

Opinion: Police enforcement reduces accidents in South Lake Tahoe

By Shannon Laney

Over the summer, the South Lake Tahoe Police Department conducted a directed traffic enforcement program targeting violators in residential neighborhoods. This was a three-pronged program that included the local media, officers targeting specific problem areas, and an avenue for our public to have input into our efforts through email and phone calls.

Since June 14, we have written a total of 181 citations and 266 written warnings citywide. The majority of these traffic stops were within the targeted neighborhoods. In the same time frame we responded to three injury traffic collisions and 11 non-injury traffic collisions.

From June 14, 2010, to Sept. 4, 2010, we wrote 209 citations and 243 warnings citywide. During that time, we responded to 21 injury traffic collisions and 24 non-injury traffic collisions.

That is an 85 percent reduction in injury collisions and a 54 percent reduction in non-injury collisions. There are several factors that can be attributed to the reduction, including a late start to summer weather, tourism and road construction. However, it also shows that directing our efforts toward problem areas along with the help of our local media bringing attention to our efforts and public input has the greatest impact overall.

For the next couple of weeks, we will be shifting gears. One major problem that has been identified is bicyclists. A large part of our injury collisions include bicycle versus car

collisions.

Here's the law:

California Vehicle Code section 21200(a), "Every person riding a bicycle upon a highway has all the rights and is subject to all the provisions applicable to the driver of a vehicle". In other words, bicyclists must follow the same traffic laws as does the driver of a motor vehicle including stop signs, stop lights, riding on the roadway in the same direction as traffic flows and not ride while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Anyone riding a bicycle under the age of 18 must also wear a helmet. The South Lake Tahoe Police Department does have free bicycle helmets for our youth. Just stop by the station and request a youth bicycle helmet.

A bicycle riding at night must also have a white headlight and a red reflector to the rear, California Vehicle Code section 21201(d)(1),(2).

Shannon Laney is the traffic supervisor and sergeant for the South Lake Tahoe Police Department and can be reached at (530) 542.6104 slaney@cityofslt.us.

Opinion: It takes everyone to keep Tahoe waterways clean

By Kirsten Lindquist

On Sept. 17 from 9am to noon, dedicated volunteers around Lake Tahoe will roll up their sleeves for a clean and clear lake with the 2011 Great Sierra River Cleanup. This annual cleanup throughout the Sierra Nevada is sponsored by the Sierra Nevada

Conservancy and runs in tandem with the California Coastal Commission's Coastal Cleanup Day, the largest volunteer event in California.

Last year, more than 200 volunteers basinwide turned out to pick-up trash on beaches and riverbanks, keeping 2,642 pounds of litter from funneling into Lake Tahoe. This year the planning committee is hoping for even more volunteers – including you.

The Great Sierra River Cleanup began as a regionwide effort three years ago to protect Sierra Nevadan watersheds from easily preventable pollution – trash – and to support the cleanup efforts on the coast. The rivers of the Sierra Nevada are the headwaters which provide almost 65 percent of the state's developed water needs before reaching their ultimate destination, the Pacific Ocean. The cleanliness of watersheds here in the mountains not only impacts drinking water quality, ecosystem health and recreation locally, it also has broader implications for the health of California's water supply and coastal ecosystems.



Cigarette
butts are
always
something that
fill trash
bags on the
cleanup day.
Photo/LTN file

Last year, 4,500 volunteers collected about 151 tons of trash, appliances, car parts and other debris throughout the Sierra Nevada.

Residents of the Lake Tahoe Basin are known for their love of the outdoors; people choose to live here because of its natural beauty. Unfortunately, that doesn't mean the streams and beaches are always pristine. At one Great Sierra River Cleanup site in Tahoe last year, 19 bags of trash were collected in addition to five couches.

"There's a greater need here for vigilance against litter than people may realize," explains Ellen Nunes, programs director of Clean Tahoe. "Even when littering is unintentional, the plastic bags, cans, the bear messes left uncleaned, they all add up. And it really takes a whole village to keep itself litter-free, even if only a few are contributing to the mess."

Clean Tahoe, the local nonprofit responsible for numerous clean-up programs and advocacy around the lake, started the Tahoe chapter of the Great Sierra River Cleanup from the start of the campaign in 2009. This year the Sierra Nevada Alliance, Tahoe Resource Conservation District, California Tahoe Conservancy, Tahoe-Baikal Institute and California Trout have rejoined Clean Tahoe to put together the event. South Tahoe Refuse is also sponsoring the event, allowing disposal of trash collected free of charge.

