

S. Tahoe finance director a rookie in public sector

By Kathryn Reed

Experience with financial forecasting is one of the driving reasons why Michael Nakama has been hired to be South Lake Tahoe's finance director.

Nakama begins the job that comes with a \$130,000 paycheck on June 11.

The vacancy was created when Christine Vuletich left in February to work for Douglas County. She was making \$140,000 when she departed.



Michael
Nakama

Nakama was most recently working for Southern California Edison before being downsized earlier this year. When South Tahoe picked him up, Nakama was still unemployed.

City Manager Tony O'Rourke said on paper Nakama was one of the top three candidates. There was a large applicant pool, with a few candidates from the South Shore. However, no locals made it to the final round.

"Staff liked him the most. He is very analytical," O'Rourke said of Nakama.

Assistant City Manager Nancy Kerry was also involved in the hiring because she will be his boss when O'Rourke leaves at

the end of the month for a job in Washington. The City Council had also been kept in the loop during the hiring process because of the unique situation of a key department head being brought on by someone who will not be around for long.

“His forte is financial analysis and budgeting. He will be a huge asset for the city,” O’Rourke said.

While Nakama does not have experience in the public sector, O’Rourke sees this as a good thing. His experience with larger companies like UNIFI Companies and American Golf and Airport Corporation are seen as assets.

Like Vuletich, Nakama will also be in charge of overseeing the IT department and the airport. He has experience in both.

Another plus is Nakama has been involved with financial system conversions, according to O’Rourke.

The city is looking to overhaul its financial software because what is used now is like having an abacus. Nakama will be a key player in reviewing the request for proposals and picking what system the city goes with.

Between a software system that allows standard financial reports to be run and a finance guy who knows how to crunch numbers both in terms of understanding the meaning of the numbers and being able to produce answers based on what’s in the budget and what could be coming down the pike, O’Rourke is confident Nakama is the piece to the management team the city had been missing.

Even though Nakama is used to the flat land and warmth – being from Hawaii, getting an MBA from Stanford and living in the Los Angeles area – he likes the outdoors.

When he interviewed he spent an extra day in the area, on his own dime. He swam at the rec center, drove around the lake and went for a run.

“He is a triathlon type,” O’Rourke said in describing Nakama.

Nakama did not return phone calls.