

Prep work for winter safety



By Sallie Ross-Filgo

Now that the autumn months are upon us, it's a good time to locate and label, or visually indicate, where your water and gas shut-off valves are.

Do this both inside and outside of your home.

Then, when the snow flies again, and the possibility of frozen and buried pipes occurs, we will be able to quickly minimize any damage to your property.

Thanks for helping us serve you better.

Sallie Ross-Filgo works for the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department.

Schafer: Detailing STPUD rate increases

Letter to the Publisher,

An opponent for my re-election to the STPUD Board has stated the 0% rate increase for 2009-2010 is an election year ploy. Nothing could be further from the truth. I am an unbiased financial professional on the Board; let me explain the facts

and process to you.

The 0% rate increase was discussed at the following 2009 public meetings of the District:

- 2/10/09 – Finance Committee budget review meeting;
- 3/4/09 – Board budget review workshop;
- 5/7/09 – Public hearing to present the proposed budget to customers; and,
- 5/21/09 – Regular Board meeting where the budget was adopted.

At these meetings Board members discussed the economic hardships currently facing our customers, local and non-local, and agreed the District should do what it could to ease the burden. Further, we already knew that our efforts to secure grants through Congress and the “American Recovery and Reinvestment Act” had been successful beyond our hopes. We felt this was the appropriate time to give our customers some of the benefit of our staff’s tremendous efforts. Those were the reasons for no rate increases, all debated and discussed at the above listed open, public meetings.

My opponent was not present at any of these meetings or she may have a more complete understanding of our budget adoption process which included no current year rate increase. Did we help our customers in a year of true economic hardship? I hope so! Was our action for no rate increase an election year ploy? Not at all!

As for “looking at a 5% to 6% rate increase starting next year”, the ten-year plan issued July 2009 clearly states, on page 32, rate increases of 4.5% in year 2010/11 and 5% each year thereafter. This averages less than 4.5% annually for the 10 years of the plan. Rates are adopted for ONE YEAR ONLY; the Board debates and deliberates rate increases annually and must notify customers when there will be an increase. Customers,

and candidates for the Board, can thus come before the Board and express concerns about District operations and/or any rate increases. The ten-year plan is just that, a plan. It is reviewed and modified every year as part of our annual budget deliberations.

Priorities: waterline replacement, to ensure continued delivery of clean drinking water and water for firefighting suppression, remains my highest priority for infrastructure improvement dollars available in the water enterprise fund.

In a Friday, 10/30/09 Letter to the Publisher, I referenced our \$4.3 million grant which, under a bid we awarded at a Special Board meeting on 10/29/09, will pay for installation of 1,500+ water meters in 2010. The cost per meter installation was so favorable to the District that the State has authorized us to seek another bid to install another 1,000+ meters in 2010 with the remaining funds under this grant. This is a huge benefit to you, our customers, and District staff deserves thanks for so diligently and expertly pursuing these funds. I believe that, over the next 16 years, further governmental agency grants will be received to help us meet the compliance goal of 2025 for a fully metered water system.

These are the facts that challenge comments by my opponent. I ask for your support when you vote so I can continue to use my unbiased financial expertise and dedication to serve you for 4 more years on the Board of STPUD, Seat No. 5.

Thank you,

Eric Schafer, incumbent for STPUD Seat No. 5

Indoor fire safety



By Sallie Ross-Filgo

The colder days and nights of autumn remind us to get ready for indoor fire safety. Be extra cautious with wood stoves and fireplaces and keep anything that will burn at least 3 feet away.

Have your chimney inspected or cleaned every year.

Don't use large amounts of paper or cardboard to build a fire in your fireplace or wood stove.

Never burn charcoal indoors because burning charcoal gives off the poisonous gas carbon monoxide.

Finally, don't use flammable liquids to start or add to a fire that is already lit.

Sallie Ross-Filgo works for the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department.

Storm provides lessons for Forest Service

By Terri Marceron

A few weeks ago an unusually wet storm put Forest Service projects in the Lake Tahoe Basin to the test. We want to take this opportunity to share with you some of the lessons we learned and how we are using them to improve our management of the Forest and its resources.

The Blackwood Creek restoration project, which began construction last summer and continued this summer, proved a resounding success as the newly created channel absorbed the heavy rainfall and allowed it to deposit sediment along the floodplain rather than rushing it directly to Lake Tahoe. Since Blackwood Creek, disturbed by past mining, grazing and logging, has been a major source of sediment to the lake, we are very pleased to see that our restoration strategy is having its intended effect.

At most of our project sites, some involving large scale construction, our best management practices (BMPs) implemented to prevent off-site erosion were in place and effective. In anticipation of the storm, our staff were checking on project sites to ensure these BMPs were installed and take any additional measures to mitigate the potential impacts of a 25-year storm.