"It's exciting to see the enthusiasm for cooperation among so many groups in town—from local and state agencies, businesses to nonprofits," says Reyna Yagi, AmeriCorps member at the Sierra Nevada Alliance.

Seventeen cleanup sites have been designated for the Tahoe cleanup this year – including locations on the North Shore as well as the South Shore. Community groups, businesses, families and individuals are all encouraged to participate. The Boys and Girls Club of South Lake Tahoe, Harrah's,

Kiwanis, Sierra Nevada College and Great Basin Institute Conservation Corps are among those already signed-on. But the cleanup committee is always in need of more volunteers.

“We’ve had volunteers from 18 months to 80 years old; every person makes a difference,” Nunes says.

To sign-up, go online. Unregistered volunteers are also encouraged to participate at the drop-in site at Regan Beach in South Lake Tahoe, where the volunteer appreciation after-party and raffle will also be located. For more details, contact Ellen Nunes at cleantahoe@sbcglobal.net.

Kirsten Lindquist works for Tahoe RCD.

9/11: Bracing for news from family working in NYC

Publisher’s note: *This is one in a 12-part series running from Sept. 1-12 about how Lake Tahoe is tied to 9/11.*

By Jessie Marchesseau

My alarm went off at 6am. It was Sept. 11, 2001, five days after my sister Summer’s 24th birthday.

I was not sure if she had received the gift I had sent yet, a small gold kaleidoscope with a colorful glass wheel on the end. I had a habit of sending gifts late.

Summer lived in Elizabeth, N.J., about 15 miles from the heart of New York City, and 2,700 miles from my home in Genoa. She worked in Manhattan and would have caught the train to Penn Station more than an hour ago. I had visited her for two weeks

that May and we had ridden that train several times.



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9/11.

Now, however, I was back home in Genoa and had to be to work in half an hour. I was a cart washer at the Genoa Lakes golf course, and though I hated the early hours, I did appreciate the free golf.

After dressing and grabbing a quick breakfast, I jumped in my car for the morning commute. At about a mile on a country road, it was considerably less time-consuming than Summer's.

As I started on my way, it was clear that this morning's radio content was different than the usual music selection. In fact, there was no music at all. Just people talking about a horrible plane crash in New York City, buildings falling, people dying and possible terrorists.

It only took a few minutes to get to work. I pulled my car into the usual space set aside for employees, but could not bring myself to turn off the engine. I sat there, frozen in my car, listening to every word they were saying on the radio, trying to comprehend.

My first thought was of my sister. She was there, in the city under attack. I knew from my trip a few months before that she worked blocks from the World Trade Center, miles even. I also

knew the rest of my family did not know this.

As I sat in my car, paralyzed by the news, my parents, brother and grandparents were in Montana, glued to their televisions.

“My initial thought was that she’s not OK,” my grandmother recalls of that day. “And grandpa was just a nervous wreck. He paced the floor continually; he was just so sure something had happened to her.”

My mother, like me, retained a little more optimism.

“At first I thought, New York’s a big city; she’s probably not close by. But I couldn’t get ahold of her to find out,” my mom said. “But the more I watched the news, the more I thought she might be nearby.”

My sister had visited the World Trade Center a number of times. The ticket office there offered Broadway show tickets without waiting in line, and the restaurants had decent food. Her birthday being only a few days earlier, Summer and some friends were planning to celebrate that evening with dinner and a show.



Jessie
Marchesseau,
right, at her
sister,
Summer’s,
wedding.

As soon as my mother heard the news, she tried to contact

Summer, her oldest child, but to no avail. All the phone lines in the New York area were down. She tried numerous times over the next few hours, as did my grandparents.

My dad remembers calling Summer maybe a dozen times throughout the morning using his cell phone or a landline whenever there was one nearby.

"You just worry yourself sick until you find out," he said.

Finally, I turned off the engine and walked hurriedly toward the cart barn, my thoughts racing. Did my family know what was happening? Did my boyfriend know? He was probably still in bed. Did the people at work know? And was my sister really OK?

As I walked in, five minutes late, I was reprimanded for my tardiness. I did not care. Didn't they know I had a sister in New York? Didn't they know what was happening? I wanted to go home and call my family and watch the news.

As the morning dragged on, I busied myself at work, and, much like my parents, kept telling myself Summer was fine. I had no access to a phone and spent the entire shift impatiently anticipating my release.

My mother and father also went to work that morning. Staying home was not going to do them any good, and Montana was not under attack.

