

South Shore chamber making strides after 5-plus years

By Kathryn Reed

Five years. It's been that long since the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce came into being. While the beginning was rocky – as most mergers are – solid ground has been found.

B Gorman has been at the helm since Day 1 when this chamber, which is the culmination of merging Tahoe Douglas Chamber of Commerce and South Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce, came to be.



B Gorman on Jan. 26 talks about what Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce is doing.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

At the beginning it was Gorman doing almost everything, along with the board. Staff and board members have come and gone. Today there are three full-time employees reporting directly to Gorman and another who is shared with the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority.

Gorman in a 90-minute presentation gave a recap Thursday of how things are and what the chamber is doing. About 50 people attended the Jan. 26 breakfast meeting at Inn by the Lake. The past and the future, though, were not topics of the meeting.

Afterward, Gorman spoke with *Lake Tahoe News* about where the nearly 650-member strong chamber is going. (About 70 percent of members are located in California and 30 percent in Nevada, with a mix of sizes.)

Growing membership is always a goal. The CEO-president also envisions the chamber taking on more environmental causes, or at least having a seat at the table when those issues are being discussed.

Chambers and politics have historically been bed partners. But this chamber has not been as politically minded as the former South Lake Tahoe chamber was or others are. That could change, according to Gorman. It's a direction she would like to take the organization, but said ultimately that will be a decision of the 21-member board.

Relationship building, promoting the community, growing the local economy and representing businesses with government are the main goals of the chamber.

With South Lake Tahoe presumably done with moving people out of and within the government organization, Gorman is forming relationships with those left behind to better serve the business community.

History:

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2005 – Serious talks are under way about merging the Tahoe Douglas Chamber of Commerce with the South Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce. • March 2006 – In a 13-0 vote, the Tahoe Douglas Chamber of Commerce agrees to merge with the South Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce. Three board members were absent and one abstained. The South Lake chamber board voted 18-6 to combine

resources. At that time the South Lake chamber had 950 members, and Tahoe Douglas 640, with 350 belonging to both chambers. • Fall 2006 – B Gorman hired to run merged chamber. • November 2006 – merger takes place. Eighteen-year lease signed on Stateline building owned by Primm Ventures. • January 2007 – Public disharmony is evident; members of former South Lake chamber begin forming South

**Tahoe Chamber of
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Today –
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The chamber through a formal bid process was awarded the contract with the city that uses grant funds to provide a business-coaching program called the Tahoe Tactical Team. Forty-five small businesses have gone or are going through the program.

Putting on workshops and forums are a big part of the chamber. Some are open to just chamber members or might cost more for non-chamber members.

Key events the chamber puts on are the Business Expo (March 30 at Harrah's Lake Tahoe) and Sample the Sierra (Sept. 2 on Ski Run Boulevard).

One member asked why the food and wine event is Labor Day weekend and not at a time when the area is less crowded. Gorman said the harvest of food and wine help dictate when it

can be, as do room nights.

“Labor Day weekend is soft. Visitors drop off in mid-August,” Gorman said. “Our hope is to build Labor Day weekend.”

When schools started after Labor Day, Lake Tahoe was busy through that weekend. Not so anymore. Gorman said hotel occupancy has been between 50 percent and 60 percent for nearly a decade on Labor Day weekend.

Another member asked about SnowGlobe, the three-day music festival over New Year’s Eve weekend.

“It’s safe to say if it were not for SnowGlobe, it would have been weaker over New Year’s,” Gorman said. That was based on a survey the chamber sent out to members asking how the event affected business.

But she also said if the city intends to bring the event back, the chamber wants more info that could be shared with members – like suggesting to a coffeehouse it stay open until 2am to warm up the concert-goers on their way back to their lodging establishments.

More information about the chamber may be found online.