

Athletic supporters eager to improve South Shore fields

By Linda Conaboy

With voters deciding Measure R is a worthwhile piece of legislation, local playing fields will now have more discretionary dollars needed for field maintenance and renovation.

Although the fields are on public land, including the Lake Tahoe Unified School District, Lake Tahoe Community College and Tahoe Paradise Park, a private group incorporated since 1989 as a 501(c)3 nonprofit in California is responsible for coordinating field usage among various organizations within the South Shore area. That group is the Community Athletic Coordinating Council.

Steve Morales, director of facilities for the LTUSD, was a founding member of the CACC and has served on the council since then.



Upgrades to South Shore ball fields will happen sooner with the passage of Measure R.
Photo/Linda

Conaboy

“It was formed by a core of city and school district staff and several individuals involved in community youth athletics,” Morales said. “Reductions at the city and district affecting the field maintenance budgets and growing youth sports programs resulted in a lack of fields and funds to maintain those available. The efforts of the CACC helped reduce those effects.”

At its formation, the first major objective of the CACC was to design an annual facility use schedule. Now, with a board consisting of the president, vice president, secretary/treasurer and the at-large members – two representatives from the member organizations (see list below) – the group’s role has changed to include fundraising duties as well.

“All proceeds generated by the CACC are designated for the improvement and expansion of the athletic fields in the community,” Morales said. He added that LTUSD currently pays for nearly all of the district’s infrastructure costs, although the construction of the two softball fields at South Tahoe High School were primarily funded through the efforts of the CACC through fee collection, the original community Food Fest events and community donations of labor and materials.

Because of the growing interest in field sports among not only boys and girls, but also adults, play on these fields has the potential to become big business, bringing many dollars to South Lake Tahoe. And in the middle of this burgeoning activity is CACC.

With this in mind and because of the importance of their function in the community, *Lake Tahoe News* decided to examine the CACC’s role and how the group interacts with the city and the school district.

Because of the recent lay-off of Dede Lehnhardt, a city parks and recreation employee and former CACC treasurer/secretary, *Lake Tahoe News* was unable to obtain specific financial data.

CACC background

According to Chuck Leonard, the group's president, CACC came into existence specifically to build the Field of Dreams fields at South Tahoe High School – it raised funds to build fields and now is an entity where all different sports negotiate field use.

“The school district gets games on the calendar first, and then youth sports such as Pop Warner, soccer and Lake Tahoe Babe Ruth are scheduled. They are followed by adult recreation leagues like adult soccer and softball,” Leonard said. “Then come club sports like club soccer. After everything else is scheduled, then you can start renting fields for tournaments.”

Leonard said several tournaments including the Come Up for Air soccer tournament brings hundreds of players to the area, many hailing from neighboring states. He also said there were semi-pro football teams here last year playing at the middle school.

“We take in around \$30,000 annually,” he said. “The money comes from youth groups – boys and girls – all who pay for field usage. In fact, the only money that comes to CACC is from what each player pays each year to play.”

The CACC is charged with organizing a long list of activities, including field maintenance, collection of funds, playing schedules and coordinating various tournaments. Besides his duties within the CACC, Leonard is also president of South Tahoe Pop Warner Football Association Inc. and was co-chair of the Committee for Community Recreation – Measure R.

Leonard explained the playing fields are located in an area that encompasses Lake Tahoe Environmental Science Magnet

School on the west and the Kingsbury Grade area on the east.

“(The CACC) maintain a central calendar in conjunction with the South Tahoe Parks and Recreation and the Douglas County Parks and Recreation departments and the Lake Tahoe Unified School District,” Leonard said. “Organizations that are members of the CACC have the first rights to the fields for their sports organizations.”

Although the number of CACC members varies as sports organizations are created or disbanded, the group currently consists of:

- South Lake Tahoe Parks and Recreation
- Lake Tahoe Unified School District
- Douglas County Parks and Recreation
- Lake Tahoe Community College
- South Tahoe Pop Warner Football Association Inc.
- South Tahoe National Little League
- South Tahoe Soccer Association
- South Tahoe AYSO
- Bijou Youth Soccer
- Bijou Adult Soccer
- ASA Girls Softball
- South Tahoe Babe Ruth

“Each of these groups pays \$10 per player per season for field usage,” Leonard said. “These funds are then utilized to maintain and repair the various fields within the service area. In addition to the main group, there is also a subsidiary group named TR4CK that raises funds for the middle

school track and helps to pay for repairs for that complex.”

Money raised to play is deposited into the general CACC fund Leonard said. The money is then utilized by the CACC to maintain or repair fields. “Annually, the CACC puts anywhere from \$5,000 to \$50,000 into field repairs and maintenance depending on the need.”

With the passage of Measure R, additional money, more than \$200,000 initially, will be plowed back into fields as well from money collected from the original Measure S. (The recreation measure is paid by property owner on the California side of the South Shore.) The question of who will decide when and where that additional money will be spent is yet to be determined.

Leonard says he would like his group to have a seat on the yet-to-be-formed steering committee, which will oversee dispersal of the funds; however, the CACC is not guaranteed a seat.

(The three-member board overseeing Measure R has not set a date for the next meeting. They will determine who is on the committee and how it will be structured.)

What about the future?

Leonard is not the only one who would like to see more outside tournaments come to South Lake Tahoe.

Jim Tarwater, superintendent of LTUSD, envisions lots and lots of tournaments.

“Although we have a shortage of active field space, my dream is to have a tournament each week in the summer,” he said. “Now is the time to take a look at the long and short term needs. Eventually, I’d like to raise enough money to offset costs. It costs a lot of money to get a field back into shape after winter.”

Stan Sherer, who oversees South Tahoe parks and rec division, also wants more tournaments in town.

“Yes, we’re hoping outside groups will come from other areas to compete,” he said. “For example, the big soccer tournament that comes here annually. We hope to continue that with other sports to enhance our tourism economy. Any way we can improve our facilities or add to them will make us more competitive and attract more athletic tournaments.”

He added all money that comes because of outside tournaments would pay tournament costs. If the city produces the event, the money comes to the city for facility rental and other costs involved in the production of the tournament.

Increased tournament activity underscores the need for such things as permanent toilets and concession stands. Although Babe Ruth, Little League (and the high school’s Viking Stadium) run their own concession stands and take in the profits from them, there is always a need for concession stands and the necessity for permanent toilets goes without question.

Morales said new concession stands are under construction at the Viking Stadium and the Field of Dreams softball fields. He added the district intends to construct a concession and restroom facility for the track/soccer complex at South Tahoe Middle School in the near future.

Permanent restrooms will be built at Viking Stadium in the spring, while the current construction of the student union at STHS will provide permanent restroom facilities for the softball fields.

According to Tarwater, the district has been working to get these improvements beyond the talking stages for years.

While the CACC remains an all-volunteer organization, Leonard said there has been talk of hiring a paid staff member.

“There’s not enough money now, but that could change,” he said.