

Opinion: TRPA work was much more than a slideshow

By Claire Fortier

Recently, the League to Save Lake Tahoe has called my integrity into question. At issue is whether I disclosed my company's income from TRPA in the 12 months prior to my appointment to the TRPA Governing Board.

The answer is simple: There was no income.

But nothing in Tahoe is simple.



Claire Fortier

Here's the story: In November 2009, Dennis Oliver, then the public relations officer for the TRPA, asked me to go through some 20 boxes of documents that the TRPA received from the El Dorado County Library. He wanted me to pull key documents and catalogue the rest for a TRPA's 40th anniversary project.

At the time, he had the lofty ambition of putting together an extensive website where anyone could access historic documents and news stories about the TRPA. He also asked me to work with him on a 24-page book on the history of the agency.

In December 2009, my company sent a written proposal to the TRPA to do that job, as well as extensive online research. For those who don't know me, I make my living as a writer and researcher.

I spent countless hours in the TRPA basement, pulling documents, studies and news stories collected by the library over 60 years. It was glamorous and exciting work. I then spent hours online, tracking down documents and news stories. Even more exciting stuff.

All my information was turned over to Dennis Oliver during my final meeting with him in January 2010.

But the mechanics of getting the information online, which wasn't my job, was simply too costly and time consuming. The TRPA nixed the idea of the book and the website, instead using some of the information in an extensive PowerPoint presentation.

The presentation that the Lake Tahoe News linked on its website was not my work. It was Dennis Oliver's project for the TRPA's 40th anniversary. All of my research, as well as the outline for the book, are available to anyone who provides me with a disc.

Who would have thought that a year and almost a month after that project I would be an elected City Council member appointed by council to sit on the TRPA Governing Board?

I certainly didn't as I sat on a hard concrete floor, dusting off spider webs and going through more mind-numbing documents than a person should read in a lifetime. If I had, I probably would have insisted on a chair.

The *Tahoe Mountain News* has demeaned the attempt by the League to discredit me as a "pissing match" between Rochelle Nason and me. But I have a different word for it –bullying.

While the League is well within its rights to check all Governing Board members' disclosure forms, it seems only mine was of interest. In addition, the League has filed a Freedom of Information Act request with the TRPA for all correspondence and emails between the TRPA and me.

Is this a pissing match or an unabashed attempt by the League to intimidate me?

In my opinion, the League would like to discredit me because I have called into question its intent, its tactics and its membership.

Repeated requests by the city and other organizations to get a roster of the League members, its finances and board member affiliations have been ignored or rebuffed. Even requests to attend League board meetings are denied because, as Ms. Nason said during our last City Council meeting, "we spend most of the meeting talking about litigation."

Shouldn't the League pledge to the same transparency that it demands of other Tahoe agencies and jurisdictions?

As City Council stated in a letter to the League board: "The League has blocked timely and economically feasible solutions to critical environmental problems. Further, the League's use of confrontation through veiled threats of litigation or its eleventh -hour demands for more information or study have made collaboration all but impossible. The League's demands are costly, time-consuming and unnecessary."

It is my strong belief that the time has come to challenge the League and its stranglehold over the TRPA Governing Board. It's time to put the League under the same microscope that it has put just about every plan, project or person that has come to the forefront at Lake Tahoe.

Claire Fortier is on the South Lake Tahoe City Council and is the city's representative to the Governing Board of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

SLTPD successful prescription drug program

To the community,

The South Lake Tahoe Police Department took part in the National Take Back Initiative which was hosted by the Drug Enforcement Agency on April 30. This program provided the public an opportunity to prevent pill abuse and theft by ridding their homes of expired, unused and/or unwanted prescription drugs.

A drop off location was established in the Safeway parking lot at 1020 Johnson Blvd. with SLTPD personnel on hand from 9am-1pm.

We are proud to announce the community took advantage of this program and we were able to collect 44.5 pounds of prescription drugs which were subsequently transported to the DEA office in Sacramento for appropriate destruction.

Thank you to the residents of the South Lake Tahoe community for your participation in this program and we hope to see you again next year.

Thank you to Safeway management and staff for allowing us to utilize the parking lot for this worthwhile effort.