However, on part of one project site, we learned that we did not prepare quickly enough or well enough for the storm. In the Angora Fire area, we failed to install sufficient BMPs on roads near Seneca Pond, where work to remove hazard trees was under way. With the storm forecast several days out, we should have used that time to prepare the site adequately. Our staff has developed recommendations to ensure that we aren't caught off guard by future storms. Forest leadership and project staff immediately gathered in the field to review the project area and reevaluate our procedures. We have stopped operations at the Angora Hazard Tree project and are working to ensure the site is prepared to ride out the winter.

The season for field work in the Lake Tahoe Basin is brief.

Like all who work outside here, we are eager to complete our projects before the snow flies. In doing so, we must stay conscious of the need to minimize our impact on the land and on water quality. Our promise to you is that weâ€™ve learned from this experience, and weâ€™ll be putting the lessons to work.

Terri Marceron is forest supervisor for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

Schafer: Setting the record straight

Letter to the Publisher,

My name is Eric Schafer and I am the incumbent running for re-election to Seat 5 on the South Tahoe Public Utility District (STPUD) Board of Directors. I am a Certified Public Accountant, practicing in South Tahoe for over 23 years, and have served on the STPUD Board for the past 8 years.

Local elections go very unnoticed unless an incumbent is not running for re-election or there are significant issues open to honest debate. STPUD has operated effectively and efficiently for all 8+ years I have been on the Board. In this year's election for the Board, there seems to be only one issue, a manufactured one at that: water meters. The October 6 candidate forum at the District facilities and recent letters/articles in local publications have created the issue of water meter installation and subsequent customer rates based on reading the meters. Let's clear the air on this issue:

- The District worked with Senator Keogh who sponsored the State legislation and since 2004 has known there would be a \$20+ million cost to install and read water meters for entire system by 2025;
- In 2005 we requested an exemption because we are not part of the California watershed. An exemption was not granted, however, Senator Keogh suggested an extension for the compliance date could be considered. Work continues with the legislature to obtain an exemption;
- In 2008 we testified to the Senate Sub-Committee on Water and Natural Resources, telling them we had a waterline replacement program in process, could not do the waterlines and water meters concurrently, and felt our highest priority was the waterlines. They agreed and said our commitment to the waterlines was proper. The fire threat is greater than water meter compliance for our construction dollars;
- Absent our waterline commitment, the 2007 Angora Fire would have been a far greater disaster. The improvements in that area alone, approximately \$18 million over the past 10 years, kept fire suppression water on the fire at all times. The Joint Committee reviewing the fire agreed that water for firefighting is our highest priority and urged continuance with the waterline replacement because fire is still the greatest threat in the Lake Tahoe Basin;
- The District developed a 10-year plan, including construction projects, many years ago and keeps it current by rolling it forward every year. The Board review, since 2004, has constantly put waterline replacement at the top of the list. We have received millions in grants from governmental agencies who agree; and,
- We continue to seek grants for the water meter installation projects and the \$4.3 million awarded for 2009-2010 is the first grant to help us with these costs. We will install over

1,500 meters next year with these funds and are optimistic that further grants can be secured.

As for the rates customers will pay when the meters are read, it is important to remember that, even under our flat rate system, 82% of your bill is a fixed cost for having the system to deliver your clean water to you. The remaining 18% is the consumption charge and, when meters are read, that charge will be based on the water volume you use. The Board policy currently is that we will remain revenue neutral, as much as possible, as we transition from flat rate to volumetric billing, starting in 2011.

So, did I know that we had a mandate to install and read water meters by 2025? Absolutely! Is there any fact-based data to that a financial loss could fall upon the District? Not to my knowledge. Have we annually informed our customers of our infrastructure improvement needs? Yes, through the annual budget review and publication of our 10-year plan.

My opponent wants water that is safe, clean and affordable. That is exactly what I have helped deliver to you for the past 8 years, with no rate increase during our current fiscal year.

As a financial professional I have used my skills and experience to make the right decisions while serving on the Board for 8 years. STPUD is a big business in South Lake Tahoe, spending \$40-\$50 million annually to deliver clear water to you and treat and dispose of waste products and I am up to the challenge to serve you for 4 more years.

I have served the community for 20 years in elected public office, the last 8 at STPUD. I am confident that, with your vote on November 3, I can help the District continue to deliver superior services to you.

Thank you,

Eric Schafer, incumbent STPUD Seat No. 5

Sullivan: Measure B good for baseball and soccer

Letter to the Publisher,

I am writing this letter to ask for the community's support of Measure B. By passing Measure B, we can reallocate unused funds for the upgrade and modernization of the playing fields on Rufus Allen Blvd. By voting yes you are not only helping South Tahoe National Little League, but also AYSO youth soccer, and other organizations that use these fields. These fields have served our community well for many years, and now they need to be upgraded with new concession stands, maintenance facilities, and rest rooms. With the passing of Measure B these fields will be made better and safer for our children to play on and enjoy. I hope you will vote yes for Measure B.