At the office, coworkers asked my mother about Summer. They knew she lived in the New York area and wondered if she was safe.

"You always worry when your kids are not close by," my mother said, "especially when you see something like that in their neighborhood. And you get more worried as the day goes by and you can't get ahold of them."

My grandparents, on the other hand, were home, watching the incessant news coverage, worrying, crying and praying.

It was not until sometime around noon or 1pm that my parents received a phone call. My sister was fine. Cell phones were still down around New York, but she had managed to get through using a payphone at a nearby school. The call was short; a line of people were waiting to use the payphone, but she wanted everyone to know she was fine.

"Oh god, it was such a relief, it was just such joy," my grandmother said of the news. "... we had always said we were so lucky that we had never lost any of our grandchildren, and thought maybe our luck had run out."

What the rest of us did not know that morning was that my sister had not gone to work on Park Avenue as usual. She had not gone to work at all.

"It was just one of those mornings," she said. "One of those mornings when you get up, and nothing is going right, and you're running late."

In her small basement apartment in New Jersey, Summer was getting ready for work while watching the Fox 5 news. She saw the footage of the first plane hitting the World Trade Center.

"I looked at it, but I didn't think anything of it," she recalled. "I don't know why. I was like, 'god that's horrible, but I still gotta get to work.'"

Thinking there must be some issues with air traffic control, Summer hopped in the car en route to the train station, still determined to go to work. She remembers listening to Howard Stern on the radio, a very serious, humor-free Howard Stern, covering every second of what was going on: the Pentagon, Pennsylvania, the second plane.

"That's when I thought, 'this is scary, I'm not going to go into the city today,'" she said.

She had already taken time off work to fly to Montana two days

later. With airports shut down and the city in wounded chaos, Summer decided to start her trip early. She left that day by car.

On that cross country drive, she recalls seeing evidence of patriotism displayed everywhere and how the nation visibly banded together.

However, returning to the city the following week was when it really hit her, Summer said. As she stepped off the train into Penn Station like she had done so many times before, she stepped into a very different New York. This one had missing person posters plastered everywhere, most of them handmade. The once bustling city streets were quiet. Train station parking lots were filled with cars no one picked up for days, weeks. There was no one to pick them up.

Though she was in the city daily, my sister did not visit Ground Zero until Thanksgiving of that year. The site was still smoldering, and the smell sickening. Missing person flyers still posted.

The aftermath, she says, was almost worse than the tragedy itself: the change in the city, the somberness and those faces staring back at you from the ever present flyers.

Our family is lucky; we are all still here to tell our story of that day, to remember and to be grateful. Many were not so lucky. But whether you lost someone close to you or not, here we are 10 years later, still feeling the aftermath of that day: Sept. 11, 2001.

Jessie Marchesseau is a freelance writer living in South Lake Tahoe.

Opinion: Paying attention to vehicles can prevent a wildfire

By Teri Mizuhara

Did you know that keeping your vehicle up to date on its maintenance schedules can prevent wildfires? Yes, by making sure all your vehicles are in good working order you can reduce the potential of wildland fires occurring.

Recent examples of wild fires caused by vehicles are clearly visible in El Dorado County along Highway 50, Bass Lake Road, Gold Hill Road and Cameron Park Drive. In Amador County recent fire scars can be seen along highways 49 and 88 and Ridge Road where vehicles caused strings of wildland fires.

“When a vehicles engine is not well maintained, the exhaust system can become overtaxed thereby allowing fuel to enter the exhaust system which in turn overheats the catalytic convertor that melts and disintegrates. Pieces of the catalytic convertor exit the muffler at about 1200°F and can bounce into the dried grass along the edge of roads and start fires” says fire equipment manager Scott Hogan of the Amador-El Dorado Unit of CalFire.

“Another common cause of wildland fires occurs when tires that are improperly inflated (too little or too much pressure) blow out and literally shred into pieces and bounce off the road coming to rest in the dried vegetation which during summer months can catch fire. You can see an example of this in El Dorado County along Highway 50 in Placerville near the Ray Lawyer overpass,” says fire investigator Capt. Spec. Tom Oldag. “The fire along the westbound lane of Highway 50 in Cameron Park occurred when a transmission failed and dropped out of a vehicle being towed.”

Towing vehicles, boats, campers, Jet Skis, etc., place added stress on a vehicles transmission and when that transmission hasn't been properly maintained it can spell disaster.

