or (530) 577.7762.

Carolyn Meiers, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Recreation on USFS land helping California's economy

By John Heil

Outdoor recreation activities in California's national forests contributed \$2 billion to local economies and helped sustain an estimated 38,000 jobs in 2010.



The U.S. Forest Service's National Visitor Use Monitoring report released last month shows national forests attracted 170.8 million recreational visitors nationwide and sustained approximately 223,000 jobs in rural communities across the country.

"The Forest Service is proud to be a vital part of our local communities by providing both recreational pastimes and vital economic sustainability," said Randy Moore, Pacific Southwest regional forester. "Outdoor activities are important to California residents and to the visitors who use local hotels, restaurants, or buy groceries and gasoline in the communities in and around the national forests."

National forests in California received nearly 30 million visitors in 2010. The Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, Inyo, Angeles, San Bernardino and Shasta-Trinity National Forests had a combined total of approximately 19 million visitors.

National Forests in California account for 17 percent of National Forest recreation nationwide. The forests offer unique outdoor recreation opportunities such as Mt. Shasta,

Lake Tahoe, Mt. Whitney, and the Big Sur coast, as well as important ecological and prehistoric sites.

“As we seek to improve the health, diversity and productivity of the nation’s forests and grasslands, we have made ecological restoration a top priority,” Moore said. “We want to provide quality recreational experiences and real economic and social growth for generations to come.”

According to the U.S. Forest Service’s National Visitor Use Monitoring Report:

- Recreation activities on National Forests and Grasslands sustain 223,000 jobs in the rural communities within 50 miles of the national forests and grasslands, where visitors purchase goods and services for their recreational activity.
- Visitors spend \$13 billion directly in those communities within 50 miles of the national forests and grasslands.
- Visitor satisfaction is very high, with an overall satisfaction rate of 94 percent.
- Approximately 83 percent of visitors are content with the value received for any fees paid.
- Nearly 95 million visitors (over 55 percent) come to a forest to primarily engage in physical activity.

Results of the National Visitor Use Monitoring Report are online.

John Heil works for the U.S. Forest regional office in Vallejo.

Opinion: S. Tahoe council meeting another disappointment

By Kathryn Reed

Telling your boss how you feel, what you believe and how to do things differently is never easy.

I know. I've been fired for having a contrary opinion and refusing to change my ideology.

I know what it's like to wonder how the mortgage is going to get paid. I know what it's like to wonder how to get a job in a profession that just keeps cutting positions.

I admire the people who spoke at Thursday night's special City Council meeting about the 2011-12 budget. It's never easy to talk in public, and even harder to do so in such a contentious atmosphere and before people who can eliminate your job.

But shame on them for waiting until now to voice their concerns. And it's even more shameful the council did not insist a session on the budget be conducted more than 16 days before the document is supposed to be the law of the land.

Yes, budgets are fluid and can be changed. But fundamentally they speak to the desires of the council.

No one still really knows what those five stands for or wants in this document. We know they don't like making cuts. It would be a bit scary if they did get pleasure out of doing so. After all, we are talking about nearly two dozen people who could be without a job in a month.

No one wants our city's 16.4 percent unemployment rate to grow.

But something or someone has to give.

Listening to the nearly 30 who spoke Sept. 15 I heard conflicting thoughts. On the one hand, employees-retirees expressed an overwhelming sentiment to preserve that sense of community they feel. And on the other hand, they seemed to expect others to preserve it; that by adopting the proposed budget, it would be lost.

Where is their sense of responsibility to the community beyond showing up to work every day? They are not talking at council meetings – I'm there to know. They are not writing letters or guest columns to/for *Lake Tahoe News* to share with others what is going on, their thoughts, desires and vision. They may be writing comments on *LTN*, but without using their name, is anyone really paying attention or caring?

Employees sounded a bit like victims last night. That's too bad.

I'm a firm believer the person on the front line knows best what needs to change in an organization. Speak up. If management doesn't listen, go to the council. If council doesn't listen, go to the media to reach taxpayers. You may not get your way, but everyone deserves to be heard.

