

LTCC reorg being mapped out in wake of state budget fiasco

By Kathryn Reed

“She has a very strong fiscal background, which is what we need.”

That’s what college board member Fritz Wenck told *Lake Tahoe News* in May when Kindred Murillo was hired to be president of Lake Tahoe Community College. When it comes to numbers, she keeps being tested.



Gov. Jerry Brown’s budget that banks on voters agreeing to raise taxes that are estimated to generate \$6.8 billion in November has the South Lake Tahoe two-year college and every entity in the K-14 spectrum scrambling to figure out what to do.

Midyear budget cuts are a reality. That’s the immediate problem that needs to be addressed.

The LTCC and Lake Tahoe Unified School District boards tonight will be discussing their respective budgets and what the actions in Sacramento mean locally.

In addition to a presentation on the budget, an item Murillo will bring forward to get on the Feb. 14 agenda is reorganizing key positions at the college.

“The college cannot afford to not have a vice president of Business Services with the current situation,” Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News*. “One thing I’ve learned over my 16 years with community colleges is community colleges fail for a couple of reasons. The first reason is finances of the organization. You

have got to have someone running that area.”

(The title of VP of Business Services will change to VP of Administrative Services when the new person is hired to reflect the job duties.)

The last person to officially have the Business Services job on a full time, permanent basis was Sue Niehoff. She was sent packing by the interim president the board hired for last school year. Niehoff has filed a wrongful termination claim against the college. She did not return a phone call.

After getting rid of Niehoff, then-President Steve Maradian expanded the job of Marc Sabella ,director of fiscal services.

With Murillo’s background in business services for 11 years, she knows the ins and outs of finance. Since her arrival she has been doing the heavy lifting, while Sabella has been responsible for lower level financial work.

As a college president, she has a slew of other responsibilities, thus one of the reasons the board agreed late last year to hire a VP of Administrative Services. Resumes are coming in. But by the time interviews are conducted, someone is selected, that person gives notice and eventually starts at LTCC, it could be late spring-early summer. With the fiscal mess California continues to be mired in – which trickles down to local bodies – Murillo said the status quo can no longer continue.

That is why in the interim before a VP is hired, she is recommending moving Aaron McVean from director of Institutional Research and Planning to interim VP of Administrative Services; putting Bill King, director of Technology, into a position focused on research, report writing and Datatel support; and creating an associate dean of Information Technology for Cheri Jones who now spends half her time on Datatel implementation and half as Admissions and Records director. The last piece would be to hire a dean of

Student Services on a full time basis.

Changing jobs for the three employees mentioned above would not affect the bottom line. This is because the college is saving \$13,229 per month without the Business VP. Salary upgrades would leave a savings of \$8,000, which could be used for clerical support for IT.

Murillo presented the reorg plan to College Council last week. That body is expected to vote on it Feb. 9. The Academic Senate will hear the proposal Jan. 27.

Some college employees are questioning why McVean would be put in a position – even temporarily – that might appear to be out of his breadth of knowledge.

Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News* she could train anyone to do the VP job as long as they have the aptitude and desire. Since she became president July 5, she said everything she has asked McVean to do he has done at an exemplary level and has proved to her he is up to the task to do more – including being integral in forming the 2012-13 budget.

The LTCC budget update for this fiscal year and looking forward will be presented tonight to the board. The college needs to allocate \$314,000 to get through June 30 in order to bridge the gap the state has created. Having put aside more than \$430,000 divided between a rainy day fund and a contingency mid-year budget account is proving to be almost clairvoyant on the board and staff's part.

Without a crystal ball, it's hard to know what the state's economy is going to do.

But in South Lake Tahoe, the unemployment rate is dropping. Latest figures have it at 15 percent in the city – down from nearly 18 percent a year ago.

While some would say college employees should be lucky to have

a job, the truth is they could be making more elsewhere. That's something the board is going to have to contend with soon – even in these economic times. Most agendas have a closed session item for labor negotiations.

LTCC's full-time faculty make between 3.4 percent and 9.4 percent less than the going salary; classified are 6.1 off the average; directors make 10.1 percent less than the market.

The college board meeting is in the Aspen room at LTCC. Here is the LTCC agenda. The meeting starts tonight at 6:20.

LTUSD's meeting starts at 6pm at the district office. Here is that agenda.