Dan Stark of the California Highway Patrol adds, "If someone is having car trouble, we encourage them to find a safe place to stop, such as a paved shoulder or parking area. They should avoid pulling off into the weeds if at all possible because this can cause a fire. Drivers should also be wary of driving long distances on a flat tire because the tire will detached from the rim and could cause a fire under the right circumstances. Best practice is for the driver to drive a short distances at slow speeds to find a place to park."

Hogan said, "Driving is something we do all the time, however we don't always give it much thought. A well maintained vehicle helps ensure that you won't end up on the side of the road with a trail of fires behind. This also saves you money, the better the engine runs the less fuel is wasted."

Teri Mizuhara works for CalFire.

9/11: Helping at Ground Zero – a life altering experience

Publisher's note: *This is one in a 12-part series running from Sept. 1-12 about how Lake Tahoe is tied to 9/11.*

By Solange Schwalbe

On Dec. 20, 2001, I traveled to New York City to celebrate my annual Christmas holiday that I have traditionally done since 1980. Only, this time the world had changed. Not only were the

World Trade Center Towers and the five other WT buildings destroyed, the destruction changed the face of the entire world.

The towers were a part of my Christmas tradition. Losing them was like losing a friend you look forward to seeing once a year.

After Christmas Day, my friends and I embarked on a journey that would change my life.



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9/11.

We visited the perimeter of Ground Zero like thousands of other people. I was taking photos of what used to be there. Of nothing. I don't know why.

When I realized what I was doing, I turned to my friends and asked about volunteering. Suddenly, I was full speed ahead to do just that.

Salvation Army has a 24-hour respite center that offered food, counseling, supplies, massage, anything the rescue workers may need. The food was rich and wonderful. All of the local restaurants donated their high-calorie dishes. Volunteers from Salvation Army served and cleaned-up the dining area 24-hours a day. Three shifts. I worked mornings, 7am-3pm.

Busing tables, I was able to connect with so many rescue workers. I would say, "Hi, my name is Solange, but call me 'Hollywood' – it's so much easier!" When I go Jeeping in the Rubicon, my handle is Hollywood. Everyone called me Hollywood.

A week before my time was up, a man came up to me and offered me a job because I could talk to anyone. He said his workers would listen to me. "What? I'm a sound editor in feature films. I don't belong here. I've never worn a hardhat in my entire life."

Two weeks of training and I was working with pay in the Pit for three months. My dad thought I was still volunteering.

I worked as a safety monitor in WTC6. This building was located in the northwest corner of the "Bathtub". It was built against the North Slurry Wall. Tower One fell on WTC6. In order to demolish the rest of WTC6, the Slurry Wall needed to be reinforced. My job was Safety Monitor for 30 drillers for a "Confined Space" – like a mine, no air and no way out. We were located underneath the debris pile of Tower One.

The being of my life was put into a box, put into the closet, shut the door and walk away. I ate, breathed, laughed, cried, wore, felt, saw Ground Zero 16 hours a day. Every day. No days off.



Solange
Schwalbe says
rebuilding her
house after
the Angora

Fire was less stressful because of her experiences at Ground Zero.

The sight of the destruction was so overwhelming that we would use humor to get around the pit. I'd get a call on the radio, "Hey Hollywood, what's your 20?" "I'm at the pool boss, by the diving board!" The sound was overwhelming. Loud all the time with heavy-duty excavators and vehicles. The "Back-up Beeps" were heard all the time. The Nextel Chirps were always going off. The drone was never-ending.

Touch. What looks like dirt was really Zone Dust. Cement, glass, metal, and every possible element of our lives pulverized around us. It was really sticky and it smelled bad. The smell was like disgusting burnt hair. Everything was chemically and biologically based. Hideous.

The past 10 years has been way too difficult. My life in Lake Tahoe was put on hold. I did not work for two years. I stayed with my dad until his wife kicked me out just after the second anniversary of 9/11. I was so distraught I actually learned how it felt to not want to be around anymore. Never have I felt that. It's the sickest feeling I have ever felt.

Thank God one of my colleagues hired me on to his movie, and I landed a teaching gig that allowed me to get a place to live.

In 2005, I was diagnosed with a blood clot in the base of my brain. Ground Zero?

In 2007, my home burned down in the Angora Fire along with 253 other homes. Digging through my ashes for six weeks was like my own personal Ground Zero. This time I was digging for my own possessions. I rebuilt out of anger. My new house is beautiful.

I have my career back as a motion picture sound editor in feature films, and I am still teaching at Video Symphony in Burbank.