But as the cliché goes, if you are not part of the solution, then you are part of the problem. It will be interesting to see what solutions, if any, are forthcoming by the staff in the next week.

The council on Thursday sounded like any other elected body about to level the ax – we're sorry, we have to do this.

Come on you five – we expected change, we expected leadership. Stop being so disappointing. Stop looking like you are led by staff and instead be the leaders. Remember, you are the boss of the city manager – not the other way around.

Nothing on Thursday indicated this is the budget you want. If it had been, you would have adopted it and ideally said why.

Management has done its job. Whether you agree with it, well, that's another story. But they were tasked with closing the budget gap and did so. Kudos to them.

The council will likely adopt the budget Sept. 27 at the 6pm special meeting. Between now and then is when people better start coming up with solutions for the financial problems as well as speak up. And not just employees. That budget is for the whole city – every resident of this town. Whining taxpayers who don't speak out are even worse than employees who don't speak.

Opinion: Cutting jobs helps budget, hurts more important areas

By Hagit Limor

The phone started ringing just after noon on a busy Tuesday in June. The axe was falling again.

Friends at Gannett who had suffered through multiple rounds of cutbacks, furloughs and layoffs had just gotten word that 700 more of their friends were about to get the call no one supporting a family, trying to pay off a car or struggling with a student loan wants to hear. Heads were about to roll.

Each time their phones rang, they wondered: Is this the source I worked for months, nights and weekends, so I could write the story my community needs to know, which incidentally, may help

my company sell more newspapers? Or is this the call that will help my company save more money by eliminating my livelihood?

No one questions the challenges facing media outlets today, most especially on the print end of the business. We've all read the numbers on circulation and advertising revenue. We're also reading some other numbers with which you can't argue.

Gannett CEO Craig Dubow actually got a 21 percent bump on his performance bonus alone in 2010, a \$1.75 million payout as part of a total compensation package of \$9.4 million. That goes a long way toward 700 jobs, the salaries for which rarely reach into six figures.

I'm not picking on Mr. Dubow here. He's not the only media CEO earning millions while laying off thousands over the past few years. I'm not saying he or any of those leaders relish the thought of impacting people's lives so significantly, though it must be nice to delegate that chore downhill.

What I'm saying is that it smells.

No journalist gets in this business to get rich. Most of us live on the low end of middle-class life. We do this because we believe our jobs are essential to our democracy. We serve as watchdogs over the thieves and cheats who would reign even more freely if they didn't have to deal with a free press. We serve to protect our communities.

Hagit Limor is the 2010-11 president of SPJ. She is an investigative reporter at WCPQ-TV in Cincinnati.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Costly wars should lead deficit-cutting panel's list

By Joel Brinkley

As the congressional debt-reduction “super committee” begins work this month, it had better take into account trillions of dollars in anticipated war costs that no one in Washington seems willing to acknowledge.

For decades now (and probably much longer), government estimates of war costs strove not to count numerous secondary expenses that result from combat, like veterans' health care – or the \$20 billion wasted in Pakistan. Officials find the real numbers embarrassing. A recent Congressional Budget Office report, for example, placed the total costs of the Iraq and Afghan wars at \$1.415 trillion, based solely on congressional appropriations specifically dedicated to those wars.

But a new academic study counts everything and puts the wars' full price at about \$4 trillion – almost all of it deficit spending. That's nearly 30 percent of the nation's \$14 trillion debt. Even that, the study's authors say, doesn't include some costs that cannot be tallied, like those in the intelligence agencies' black budgets, or the hundreds of millions in impromptu “death gratuities” paid to families of Americans and some foreigners killed in war.

The more disturbing finding, however, is that in the coming years the wars threaten to cost the nation another \$2 trillion – in interest payments on war debt as well as continuing medical expenses for 150,000 wounded veterans.

Joel Brinkley, a Pulitzer Prize-winning former foreign correspondent for the New York Times, is the author of

"Cambodia's Curse: The Modern History of a Troubled Land." E-mail him at brinkley@foreign-matters.com.

Read the whole story