

Results-driven city manager takes helm of South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Results. That is how Tony O'Rourke wants his tenure as city manager of South Lake Tahoe to be judged.

Part of Day 3 on the job was spent speaking to Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe during the group's weekly lunch at Harveys. Looking out and down from the 12th floor setting it was inevitable someone would pepper him with a question about the stagnated convention center project.



South Lake
Tahoe City
Manager
addresses the
Aug. 11 noon
Soroptimist
meeting.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

He didn't have much of an answer, other than to say the concept is great, and two hotels and a convention center would be an asset to the community.

What the public tends to forget is the city – neither elected official, nor paid staff – can get the project moving. It's

stalled in bankruptcy court.

But if it does come to fruition on O'Rourke's watch, maybe future Soroptimist meetings could be conducted where the service club is headquartered – South Lake Tahoe.

Soroptimist Deb Howard asked O'Rourke to give specifics about the challenges and opportunities he sees.

Immediately he said the airport – where his office is.

“I'm not familiar with any other destination with an airport in the middle of it,” O'Rourke, 55, said. “It would be a great opportunity to get commercial service.”

He said this is one of the first things he wants to talk to the City Council about – pursuing the return of commercial flights into Lake Tahoe Airport. He mentioned Mammoth as an example of a ski town doing booming air business.

In Beaver Creek, where he was executive director of Beaver Creek Resort Company, he said 70 percent of visitors flew in. International travelers tended to stay 10 to 14 days and spend more money compared to weekend warriors. He added that tapping into the Mexican and British markets would be huge for the South Shore – “they love alpine skiing” – he said.

O'Rourke is well aware of what is going on in the city, or not, as the case may be. He did his homework before interviewing. On Monday he met with all the department heads as a group. One-on-ones are going on the rest of this week.

“I like the idea there are challenges. I'm not a caretaker,” O'Rourke said.

He wants to engage the community in the direction the city should go, then create a strategic plan with a handful of achievable goals.

The avid outdoorsman said having 60 percent of the council

changing after the Nov. 2 election is not a concern because boards and councils change all the time. He said if goals are outlined, this reduces personal agendas council members may want to promote.

“You need to create a shared vision. What do you want to become?” O’Rourke said. “There is no substitute for results. Are you really achieving anything?”

His contract is for three years, but the disgruntled public is apt to want results well before the council considers an extension.

But O’Rourke also pointed out it’s easy to criticize and that if the public wants change, it should be in the game and not on the sidelines or playing Monday morning quarterback.

“No one person can make a difference, it has to be collective,” O’Rourke said.