I will be attending the 10th anniversary of the terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center like I have every year. The biggest difference this year is that because of the political presence (including President Obama), the families of the victims are the only people who will be able to attend the ceremonies. No firefighters, no cops, no EMS, no rescue workers, no volunteers. If it were my decision, due to the lack of room at the site because of the new construction of the Freedom Tower, the ceremonies would be at Madison Square Garden for everyone. We could have a procession from Ground Zero to MSG.

Every year I am at the WTC Cross at 8am on 9/11. This year the WTC Cross has been moved underground for the new memorial. I am devastated. This will be the first year that I will not be able to be at the Cross.

I feel an incredible amount of anxiety getting ready to travel to New York City for two weeks. There are many events planned for the week prior to 9/11. I will probably not attend any of them. My main focus is to see and be with my Ground Zero family. We all worked together in the pit.

I have been able to heal from the Angora Fire. I will never get over Ground Zero. I have the WTC Cross tattooed on my shoulder. I wear my Cross chain every day. Ground Zero will always be a part of me. I suffer from anxiety disorder because of it. I fear nothing. Things don't matter anymore. How significant a person is in my life has changed. I always wanted to be friends with everyone. Now, I choose a few. My perspective, priorities and how I respond to events have totally changed. I'm more compassionate, less trusting.

How I dealt with the Angora Fire would have been completely

different if I had not experienced Ground Zero. I would have been the “victim” in a pity party the whole time. Instead, I felt angry but empowered.

I am not afraid to die.

Opinion: Now is the time to prepare for a disaster

By Trista Cunningham

With this being National Preparedness Month, the American Red Cross Capital Region Chapter is calling on families, businesses, schools and organizations to take steps now to become better prepared for the next emergency or disaster.

Disasters can strike at any time – from earthquakes to wildfires to terrorist attacks like those that occurred on 9/11 10 years ago. National Preparedness Month provides our nation with the opportunity to remember the victims and honor those who responded, and to make a renewed commitment to being better prepared for the future.

“We all must do what we can to prepare our families and make our communities ready for the next emergency” said Christy Woods, director of preparedness for the Capital Region Chapter. “Everyone can take three key action steps to get started: build a kit, make a plan, and be informed.”

Emergency preparedness kits should include enough supplies for at least three days in case you have to evacuate. Water (one gallon per person, per day), nonperishable food, a flashlight, battery-powered or hand-crank radio, extra batteries, a first

aid kit, a seven-day supply of medications, a multipurpose tool, sanitation and personal hygiene items and copies of important personal documents should go in every kit. The Red Cross also recommends having at least two weeks worth of supplies at home. A variety of emergency preparedness kits, first aid kits and other supplies are available online.

All members of the household should work together on an emergency plan. Designate a meeting place right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency like a fire. Each person should know how to reach other members of the household. The plan should also include an out-of-area emergency contact person, and a location where everyone should meet if they can't go home.

People should be informed about what types of disasters are most likely to occur where they live and how local authorities will contact you in the event of a disaster. First aid and CPR/AED training empowers individuals with the confidence and skills to respond to health emergencies in case advanced medical help is delayed.

"We have learned from previous disasters that the government, communities and organizations like the Red Cross will never be big enough to do it all in every disaster," Woods said. "Every person, business, school and house of worship must be prepared to take care of themselves and their neighbors in an emergency."

Severe weather, power outages and water main breaks can happen anytime. Throughout the year, the Red Cross offers programs to help people be prepared. The "Do More Than Cross Your Fingers" campaign, featuring Jamie Lee Curtis, makes it easy for people to prepare for emergencies, starting with how to customize their emergency kits. The "Ready When the Time Comes" program trains employees from corporations and mobilizes them as a community-based volunteer force when disaster strikes. "Be Red Cross Ready" is a web-based interactive tutorial that teaches

people how to be ready for emergencies.

In addition, because up to 40 percent of businesses fail following a man-made or natural disaster, the Red Cross developed the Ready Rating Program. Ready Rating is a free, self-paced, web-based membership program that measures how ready businesses, organizations and schools are to deal with emergencies. Members receive customized feedback on how they can improve their efforts. The program is designed for those who are in the beginning stages of planning for emergencies as well as those who have already done so and want confirmation on their preparedness level. It gives these groups ideas of what they can do to better prepare themselves for the next emergency or disaster.

No one can predict where or when the next large disaster will strike, but preparedness steps taken today can save lives and livelihoods tomorrow. People can contact their local Red Cross or go online to learn what steps they should take to be ready when emergencies strike.

