

Conner: Jobs for locals, better transit, bring in businesses

Publisher's note: *This is the fourth of five Q&A profiles of a South Lake Tahoe City Council candidate running in the Nov. 6 election.*

Name: JoAnn Conner

Age: Old enough to have an AARP card; young enough to play hopscotch with my grandgirls.

How long have you lived in South Lake Tahoe?: 31 years.



JoAnn Conner

Work/volunteer experience:

Work: In South Lake Tahoe, I have worked as an educator, a temporary worker, a child care provider, a journalist, director of a learning lab, manager at a retail store, medical front office staff, catering and food service, director of the Washoe Tribe Head Start Program, director of the Washoe Heritage Information Network, and currently Regional Manager and Independent Associate with Legal Shield/Identity Theft Shield and owner of Golden Bear Events.

Volunteer: Current member of the American Legion Auxiliary, South Tahoe Cancer League, and president of the South Tahoe

Chamber of Commerce. In the past, I have been president of the Lake Tahoe Historical Society (when we moved the log cabin and toll house), board member of Tahoe Douglas Rotary, president of South Lake Tahoe American Association of Pen Women, board member of American Business Women, volunteer at Christmas Cheer, Optimist Club, Neighborhood Chairperson for Sierra Nevada Girl Scouts, co-pack master for Boy Scout Pack No. 594, member of South Tahoe Bowmen, president Lake Tahoe Writer's Club, president of Silver State Fiction Writers, and involved in youth sports.

Why are you running for City Council?: I feel I have a unique connection to a large variety of people in the community, and will bring a fresh perspective and new ideas to the council. We need fiscal responsibility; we owe it to the people to use our money wisely. We need to ensure public safety, do everything possible to bring new jobs here, and be more business friendly.

What is your vision for South Lake Tahoe, the South Shore and the entire Lake Tahoe Basin?: We live in an unusual environment that requires the entities in the basin to work closely, both to maximize public services and to attract visitors. My focus would be on South Lake Tahoe and working more closely with the Meyers community. My vision, based on conversations with business and recreation factions, would be to create more jobs by increasing access to recreation, conservation efforts with people in mind, and therefore creating more income to allow for improvements in our infrastructure and dwellings. Appeal to visitors would be enhanced. I would like to see us become more of a destination for special events, festivals, and family recreation as well.

What are the three best things about South Lake Tahoe?: The giving and caring spirit of the people, the pride in presenting beautiful, recreational surroundings to guests and locals, and having a good place to raise a family.

What three things would you like to change in South Lake Tahoe and how will you go about changing them?: We need more jobs for locals. I would actively seek out compatible business to come here, and work to give incentives for hiring and mentoring locals. I would expand on the neighborhood meeting concept and encourage buy-in from the locals, and help with the volunteer program to improve aesthetics of our neighborhoods. We need a better public transportation system; possibly partially funded by environmental groups.

What would you do to balance the budget?: The budget has improved in the past year, with less of a deficit than we have seen for a while. I would look into better investments for retirement funds and work with public employees to revamp future retirement and benefit policies. More enforcement of vacation rental fees, and possibly a business license fee for people who rent out multi-family dwellings. I think there are some changes we could make to policies that would encourage more revenue and bring efficiency to a higher level.

What would you like to see in a recreation master plan?: We need to upgrade our golf course and keep fees competitive. Be more local friendly. We need more activities at our recreation complex that would attract local youth, especially teens. Our skateboard park needs more work, our playing fields need to be expanded to accommodate more tournaments from other areas coming to Tahoe, in addition to adequate fields for our local youth and adult sports. I would like to explore the idea of "bike sharing" used in other communities to cut down on vehicle usage.

