

State finally prevails – Kindertown day care closed

By Kathryn Reed

Kindertown Day Care and Preschool will not open Monday. It may never open again, at least not with Maria Barrows-Crist as owner-operator.

Officials from the California Department of Social Services showed up at the South Lake Tahoe center Friday about lunchtime with an order from a judge stating the center would be closed at the end of business Nov. 4.

“Thirty-nine kids over the weekend will have to find alternate care,” Barrows-Crist told *Lake Tahoe News* through tears.



Community efforts to keep Kindertown open ultimately were not enough.

Photo/LTN file

She looks at the pictures on the walls in the center, of the people who have supported her for the past 33 years – and especially in the past two years during her licensing

struggles – and she feels she has let them down.

“I feel like such a failure,” Barrows-Crist. “I really did fight.”

When troubles first started, Kindertown received money from the state as well as private funding. She had 130 children and 20 employees in September 2009.

About 7,000 kids have come through the doors since Judy Kurtzman first opened Kindertown on July 1, 1973. Barrows-Crist is the third owner.

Her saga with the state began in September 2009 when the officials tried to close the facility based on a series of allegations. Each time Barrows-Crist wins in court the state comes up with more charges. This time, though, the state won. That hasn't happened before during all of this back-and-forth legal maneuvering.

Officials from the state were not available for comment late Friday afternoon.

Barrows-Crist said she was caught off-guard because she didn't believe anything would happen until the Nov. 18 hearing before El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Warren Stracener in Placerville. In October he ruled there is no harm keeping Kindertown open until his decision is made later this month.

But the state took the case to the appellate court, which said the center should be closed until Stracener makes his ruling.

So, it's possible Kindertown could open again Nov. 21 if she were to win in two weeks. But by then parents will have found alternative care for their children and the five employees may have moved on as well.

Plus, Barrows-Crist is now representing herself in court because she can't pay what she owes attorney Mike McLaughlin and therefore has no money for any legal counsel. McLaughlin

could not be reached Friday.

The state said they would notify the families by phone and provided Barrows-Crist with a letter to give families as well. The one thing she felt good about Friday was reaching most of the parents before the state did.

If this closure is permanent, Barrows-Crist hopes a buyer will come forward soon. The business has been on the market for a number of months.

Bankruptcy, Barrows-Crist said, may be her next experience with the courts.