

Great stage performances belie reality of Tallac Assoc.

By Kathryn Reed

CAMP RICHARDSON – The Tahoe Tallac Association board and staff could take some pointers from the characters on stage at the Boathouse Theatre.

The five woman starring in the play “Dixie Swim Club” are fabulous in how they capture the nuances of a friendship born in college that lasts into their 70s when there are only four of them left.



Sheree Hollinger (Teri Leve), right, consoles Jeri Neal McFelley (Amy Sando) who is the least likely of the friends to become pregnant.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

They laugh, they yell, they console, they cry, they endure – they find a way to make their lives work as individuals and as a team.

The behind the scenes maneuverings of the Tahoe Tallac Association – the 30-plus-year-old organization that oversees the annual Valhalla Music and Arts Festival – does not resemble a team.

Lake Tahoe News in September reported the financial difficulties the South Shore organization was having.

It's only gotten worse. Grants have not been secured – which is the major source of income to pay the acts, employees and keep the lights on. Marketing seems to be a foreign word to the group. Press releases are sent by the acts coming, if at all, not the association – which makes for a lack of cohesive message or no message.

A once robust volunteer corps was not to be seen July 8 on the second night of “Dixie Swim Club.” Instead it was Executive Director Lori Cramer selling tickets. Volunteers used to receive regular emails about when to sign up for work detail. That hasn't happened this year.

Unfortunately the realities of TTA sound more like the ingredients board member and theatrical director Dave Hamilton could write into a script. Instead, he and those left behind must figure out a way to dig themselves out of financial hole that seems to keep sucking them under.

On July 7, Eric Taxer resigned from the board. Last month the board met without the executive director – a highly unusual move. The next meeting, presumably with the board and staff, is July 11 at 5:30pm – most likely in the Twin Cabins in front of the Valhalla Grand Hall.

In Taxer's letter to the board that was obtained by *Lake Tahoe News* he writes, “We will be starting our new Fiscal Year with

approximately \$38,000 of debt. The only immediate source of income with the new fiscal year will be the holiday faire and gala, expected to generate \$12,000 in income. But, we will have snow removal expenses, winterization expenses, continued insurance, utilities, and payroll. I have repeated in prior meetings for over a year the importance of fundraisers. I have stepped up to the plate and organized such. Other members who have committed to do so have basically bailed on their responsibility.”

If the workings of the nonprofit, which is run by a volunteer board and an executive director who is owed thousands of dollars in back pay, were near the caliber of the programs put on at the various venues near the shore of Lake Tahoe, it would have coffers overflowing with greenbacks.

Cramer is the TTA’s fifth executive director. She was a board member before taking over for Steve Farnsley, whose services the board said it no longer needed. Before Farnsley it was Kathy Farrell at the helm. She embezzled from the organization, though the board chose not to press charges.

Hamilton and Taxer have loaned the association thousands of dollars that have yet to be repaid.

The remaining board members, according to the TTA website, are: Norm Glenn, Hamilton, Ginger Nicolay-Davis (who is worth catching in one of the remaining six performances of “Dixie Swim Club”), Bruce Rettig, Frank Riley (catch him with Tahoe Improv Players on Aug. 2), Pam Taylor and Kim Wyatt.

Nicolay-Davis and Cramer were sent an email last week by *Lake Tahoe News* asking some general questions – nothing about the financial situation. That day, July 1, Nicolay-Davis responded, “We will get info over to you shortly.” The deadline to answer was July 7. *Lake Tahoe News* never received answers to its basic questions – Like what is new this year?

One thing *LTN* knows is new is greater access to the lawn area

– including free concerts on select dates.

Another new thing is better dialogue with the U.S. Forest Service, which owns the land just beyond Camp Richardson. Taxer deserves a great deal of credit for being tenacious in researching documents and getting the appropriate people to listen. When Deputy Forest Supervisor Jeff Marsolais was hired he helped foster an atmosphere of cooperation between landlord and tenant.

While the board figures out how to function more effectively, the shows will go on. Here is this year's festival schedule.