

Moore about to call it quits at South Tahoe Parks and Rec

By Kathryn Reed

Gary Moore is ready to redefine recreation.

South Lake Tahoe's director of Parks and Recreation is retiring Oct. 1. His wife, Angela, is retiring the day before as manager of the infusion center at Barton Memorial Hospital. Travel is a big part of their plans – and recreating.

Tahoe will always be home even if they spend a bit more time in Angela's native New Zealand. But no longer will either have to ask for time off or worry about work while away.



Gary Moore is sprinting toward retirement.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

Though only 56-years-old, Moore is practically an institution in the department. He started full time with the city rec department June 2, 1975. Prior to that he spent three summers lifeguarding at El Dorado, Regan, Ski and Connolly beaches.

Although the city was incorporated in 1965, parks and rec wasn't part of the plan at the beginning. Keith Gottschlak was

the initial director in 1971 when the department got its first facility. El Dorado County leased Campground by the Lake to the city that year.

Moore started the same month the recreation complex opened its doors. Before that the department rented space from the U.S. Forest Service when its offices were on Tata Lane.

“We were the first wave of professionals brought into the department,” Moore said of he and the four young guys who were hired. With his bachelor’s in recreation administration from San Diego State University and a master’s in the same subject from CSU Sacramento, he thought Tahoe would be a stepping-stone to another job. It was – and several times. Only he never left the department.

When Moore started his career, parks and recreation had been around a while, but the ‘70s is when it began to boom, and cities saw the need to acquire open space and initiate more innovative programs.

For the past four years he has been at the helm of the department. Prior to his ascension, he was superintendent of the recreation side. For about a decade the department didn’t have a director, it had superintendents – one over recreation, one over parks.

City Manager Tony O’Rourke said his initial reaction is to hire a director. He’s heard he has big shoes to fill with Moore’s departure. A changing of the guard had nothing to do with Moore’s decision to leave. It was just time.

“We like the direction right now that Lake Tahoe and South Lake Tahoe is going. Finally, the bell went off that we have this big blue thing out there,” Moore said. “We are now saying we are a recreation paradise, guys.”

He likes that his department is part of the greater effort of defining how Lake Tahoe will prosper in the future.

A life of recreation

Moore has done it all in his 35 years with the department. He's scrubbed toilets at the campground, he ran the Senior Center, oversaw the ice rink, has been at Bijou Golf Course.

His fingerprints are on just about everything that involves recreation in South Lake Tahoe.

"Times change. You try to look at the crystal ball and find trends. We don't say, 'We don't do that'," Moore said. "I have more ideas than I know what to do with."

He admits his eyebrows have been raised at times by some of the suggestions that have been brought to his department. Disc golf was the community's idea.

"They walk in and say can we do disc golf at the park," Moore recalls. "We said, 'What's that?'"

Trash can lids were the early baskets.

It was more recent that a group of women approached him about having a roller derby rink at Bijou Community Park. The department went with it.

When the City Council wanted a dog park, it was parks and rec that went to work.

The department has branched out into interpretive services with Explore Tahoe near Stateline.

Moore credits his father, good mentors, an incredible staff and the will of councils for the department's success.

His background was traditional sports – football, basketball and baseball. It was his dad who told him, "Get off the tree trunk and get out on the limbs" when it comes to thinking about possibilities.

With the groundbreaking of Lakeview Commons earlier this

month, Moore is excited about the direction the city as well as the department is going. After all, El Dorado Beach is part of his jurisdiction.

Leaving an impression

From a department of about a half dozen employees when Moore started, he now oversees 225 workers in full season who work in nine divisions.

The length of time people stay in parks and rec is a testament to the cohesive working atmosphere, one of openness and respect that Moore has fostered.

“He is real accessible to the employees. Everyone has appreciated that,” said John Collins, who runs the senior center. “When I came back to the senior center it was tough because everyone was sad to see him go.”

Moore and Collins have worked together for 30 years, with Moore starting out as his boss. Collins likes that Moore has knowledge about all areas of the department, that he isn't afraid to get his hands dirty.

Greg Ross, who runs Bijou Golf Course, has also worked with Moore for about 30 years.

For those who know Moore, they know not to stand close. His hands are never stationary.

“You need your defensible space around him,” is how Ross describes it.

Steve Weiss, who retired as superintendent of parks in 2006, has told a story to others about he and Moore driving to Sacramento. Moore was the passenger. By the time they got back to Tahoe, Weiss' shoulder was bruised from Moore's gesturing.

“He is hard to capture in a sentence or two. His personality is what you remember,” Ross said.