

LTCC students move out; money and culprit still missing



By Kathryn Reed

The Alder Inn and Lake Tahoe Community College's ties are no more. All of the students who had called the hotel home moved out when fall quarter ended last week.

The trouble came earlier in the school year when Joseph Balius, who claimed to own the Ski Run Boulevard complex, left town. He is whom the students paid their rent to.

The real owner of the property is June Stefani. She never saw the students' rent money.

Balius had a lease option to buy the property from her, but he was delinquent on his payments to Stefani. That agreement expired earlier this fall and that's when everything came to light.

But some of the transactions remain murky.

A document dated Sept. 29, 2004, lists former South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Ted Long as the one on the lease to buy agreement with Stefani. No other document of record could be found showing he sold the lease to Balius for \$1 as he told *Lake Tahoe News* in October.

Stefani and her attorney also say Long has not been involved in the property for years, but evidence of that fact has not been found at the El Dorado County Records Office.

Trudy Hancock was best friends with Kira Balius for five years, watched their kids and lived at the Alder Inn – and still does. She, too, believed the couple owned the hotel. She also said Joseph Balius and Long were best friends.

Long did not return a phone call.

“I would have bet my bottom dollar they would not have done this,” Hancock said of the Baliuses. “I thought I was a pretty savvy lady. We all got ripped off.”

Hancock is staying on to keep an eye on the property as a contract employee. She said Stefani plans to turn it back into a hotel during peak periods like this week and not operate it as an apartment complex like what Balius had done.

Donna Hall, a parent of one of the students, had only good things to say about the college’s role in the matter. LTCC had long boasted about the Alder Inn as being a great place for students, even promoting it on the website.

“They went beyond their legal liability. They have agreed to split the damages with us,” Hall said. “The college is just being wonderful.”

A spokesperson with the college did not return a call asking how much LTCC has paid out.

The students who are continuing on with their studies at LTCC have found other living arrangements.

Hall has no intention of going after Balius in civil court, but she does hope law enforcement tracks him down.

“Everyone took their lumps. The owner and students are victims of this man,” said Bob Henderson, Stefani’s attorney.

Henderson said his client also does not intend to pursue civil action against Balius.

Stefani was not available for comment.

Henderson added, "I think he should be pursued by law enforcement. The total amount of damage looks like between \$20,000 and \$30,000. That is substantial."

Officer Rick Martinez with the South Lake Tahoe Police Department is investigating the case. He doesn't return phone calls. All his superior Lt. David Stevenson could say is that nothing has been forwarded to the District Attorneys Office.

Those close to the case speculate Balius and his wife, Kira, and their children are in the Las Vegas area.