Cameron Carmichael, South Lake Tahoe police sergeant

Opinion: South Tahoe making mistake giving money to LTUSD

To the community,

It appears that on May 17, the city manager of South Lake Tahoe will advise the City Council to donate \$250,000 of city reserve funds to the school district for upgrading the football field at South Tahoe High School. It is a mistake to do so.

The city manger came to town claiming that he would manage the city as a business. I know of no business model that gives money away. It seems that the city manager has forgotten that he, as does the council, has a fiduciary trust to honor. The city manager says this gift to the school district will create a partnership with the district. I say, well, to achieve what? The school district should run the district and the city should run the city. They should cooperate, but there should be no free exchange of tax dollars. In this deal what is the direct benefit to the city?



Bill Crawford

It is especially ill advised to give away the \$250,000 under the circumstances. The city is hurting for revenue. The city manager and council have for economic reasons trimmed crew and staff reducing the number of city employees. The city has large unfunded liabilities. The city can't fix the streets. But it will take reserve money for the school district.

And if citizens will look at their property tax bill, they will see three items that render money to the school district. So why should the city even think of giving money to another agency?

This is an example of undisciplined behavior by the city manager because this gift has nothing to do with meeting the needs of the city. He should receive a vote of no confidence on this subject. It is bad politics.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Geothermal power is Nevada's energy solution

By Lisa Shevenell and Daphne LaPointe

Nevada often has been in hot water, but this time it's doing us some good. Nevada's wealth of hot springs already hosts several operating geothermal power plants, and international companies are investing in an ever-increasing number of new geothermal development projects – more than anywhere else in the country.

Geothermal power could become a billion-dollar-per-year business in Nevada and account for 35 percent or more of the state's electricity needs.

Nevada state law requires that 25 percent of our electricity must come from renewable power by 2025, and geothermal energy alone is more than enough to meet this legal requirement.

Production capacity from all active geothermal power plants in Nevada is about 425 megawatts.

Geologists at the Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology at the University of Nevada, Reno and other geothermal experts estimate that by 2025, Nevada could add up to 3,000 megawatts of geothermal power-generating capacity – enough to power 1.5 to 3 million homes (one megawatt can power 500 to 1,000 average-sized homes). This would significantly decrease Nevada's dependence on fossil fuels for power generation.

Lisa Shevenell and Daphne LaPointe are with the Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology.

Read the whole story

Opinion: San Diego case hits correct note on redevelopment

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

The timing could not have been more perfect – or more ironic.

As the Legislature mulls Gov. Jerry Brown's proposal to abolish local redevelopment activities, a San Diego judge has issued a denunciation of one redevelopment agency for running rough-shod over private property owners in its zeal to underwrite a big condominium.

National City, a suburb of San Diego, wanted to seize their property under eminent domain to facilitate construction of a 24-story condominium building. To make the seizure legal, the city declared the property to be blighted and needing to be cleared for new construction.

Taking property in that way was given broad clearance by the U.S. Supreme Court in its now-famous – or infamous – Kelo

decision having to do with a similar case in Connecticut. But to exercise that power, National City still had to meet the state's requirement that it prove blight.

One property owner, the Community Youth Athletic Center, resisted and challenged the city's blight designation. The center, which gives boxing lessons to underprivileged youth, received support from groups opposed to the broad exercise of eminent domain. And San Diego Superior Court Judge Steven Denton sided with the gymnasium as well.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Fingers crossed Beth Gaines is fit for office

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the May 9, 2011, Sacramento Bee.*

Beth Gaines is scheduled to be sworn in this week as Assembly member for the district that includes parts of Sacramento, Placer and El Dorado counties.

Many wonder if she is fit for state office. We hope she surprises us.

She succeeds her husband, Sen. Ted Gaines, who was elected to the upper house in a special election. Gaines won a rather lackluster victory, besting a Democrat who barely campaigned by 10 percent in a district that is heavily weighted to favor Republicans.

Gaines should understand that it's a privilege to serve, not a right. She ought to turn down the perquisites of public

office, avoid constant fundraising, and devote full-time to representing her constituents.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Alternatives to foreclosure

By Deborah McNaughton

Foreclosure filings spiked upward another 7 percent in March. There are alternatives consumers can use to avoid becoming part of next month's statistic.

During March, the amount of foreclosure filings totaled 239,745, according to statistics released from RealtyTrac. This is up from February, when filings totaled 225,101. Granted, the rate of increase is slower than it was this time last year, but that the decrease wasn't attributable to better market conditions.