Trista Cunningham works for the American Red Cross.

9/11: Composure in tragedy despite knowing the dead

Publisher's note: *This is one in a 12-part series running from Sept. 1-12 about how Lake Tahoe is tied to 9/11.*

By Lorenzo Gigliotti

During a recent interview a reporter noted a lithograph depicting the flag raising at the site of the World Trade

Center following the events of Sept. 11, 2001, which led to a discussion of what I was doing on that fateful day, after which I agreed to write a brief column recounting my memory of that day in our nation's history.

Sept. 11, 2001, I was in my third year as fire chief for the city of Grandview, a first ring suburb of Kansas City, Mo. I arrived at my office in Fire Station 1 at about 6am, and like most mornings parked behind the station and walked through the apparatus bays to the administrative wing of the building. As I was headed to my office to change into workout wear, I found the oncoming and off-going crews glued to the television set which was in the space set aside for physical fitness. Earlier that morning, at 7:59am Eastern time, American Airlines Flight 11, a Boeing 767, crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center.

I recall thinking what a tragic accident.



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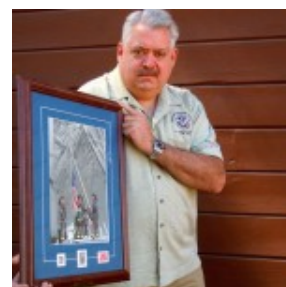
However, within about two minutes, a second aircraft, United Airlines Flight 175, another fully-fueled Boeing 767, crashed into the South Tower of the World Trade Center.

I recall being shocked, thinking that this was an intentional act and that we were under some sort of attack.

I contacted my boss, the city administrator, at home to discuss what had occurred. This led to a full day of meetings discussing our preparedness and security levels, not only as a small city within the Kansas City metropolitan area, but the security and preparedness level for the metro area as a whole.

Asked by the reporter if I knew anyone who perished that fateful day, it caused me to recall an experience I had 13 years beforehand.

In June 1988, I found myself standing in a long line waiting to check in at the registration desk, having just departed the bus which delivered 40 of us, fire service professionals from around the country, from the Baltimore/Washington International Airport to the campus of the National Fire Academy to enjoy the next two weeks of coursework in executive development. The National Fire Academy is contained within the National Emergency Training Center that is located on the site that was the Saint John's College for women located in Emmitsburg, Md.



Lorenzo
Gigliotti

Before the campus was remodeled in the late 1980s, students were housed in communal dorms with anywhere from two to seven students sharing large dorm rooms; bathrooms were located in the halls; and meals were served in the "chow" hall which was and still is centrally located on the campus.

At 11 this particular evening, I completed the check-in process and was assigned a room in "C" dorm where I found

myself in a double occupancy room with a gentleman from the New York Fire Department. I got to know this gentleman over the next two weeks. His name was Peter Ganci, and he was, at that time a captain with the fire department of New York. Peter's career progressed to his appointment as the "Chief of the Department" which is the highest uniformed rank with the New York Fire Department. Chief Ganci was among the 343 firefighters killed during the terrorist attacks on the United States on Sept. 11, 2001.

I have been known to use the catch phrases like "the world is a small place" or "the fire service is a small fraternity," but little did I know how small until I recalled this chain of events that certainly changed my life.

Lest we forget – 343.

Lorenzo Gigliotti served as the fire chief for South Lake Tahoe from January 2005 to September 2011.

Opinion: 'Miracle' at STHS opens to round of applause

By Robert Schimmel

Was this a "miracle" at 6,300 feet? After all, no crash landing, no one bailed out and appearances are that continued success will follow. Can this really happen? Absolutely, and if you haven't heard or read about it by now, then allow me to give the increasingly popular and lyrical acronym call: TADA!

This is music to the ears of everyone I've spoken to regarding the Tahoe Arts and Design Academy at South Tahoe High School

whose grand opening Aug. 26 was clearly not the result of a miracle, though Wendy David, president of LTUSD board, may have required one given the ponderous scissors she had for “cutting” the ribbon. Well done.



Robert
Schimmel

Let's start from the beginning of the evening, 5pm, when refreshments were served to lots of parents, students, LTUSD folks, representatives from various agencies and nonprofit organizations, well-wishers, and other interested parties, like me, who were there to learn more, soak up the glamour and witness the unveiling and hopeful triumph of this visionary project. I have not been closely involved and wondered if this was going to turn out to be just another well-meant project that cost a bunch to start but somehow got derailed or had to settle for less. Well, from the people I chatted with during the evening and based on the tour of the facilities, nothing could be further from the truth.

