

South Shore residents talk economic revitalization

By Kathryn Reed

In 2007, the South Shore experienced what many believe was one of the worst disasters to hit the area – the Angora Fire that reduced 254 houses to ash in a matter of hours.

To rebuild – the structures, their psyche, their belongings – it took the community coming together. This included the government agencies setting aside some long-held ways of doing things. It took people giving – time, resources, money.



SMG President Carl Ribaud talks economics Oct. 23 in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/LTN

It took having a common goal. That goal was to make whole the lives of those individuals who lost their homes and those who were displaced.

That type of cooperation is what Paula Lambdin suggested be done to turn the economy on the South Shore around. She should know it works. Her family rebuilt in the burn area. And Lambdin was instrumental in holding her neighborhood together after the fire.

Lambdin was one of nearly 200 people who attended an economic forum Tuesday night at Embassy Suites in South Lake Tahoe that was put on by the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce,

Tahoe Prosperity Center and Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority.

Casey Blann, president of the chamber board, said it is time to stop looking in the rearview mirror and start doing something.

Carl Ribaudo with Strategic Marketing Group went over the economic analysis he prepared for the South Shore Vision plus some additional information. (This is the economic analysis he presented to the South Lake Tahoe City Council earlier this month, which is similar to what he delivered Oct. 23.)

He emphasized how the South Shore has lost about a half million hotel room nights, or 30 percent, since 2001; that retail sales in the city are declining, while Truckee's are increasing; the need to look at whether economic changes are cyclical or structural; how the bulk of hotel rooms are not in casinos, but that the casinos are hosting the majority of travelers; the abundance of rooms; and how other areas are charging more and therefore bringing more taxes to government coffers.

"The status quo does not provide the level of revenue that is sustainable for the community," Ribaudo concluded.

He believes the type of person coming to Tahoe is the same person who shops at REI. While he doesn't want to discount the idea of bringing families, Ribaudo said with that sector representing 30 percent of travelers, it would be foolish to forget the other 70 percent.

B Gorman, president of the chamber, spoke about the trek a group of South Shore powerbrokers took earlier this year to Livermore and Monterey and what the message was from that excursion. She also shared a video from the experience.

<http://youtu.be/9dCeNVqudN0>

Three questions were asked of the audience at the beginning before each table worked on its solutions. In a brief

brainstorming this is what people came up with:

Q: What expectations do you have for the evening?

A: • Education • Accurate data • Inspiration • Information • Solutions • All encompassing plan • Partnership • Shared vision • Momentum • Change.

Q: What are the obstacles?

A: • Financial • Regulations • Communications • The past • Lawsuits • Assumptions • Complacency • Apathy • Status quo • Lack of imagination • Weather • Fragmentation • Isolation • Lack of leadership • Multi-jurisdictional.

Q: What are you willing to do?

A: • Engagement • Collaborate • Invest • Compromise • Shop local • Participate • Be uncomfortable • Volunteer • Share assets/resources.

Then it was time for the eight tables comprised of residents, business people and agency types to hash how best they would revitalize the economy and the obstacles that may get in the way.

All the comments were being collected, with the goal of having a meeting after the first of the year to encourage solutions with the public and private sectors working together.

Comments included, but were not limited to:

- Stop competing with each other – in other words, work together instead of against each other;
- Identify core values;
- Perhaps the wrong visitor is being targeted;
- Change the status quo;

- Transportation is a problem;
- Communication needs to go both ways – not just one segment telling everyone else what is going to happen;
- Find out what visitors want;
- What brought locals to Tahoe will bring tourists;
- Mountains, wildlife views, fly fishing – those things and others need to be promoted, not just the lake;
- Create a collection of pedestrian zones that are linked;
- Reduce the speed limit;
- Empower locals;
- More jobs;
- Leadership;
- Need more participation – not just all the regulars.

The question people were left with was: What role are you willing to play in the economic revitalization of South Lake Tahoe? Substantive answers will be sought at the next meeting.

A similar question is the Question of the Week on *Lake Tahoe News*.