The slowdown is because there are so many foreclosures to file, it's taking lenders longer to process foreclosure proceedings. The allegations of fraud in some of these foreclosure proceedings started last September, and as a result, there was a temporary suspension of foreclosures while the fraud was investigated. There are people out there who are still in trouble, but there are ways they can avoid a foreclosure, if they're willing to do the work.

My alternatives include:

* Short Sale – Of course you have considered a short sale. That should be your first choice, but the downside is that

there are so many players in the mix. First, you have to list the property with a real estate company. If you get a buyer, you have to submit a hardship letter and your financials to the lender along with the offer to purchase your property at a price that is lower than your balance. It may take the lender weeks or months to decide if they are willing to accept the offer. By that time you may have lost your buyer. If you have not been making your mortgage payments, the lender may foreclose on your property. Unless you can overcome these issues, this alternative may not be the one for you.

* Short Refinance – If your payments are not behind, contact a lender to see if you are eligible for a short refinance. An appraisal on the property will be ordered. If the appraisal is less than the balance you owe, the lender will tell you how much of a loan they will make. When you get a commitment letter and appraisal from the lender, submit it to your current lender requesting a reduction of your current balance. If they agree to a reduced payoff, continue with the new lender and complete your new loan with a lower loan amount and hopefully better terms.

* Lease Purchase Option – Put your home or property on the market as a lease with an option to purchase. A lease purchase allows a buyer to purchase your property for an agreed sales price and date to complete. Earnest money is applied towards a down payment, and you would collect monthly payments. Make sure you get enough down payment money to catch up any past due payments, and continue to make the mortgage payments until the sale is complete.

* Rental – Renting your house out may also be an option for you. If you get a renter that can cover your payments you can rent another place for less money. When things get better and your finances loosen up you can always move back into your home.

A lot more people are facing foreclosure than the statistics

currently reflect. As a result, everyone should be aware of the alternatives. Foreclosure can sometimes be a worst-case scenario for some, but that can be avoided simply by choosing to accept something that isn't a best-case scenario, but it's better than losing your place to live with no alternatives at all.

Deborah McNaughton is a nationally recognized author, credit expert and financial coach.

A mother's love never dies

By Bill Plaschke, Los Angeles Times

Her son is Bryan Stow, the San Francisco Giants fan who was attacked in a Dodger Stadium parking lot. As he lies in a coma, his chance of survival 'slim,' she wants him to know she'll be his mother forever.

Every day, she talks to her son.

Doctors give him little chance, the public no longer pays much attention, but nearly every day for more than a month, the mother arrives at the cramped ICU room at County-USC Medical Center to talk to her comatose son.

He is Bryan Stow, the San Francisco Giants fan who suffered a serious brain injury when he was attacked in the Dodger Stadium parking lot on opening day.

She is Ann Stow, and she wants him to know that she will be his mother forever.

"We're here, little man!" she says when she walks into the room.

Bryan is 42, and other family members chuckle, but Mom is insistent.

“He will always be my little man,” she says.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Grand jury needs to reprimand S. Tahoe City Council

To the community,

After watching the dysfunctional, capricious, dishonest and heartless tactics of the South Lake Tahoe City Council in attempting to gut Proposition 215 and target sick people, I believe the current City Council is a threat to the health and safety of the entire community and not just medical marijuana patients. Clearly, the City Council is continuing to engage in the same behavior that has already prompted the El Dorado Grand Jury to warn the City Council it is incompetent and probably guilty of criminal violations. As a result, serious questions exist regarding the legitimacy and authority of the current City Council to pass or enforce any ordinance.

Frankly, the South Lake Tahoe City Council's selection of Hal Cole as mayor is an insult to this community, since he is the single biggest reason we have a huge crater in the middle of town. It's now over five years since the \$400-plus-million convention center-retail-hotel complex that broke ground in 2006 has become a crumbling pile of concrete and rust. Not only has the City Council failed to address this problem, it

appointed the guy responsible for this crater as their new mayor.

The real reason that this huge crater can't be fixed, is because the city never required a performance bond. In fact, then Mayor Hal Cole, who also served as the Redevelopment Agency board chairman, not only let the developer off the hook for the performance bond, Mr. Cole signed the contract first, even though the contract specified the developer must sign first. Why Mr. Cole suspended the performance bond and signed first remains a mystery and is a matter that should still be investigated by the Grand Jury.



