

LTCC president talks about dollars, future of college

By Kathryn Reed

Money. It was the overriding concern of people asking questions of Lake Tahoe Community College's president.

Steve Maradian, interim president of the South Lake Tahoe school, delivered a one-hour talk Friday about the state of the college to about 40 people – students, administrators, trustees, faculty, and staff.



Steve Maradian gives the state of college address at LTCC on Feb. 4.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

Overall, his message was the college is doing well despite the chaos and uncertainty in Sacramento. But those unknowns about what lawmakers will do when it comes to funding higher education is what those in attendance wanted to hear more about.

Gov. Jerry Brown is proposing \$400 million in cuts to the

community college system. The best-case scenario is a \$640,000 hit to LTCC; worst case is \$1.7 million. The discrepancy is largely based on a possible June ballot measure Brown wants to bring to voters.

Maradian said because the board has made prudent fiscal decisions in the past, LTCC is able to pay its bills, unlike some colleges which are running a deficit.

LTCC has 7 percent in mandatory reserves or \$960,000. Last year a rainy day fund was created which contains \$750,000. Another reserve account has about \$400,000.

"We'll identify all the funds we can capture without hurting instruction," Maradian said in regards to preparing the annual budget for 2011-12.

Maradian said the things the college can count on are tuition costs going up, health care being more expensive, and the state providing less assistance.

Flexibility is another word he used. It's going to be needed as the state deals with its 11-figure deficit.

In his mostly optimistic speech from a podium on the stage at Duke Theater, Maradian asked the assembled group, "Do we dream big or do we not dream at all?"

"Dream big" was the answer.

But from there Maradian delved into the challenges the college is likely to face.

Providing non-credit fee based instruction is one area Maradian believes LTCC should explore.

He cautioned the governor might one day require a local parcel tax to fund community colleges. Maradian said he looked into property values of the college district and found the total to be \$52 billion. If people were taxed \$1 on every \$100,000 of

value for their property, the college could bring in \$5 million.

Baccalaureate programs are the trend for community colleges, though not in California.

Maradian said more education opportunities are needed, especially as the population grows. The demand for higher education is outpacing the state's ability to provide it. Cuts mean fewer classes, which means students aren't able to get the education they want.

He posed the rhetorical question: What happens if one or two generations slip through because there are not enough seats?

There are 2.7 million students in California's community colleges, with just 74,000 graduating each year, which includes those receiving certificates.

Maradian touched on the Title 3 project, saying a Datatel consultant was on campus two days this week to assess the situation. When the staff member who was in charge of the project had his job eliminated last month by the board it caused quite a commotion.

When pressed to elaborate more by a member of the audience, Maradian said the start date to use the software is now 2012, with some students and staff piloting the program before it starts.

"Buying time didn't cost us money. It will make it more manageable to implement," Maradian said. "It's a more realistic approach."

He added that the consultant would provide the college with planning documents to go through the process.