The basic financial facts I gained while seated comfortably in the beautiful new theater, with lighting and stage options to die for, are that this entire TADA complex cost \$9 million of which more than \$4.5 million came from state grants, and what I believe were some tireless efforts by Ivone Larson, STHS principal. The balance came from the all-important Measure G (November 2008).

Wow! Now that is a miracle these days, and perhaps that's the key – these days. According to Steve Morales, the TADA project

manager and LTUSD facilities director, this huge undertaking began as a viable vision and concept more than seven years ago and benefited from some great planning as well as fortuitous economic timing plus smaller successes along the way that actually began with developing relationships and strategies as far back as 1994. He also acknowledged the very positive LTUSD board and incredible amount of work required from an equally incredible group of talented and committed staff, architects, engineers, and others.

During the initial festivities I finally met Bill Roby, the director of the El Dorado County Community Foundation, who has been so instrumental in granting funds to numerous arts and other groups in Tahoe with the help of its Lake Tahoe cabinet members. He treated me to the welcome news of EDCCF's good year and continued growth that, in my opinion, should bode well for more involvement and help here in Tahoe for appropriately targeted grants and funding.

As I wound my way through the facilities mesmerized by the Hollywood technologies, a few "wait and watch" thoughts crossed my mind. This is a bit of a honeymoon phase now with implementation coming right up and results down the road, so this community and those on the Board must stay vigilant re all the skills our kids need to maximize this awesome facility. While emulating "a field of dreams" can be a risk, let's hope enough vision was expended on preparing the groundwork for success inside TADA as is evident on its surface. We certainly have many talented teachers, like Bob Grant (music), Liz Niven (theater), Lyn Twitchell (fine art), on that side of the equation, but I am not familiar with those who represent what seems to me to be the emphasis on digital media arts and production management. However, what makes this such a great community enriching effort in the broadest sense is the availability of these facilities to everyone. This certainly takes a lot of the waiting out of it.

As a final note and closing kudo, "thank you!" to the Lake

Tahoe Educational Foundation and its president, Nancy Ralston, for sponsoring this informative and fun grand opening (of my eyes and many others) to the possibilities of clear, committed vision and infinite, future hopes of our kids and students. This has clearly been a miraculous effort, but no miracle.

Congratulations!

Robert Schimmel is a professional artist and teacher in South Lake Tahoe, as well as host of Lake Tahoe Art Scene on KTHO radio on Thursdays at 1:15pm.

9/11: Stage becomes a vehicle to share experiences, feelings

Publisher's note: *This is one in a 12-part series running from Sept. 1-12 about how Lake Tahoe is tied to 9/11.*

By Susan Boulanger

On Sept. 11 at 2pm, the LTCC Theatre Arts Department will have a special theatrical presentation to commemorate the 10th anniversary of 9/11. I am excited and grateful that members of various branches of South Lake Tahoe law enforcement and fire departments, as well as several other LTCC staff members, have joined with me to present several events that will follow the play, including a panel discussion, and a special commemoration of the Victims and Heroes of 9/11 at the Ledbetter Terrace. This event will culminate in honoring our present-day heroes in Lake Tahoe – law enforcement, fire, military, and all public safety personnel.

So, the question posed to me was – “Why are you doing this?”

I don't have enough space to fully express my feelings or thoughts, or to describe my need and my joy to use my art to reach out to my community. But I will try to put some of them into words.



From Sept.
1-12, Lake
Tahoe News is
looking at
9/11.

To me, the events of 9/11 were staggeringly horrific. It's 10 years later and I still can't get my mind around it; I still feel for the victims, the heroes, the rescue workers, and all of the families; and a nation that was deeply wounded.

Like so many other people, I wanted so much to go to Ground Zero to help, but that wasn't possible. And what could I have done there to help?

So, I donated what money I could afford. I prayed. I attempted to comfort one of my students who had lost a brother in the World Trade Center. I wept for the victims and was in awe of the heroic efforts of so many people. I tried to comprehend it all. And I felt helpless.

On the 10th anniversary of 9/11 I can do something. I can use my abilities as a theater artist to help this community pay tribute, remember, and hopefully, heal a little.

Some playwrights in the world of theater wrote plays connected to the impact of 9/11. Some of the plays dealt with personal experiences; some were fictional, and some were taken from the real-life experiences of people near Ground Zero. "With Their Eyes – A View From a High School at Ground Zero," edited by Annie Thoms, is a collection of real-life accounts of students and staff members at Stuyvesant High School in the shadows of the towers.

