

Reno tourism CEO quits abruptly

By Bill O'Driscoll, Reno Gazette-Journal

Ellen Oppenheim quit Monday after five years as CEO of the Reno Sparks Convention & Visitors Authority, saying she needs more time to care for her ill mother in Texas.

She leaves behind ongoing financial struggles at the tourism agency where in the past two years, the budget built on room tax revenues has been cut by 28 percent with 52 jobs slashed, and a shrunken international choral festival coming this spring could cost the agency nearly \$400,000.

The choral festival issue, Oppenheim said Monday, "had nothing to do" with her decision to resign the post she accepted in 2006 at an annual salary of \$225,000.

"I need to be available for my mother," she said. "It's important, my need to be able to get on a plane and tend to my mother's needs."

She said she will continue for the next six months in another capacity at the RSCVA because her contract, which was to be reviewed along with her job performance later this month by the agency's board, requires six months' notice of resignation.

Board chairman and Reno Councilman Dwight Dortch said the board will meet Thursday to discuss Oppenheim's transition and separation and appoint an interim CEO.

Last month, the 13-member board was informed that the American International Choral Festival had confirmed just 549 registrants out of an expected 3,000 from Europe, China and elsewhere for the May 4-8 event in Reno.

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