

Kindertown counting hours to closure



Maria Barrows-Crist and Assemblyman Ted Gaines meet Wednesday.

By Kathryn Reed

Kindertown day care-preschool is slated to be closed at 5 today by the state of California.

Maria Barrows-Crist, who has run the South Lake Tahoe facility for more than 30 years, took her cause to Assemblyman Ted Gaines, R-Roseville, when he was in town Wednesday.

He told the nearly 50 people gathered in the soda fountain of the Red Hut that he would call the Department of Social Services (DSS). But he cautioned, "I don't want to make a promise I can't satisfy."

Barrows-Crist and her center have been charged with a slew of allegations – some brought by former employees – that run the gamut. An administrative law judge in a 28-page document said the facility must close and that Barrows-Crist is to not work with children for two years.

Of the 130 students who had been going to the center before the ruling was handed down a month ago, about 40 remain.

Some of their parents on Wednesday said they will not take their child elsewhere even if it means school and work will be affected.

"We parole and give probation to people convicted of crimes in courtrooms. You would think there should be middle ground here," said Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe city councilman.

Gaines replied, "That's what I'll be searching for – middle ground."

Barrows-Crist mentioned the more than \$300,000 in funding she has from the state to assist families in need. El Dorado County will be the recipient of that money if Kindertown closes.

"I called our local county supervisor five times and she didn't return the calls," Barrows-Crist said.

Barrows-Crist's attorney has filed a stay, but time is ticking.

Patrick Enright, South Lake Tahoe city attorney, at the direction of the council wrote a letter dated Oct. 10 to the attorney for DSS.

The letter in part says, "The City Council requests that Judge (Rebecca) Westmore consider other disciplinary actions short of revocation, including probation, monitoring, training and penalties."

Barrows-Crist said having her sister take over Kindertown is not possible because the state won't give her a license.

"I have no idea what I am going to do if I don't have a stay by 5pm on the 15th," Barrows-Crist said before the meeting. "I'll probably lose everything. If I can't have kids, I don't

have a business.”