A year after 9/11, a play called "The Guys" by Anne Nelson was performed in New York. Based on a true story, this play deals with a NYC fire captain who lost eight of his men in the towers and now must try to find the words to honor each man's memory. While the world was calling these men "heroes," (which, of course, they were), this play reminds us that each of those heroes – everyone who ran into the horror to help – was human, an ordinary person who selflessly gave of themselves to help others.

I had the idea to do this commemoration a number of years ago. I knew that I wanted to do something to mark the 10th anniversary and, as a theater artist, I knew it would have something to do with the stage. When I was hired as the director of theater at Lake Tahoe Community College two years ago, one of my first thoughts was "I will have a place to do this commemoration!"

I started with the idea to do the two-character play, "The Guys," but once I was at LTCC, I wanted to include more people. That is when I decided to incorporate monologues from several different plays. I now have 18 actors involved.

Some of the play will focus on the immediate experiences of people – what happened at the moment of the attack and directly following. Some of the play will focus on the aftermath.

Most important for me, though, are the parts of the

presentation that focus on the people who were the heroes – this presentation speaks directly about the firefighters who were lost, but I look at it as a representation of all of the public safety personnel who were lost that day.

Theater is such a unique medium. The immediacy of it, the live actor/audience give and take, provides an experience that is unlike any other art form. Theater provides a connection for the audience that allows a deeper experience. I am hoping that this piece of theater, and the events that follow, will provide a meaningful experience to the members of our community.

Given the scope of what happened that day – and what has happened since – this project is a small thing.

But, it's something I can do.

Susan Boulanger is director of theater arts at Lake Tahoe Community College in South Lake Tahoe.

Opinion: What Nevada's cell phone law means

By Washoe County Sheriff's Office

Nevada legislation aimed at decreasing the number of accidents caused by distracted driving will go into effect on Oct. 1.

"The goal of Nevada's new 'hand free' legislation is to save lives," Washoe County Assistant Sheriff Tim Kuzanek said.

According to information from AAA's Foundation for Traffic Safety, distracted driving, including the use of cell phones

is one of the major contributors to automobile accidents. Statistics show that between 4,000 and 8,000 crashes related to distracted driving occur every day in the United States. In the course of a year, distracted driving such as cell phone use, eating or drinking while driving, or anything else that takes your mind and eyes off the road, contributes to as many as one half of the 6 million crashes reported annually in this country. A 2010 AAA study also showed that the majority of drivers (62 percent) feel that talking on a cell phone is a very serious threat to safety, but they do not always behave accordingly or believe that others share these views. In fact, nearly 70 percent of those surveyed admitted to talking on their phones and 24 percent said they read or sent text messages or emails while driving in the previous month.

Nevada's new texting law "makes it a crime for a person to manually type or enter text into a cellular telephone or other similar device, or to send or read data using any such device, while operating a motor vehicle. The law further prohibits a person from using such a device for voice communications unless the device is used with an accessory which allows the person to communicate without using his or her hands, with certain limited exceptions."

According to this legislation, drivers must use hands-free equipment in order to make or receive phone calls on cell phones or other wireless communications devices. Exceptions include emergency personnel, licensed amateur radio operators who are communicating certain public information, employees of public utilities who are responding to emergencies, or drivers who are reporting emergencies or responding to dangerous situations. GPS devices are not included in this legislation.

In accordance with the law, law enforcement will issue only warnings to violators from Oct. 1 through the end of 2011. Fines will be imposed beginning in 2012.

The Governors Highway Safety Association offers the following

suggestions while driving:

- Turn it off. Turn off your phone or switch to silent mode before you get in the car.
- Spread the word. Set up a special message to tell callers that you are driving and you'll get back to them as soon as possible, or sign up for a service that offers this.
- Find a Safe Place. If you need to make a call, find a legal and safe place to pull over and park first.
- Use your passengers. Ask a passenger to make the call for you.
- X the Text. Don't ever text and drive, surf the web or read your email while driving. It is dangerous and against the law in most states.
- Prepare. Review maps and directions before you start to drive. If you need help when you are on the road, ask a passenger to help or pull over to a safe location to review the map/directions again.
- Secure your pets. Pets can be a big distraction in the car. Always secure your pets properly before you start to drive.
- Keep the kids safe. Pull over to a safe location to address situations with your children in the car.
- Focus on the task at hand. Refrain from smoking, eating, drinking, reading, and any other activity that takes your mind and eyes off the road.