

Valhalla annual art-music fest ready to dazzle crowds

By Kathryn Reed

CAMP RICHARDSON – If people didn't know why it's called the Great Lawn before Saturday, they did after the cleanup session at the Tahoe Tallac Site.

Bag upon bag of pine needles were filled as volunteers descended upon the South Shore venue to spruce it up before the season kicks off in June.

While the Tahoe Tallac Association has been without an executive director since last August, the volunteer board is committed to keeping the 33-year-old Valhalla Arts and Music Festival alive for decades to come. The board of directors has had some turnover, volunteers are returning, and the dedicated paid staff is hanging on with limited hours.



Tahoe Tallac Association volunteer Jenny Sweatt on April 21 helps clean up the site. Photo/Kathryn Reed

On top of all of that, changes within the local office of the U.S. Forest Service – the landowners – have led to a better

working relationship. The feds have even agreed to allow more events on the lawn, and for wedding receptions to filter from the Grand Hall onto the adjacent grass.

A bugaboo between the Forest Service and TTA in the past has been the gate across the driveway just off Highway 89. It limits access to the site. People would have to walk in after parking in the neighboring dirt lot. For some, that just isn't an option, and for those who didn't know what was on the other side of the gate, they might not have ventured forward on foot.

"We have been told they are moving the gate," TTA board President Ginger Nicolay-Davis told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Even when a show is not going on, artists in residence are working in the small cabins – which are open for the public to see. Plus, the historic buildings are worth visiting in their own right.

By the end of May a USFS sign that has been controversial with the board because it seemed to detract visitors will be coming down, according to Nicolay-Davis.

Fifteen percent of the gross receipts each year per the contract with the USFS is supposed to go back into the site. That hasn't always happened. But better accounting practices are ensuring it gets done.

Exterior painting will occur before the festival season begins and carpet will be replaced.

Revenue from weddings is expected to be double what it was a year ago.

With cash in the bank, the association will be able to pay someone to take care of the lawn this year instead of board member Dave Hamilton pushing his mower over the grass.

After this season, the board may consider hiring someone to

take over more of the heavy lifting.

“We are very hopeful we will be able to hire at a minimum a summer director for the festival. The board can’t do this forever,” Nicolay-Davis said. “In a perfect world we want to become a summer theater venue and mix in music and other stuff as part of our mission.”

Three plays will be staged at the Boathouse Theater this summer. “God of Carnage”, a Tony-award winning comedy, starts the theatrical season on July 5. That is followed by the comedic play “Death by Golf” later in July.

The locals’ favorite “Guilty Pleasures” is returning in August with new, updated material – including a segment on the Ta-hole and revisions to the TRPA skit. Hamilton is the mastermind behind the words and lyrics.

All three plays will be for multiple days, including evening and matinee performances.

Music on the lawn will be one day a month starting in June. (June 17, July 8, Aug. 19 and Sept. 2.) It is geared to locals. A variety of genres will be represented during the free noon-2pm performance.

Plus, there will be several musical acts in the boathouse, though those cost money.

The improv, which has always drawn a crowd, will be one day a month, as well – July 3, Aug. 7, and Sept. 4.

“My thought was to have really good events, but not as many (overall),” Nicolay-Davis said.

For more information about the festival, go online to the revamped website that was launched earlier this month. Here is the Valhalla 2012 schedule. And right now a membership drive is going on, which entitles people to free tickets. For details on membership, click on the ad at the top of *Lake*

Tahoe News' home page.