Promoting recreation was touted two years as a means to stimulate the local economy. Nothing has been done in that time. What will you do so that same sentence can't be said two years from now?: The city manager and the JPA are looking at developing more fields. Our advertising efforts should promote hiking, biking, camping, and marathon activities more, in addition to skiing and snowboarding. Work more closely with

bicycle coalitions and groups that can be resources for bringing people here. Two years in a row, the 401K Cyclists for Cancer have been through our town. Where's our publicity? Encourage and help businesses that are working to get more events here, like the snowball baseball tournament and CUFA soccer.

What types of recreation do you enjoy in Lake Tahoe?: Hiking, walking, bike riding, snowshoeing, camping, boating, disc golf.

How will South Lake Tahoe be different in four years after the end of your term?: I am only one person, one vote, and I don't own a magic wand, but I would hope my energy could be used to bring together a more cohesive faction of locals working together with agencies and each other to look for, and expand upon, the positive aspects we can use to build our town.

Being on the council requires working with four others. Give readers an example of how you work well others in difficult situations with differing opinions: I taught rival gang factions in the same classroom at the same time and never had a fight in my room. That took some leadership and diplomacy skills. Often just posing questions to get others to think from another point of view can be helpful in conflict resolution. Then, work on compromise. This isn't about the five people on the council; it is about the people of South Lake Tahoe. I would hope that would be a common interest that would generate compatibility in most cases.

What are your opinions about the following issues and/or entities?:

- **Loop road** – Not in favor of the current configuration being proposed by the TTD. Harming or obliterating existing business and dislodging residents who rely on low cost housing for a dubious benefit to South Lake Tahoe is not a winning proposition.

- **Hole at Stateline** – Currently, there is another developer looking at the property. If this is a win, great. If not, we need to actively pursue a positive resolution for this dangerous eyesore.
- **Tahoe Valley Plan** – Hopefully, can move forward. This area of our city is in need of revamping.
- **Giving money to any chamber or tourism bureau** – Not in favor.
- **Benefits, including pensions, for city staff** – Look for better return on investment, but also restructuring to a sustainable system, targeting new hires first.
- **Tahoe Regional Planning Agency** – Continue to develop better communication. Seems to be a move on their part to be perceived as more amenable to people and solutions instead of enforcement.
- **Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board** – I would like to find out more information on this topic; the relationship appears to work, but could be fine-tuned to a better partnership.
- **South Shore Vision Plan** – I think this, in its current state, is more beneficial to Nevada than South Lake Tahoe. More local input from those who live and work in our town should be considered.
- **Lake Tahoe Airport** – Not an easy answer to this one. Lawsuits have plagued this site in the past, but it is my understanding we are still liable for a large debt if we close this. The closure would be problematic in regards to safety issues and, if we are to rebuild a tourist economy, this is a key component. Neighbors are not happy about the noise it would bring, but newer technology cuts down on this.

Why should voters vote for you over someone else?: I believe I

have proven myself to have integrity that addresses the needs of the people, not a personal agenda. I do not have any ties to big business support, nor does my income rely on any support from the casinos, ski resorts, city, county, state, or any other special interest group. I am a “little guy” who can truly identify with the needs and feelings of most of the people in our town. Yet, my background with big business and communication with same, also allows me to see their perspective.

Is being president of a chamber of commerce a conflict of interest?: I don't believe so; I feel it has given me three years of interaction with business owners and the public on an intense level. I have a good grasp of what the “little guy” on the street thinks and their concerns. Being president means I have been at nearly every council meeting for over a year, so also understand a lot of what the city is facing. I will not be the current president by the time of the election.

Is there a person or business you would not take a campaign contribution from?: Yes. I will not take any contribution or support from any business or individual that expects me to advance their personal agenda if I am elected. I support legitimate business with a focus on South Lake Tahoe and Meyers and I will serve the residents, doing my best for the city as a whole.

Tell readers something about yourself that they may not already know: I was so shy when I started high school I couldn't even walk to the front of the class and say my name. By the time I got to college, I was voted best speaker in my class and delivered singing telegrams to make extra money.