Worst of all, on July 10, 2006, Mayor Hal Cole told the public, "The developer is assuming all the risk."

Given that the city ended up with an enormous crater and no funds to fix it, Mayor Cole's comment was not only false and deceptive, his re-appointment as mayor has created an unacceptable level of mistrust in our City Council.

The grand jury was also quite clear about Councilman Bruce Grego. Here is what the Grand Jury had to say about Mr. Grego and the \$935.50 that was paid to him: "A member of the City Council requested reimbursement for legal fees paid to an outside law firm. The legal advice consisted of a legal opinion and preparation of a letter to the Fair Political Practices Commission. No contract had been signed and the City Council had not approved the expenditure in advance. The City Manager stated that he gave verbal approval for the expenditure. California State Law clearly states that government contracts for payment may not be backdated. All unusual expenditures should be approved in open session. The City's Purchasing Policy and Procedure Manual calls for the

presence of written contracts when professional services are sought, and makes no provision for payment and reimbursement absent the presence of a contract.”

Clearly, the grand jury has made a finding that Mr. Grego’s reimbursement was in violation of California state law, yet Mr. Grego continues to insist he did nothing wrong and refuses to return the money.

In an editorial dated July 28, 2010, the Tahoe Daily Tribune said, “The City Council’s response to the critical and scathing El Dorado Grand Jury report is embarrassing and disheartening.” The editorial then went on to point out that instead of accepting responsibility, the City Council adopted a response that was peppered with the phrases: “the city does not agree in part with the finding,” “the city agrees and does not agree in part,” and “the city does not completely agree with the statement,” among others. That didn’t fly with the Tribune, which reminded the City Council and the citizens of South Lake Tahoe, “The first step to solving a problem is admitting to having one.”

It has been over a year and neither the City Council, nor Mr. Cole, nor Mr. Grego are willing to admit they have a problem and continue to insist that we should ignore the grand jury report and trust them instead. But the 19 distinguished members of the El Dorado Grand Jury, as well as the citizens of South Lake Tahoe have learned that they cannot trust the City Council, especially if Mr. Cole and Mr. Grego are allowed to remain on the Council.

The Grand Jury concludes its report with a stern warning: “This Grand Jury is of the opinion that an accusation for malfeasance or nonfeasance by this City Council may be appropriate... The Grand Jury only touched the ‘tip of the iceberg’ in its investigation and recommends that the citizens of South Lake Tahoe get involved with their City government. It is up to the citizens to establish the kind of governance

they desire, to exercise their democratic right to vote, and get a City government that works for the common good and in an efficient manner for its citizens.”

The South Lake Tahoe City Council has not heeded any of the warnings of the El Dorado County Grand Jury and continues to violate the law. It is time for the grand jury to revisit this issue and open up a new investigation.

Steve Kubby, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Time for Tahoe to embrace Hot August Nights

To the community,

I have participated with a classic car since the late '80s in the Reno/Sparks Hot August Nights nostalgic car celebration that is said to draw as much as \$300 million to that area just a stones throw away. The participants have all kinds of cars and most are quite valuable and some with paint jobs that cost in the tens of thousands. The car owners are generally middle aged and many are the retired boomers with money to spend.

In the last few days the news broke that after a year of upset about Long Beach being brought on board as a new venue for Hot August Nights they are now out. The city of Reno was run through the ringer about the Long Beach addition and many thought HAN might leave all together.

Instead of Tahoe being the kick-off city it was Long Beach and we were given a small spot starting before the Reno event Aug. 7-9. Last year Tahoe came alive with the hope of future

expansion for the event. Everything went great in a very small way.

Harrah's and Harveys did the wait and see and did little to promote the event and now with a Sunday-Tuesday probably won't do much again.

This should be a yearly car celebration that is the true kick-off to Reno. Many like the idea of being up in the cooler air and out of the Reno crowds. I know all our efforts are focused on Amgen, but if the people who survive up here had a clue about the potential of this massive event and the revenue it brings, they might finally do something that puts Tahoe on the another map and pumps us up like we should be. So often our struggling town just doesn't get it right.

This door is open to a proven successful event that could and should be expanded upon. How to make that happen is anybody's guess as we tend to go halfway with many things up here. Perhaps that could change.

Phil Blowney, South Lake Tahoe