Dan Sullivan, president South Tahoe National Little League

Charter explains fees in El Dorado County

Publisher's note: *This is an email from Charter Cable to El Dorado County Chief Administrative Officer Gayle Erbe-Hamlin dated Oct. 26.*

Dear Ms. Erbe-Hamlin:

In June 2009, Charter notified customers in the Meyers, CA area that with the beginning of their July 2009 billing cycle, rates would be adjusted for Basic and Expanded Basic cable television service levels along with a similar change in corresponding digital packages. These price changes were to be implemented in conjunction with the addition of 67 new standard definition channels and 16 new HD channels:

Service Level	Current Price	New Price	Difference
Basic Cable Service	\$19.25	\$19.99	\$0.74
Expanded Basic Cable Service	\$24.74	\$35.00	\$10.26

A subsequent review of our billing system noted that approximately 400 accounts in the Meyers area did not reflect the adjustment although their services and lineups were upgraded. Those customers are being notified by first class mail with the attached post card. Rest assured Charter will not bill those customers for past months of the adjustment amounts as we move forward to correct this error.

Billing corrections that reflect the price adjustments will begin with December billing cycles. Please note that this was a previously noticed change and is not a part of the rate adjustments for customers in South Lake Tahoe, NV and Douglas County, NV.

We remain committed to providing excellent cable services to the Meyers community and all communities we serve. If you have any questions about these changes, please call me at 775-850-1267.

Sincerely,

Franny

Franny Buffa, Government Relations Administrator

Charter Communications

Perez: Interim sheriff should not be a candidate

Letter to the Publisher,

I was shocked to learn the sheriff was leaving office early, and prayed it was unrelated to health reasons and instead for unanticipated circumstances. Given this was not the case, I was disappointed to hear his early resignation included a request to offer what amounts to a political advantage for the candidate he endorsed in the upcoming race.

I've been told the county can either fill the sheriff's position by special election or Board of Supervisors appointment. But as a county voter and taxpayer, I'm adamantly opposed to a special election.

Our county can ill afford the cost of a special election given our 12 vacant deputy positions, significant budget reductions to the sheriff's budget, cuts to mental health care, the need to protect the health of our children against H1N1, pending state prisoner release, homelessness, loss in property tax revenue, and our depressed economy.

Instead, I ask for the appointment of an interim sheriff, but not one of the candidates seeking election as sheriff. No candidate should be granted an unfair advantage in this race, and it should be voters who decide which candidate is best educated, trained, and experienced; along with the tenacity, integrity, vision, and leadership strength to be our next sheriff.

Stan Perez,

El Dorado County sheriff's candidate and retired California Highway Patrol chief

No longer ignoring chronic fatigue

By Hillary Johnson, New York Times

Earlier this month, a study published in the journal *Science* answered a question that medical scientists had been asking since 2006, when they learned of a novel virus found in prostate tumors called xenotropic murine leukemia virus-related virus, or XMRV: Was it a human infection?

XMRV is a gammaretrovirus, one of a family of viruses long-studied in animals but not known to infect people. In animals, these retroviruses can cause horrendous neurological problems, immune deficiency, lymphoma and leukemia. The new study provided overwhelming evidence that XMRV is a human gammaretrovirus — the third human retrovirus (after H.I.V. and human lymphotropic viruses, which cause leukemia and lymphoma). Infection is permanent and, yes, it can spread from person to person (though it is not yet known how the virus is transmitted).

Read the whole story

Blann: Experience, business know-how on LTCC board

To the Publisher:

As Election Day draws near, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the community for your interest and support for Lake Tahoe Community College. It has been a great privilege to serve on the Board of Trustees for the past four years. In the process of my re-election campaign, meeting and talking with many members of our community, I am reminded again of the precious resource we have in the college. I am very proud of the prominent role we play and the service we provide.

There are some challenges facing the college today including the impact of state budget cuts, maintaining our quality programs and enrollment, meeting community needs and strengthening the identity of LTCC. I see these challenges as opportunities to be creative and work together for new solutions. New sources of revenue through the college foundation and community partnerships are areas of particular interest to me.

What I bring to the Board is my community connection and understanding of local business. My background and education is business and marketing and it includes a long term history of local involvement and leadership positions. I am also a parent whose children were born and raised here giving me a firsthand understanding of the current challenges and costs facing today's students.

During my first term I have been able to offer valuable input from a community and business perspective. I am organized, hard working and have a common sense approach. My experience, leadership skills and broad background will help me as we

guide our college through challenging times and beyond. If re-elected, I will work hard to be a part of its continued growth and sustainability.

I respectfully request your vote. Thank you very much.

Molly Blann, incumbent candidate

Lake Tahoe Community College Board of Trustees