

Opinion: An army makes Clean Tahoe the success that it is

By Ellen Flynn

As this year comes to a close, I look back upon the service we have provided throughout the year to our community, the impact we have made, and I'm compelled to write to my community.



Clean Tahoe's dedicated staff, Jeff Pollitt and Lou Graves, drove the streets of the city and county of South Lake Tahoe picking up more than 150 tons of illegally dumped items, trash on roadsides, public lots and assisted our community in getting rid of unwanted items. The Dinner Table Project, launched in 2010, continues to help those in need in our community with recycled furniture. It's been a great year of being in service.

I'm happy to report that the program's fiscal situation stabilized last year. This hasn't been the case for much of the past five years. The program has struggled financially with the rising cost of doing business and a paycheck that hasn't changed much since 2002. All employee benefits were cut at the close of 2010 so that we could move into 2011 with a balanced budget.

We recognize that we do not fight the battle of litter alone. It takes an army. An army of people who also recognize that the war on trash can sometimes be an uphill battle. We are your front line troops, so to speak, and we are turning around today to thank the many who stand behind us in our daily crusade.

First, a debt of gratitude goes to the residents of South Lake Tahoe. Without your support, this program would not be successful. Quite simply, Clean Tahoe Program was born from

your good stewardship of this area. You voted to spend \$1.20 every three months to fund the program. Take a look at your South Tahoe Refuse bill and at the bottom you'll notice the surcharge. For the price of two latte's (we also receive \$3 from your property taxes) you have funded Clean Tahoe for the year. Now that's an incredible value.

A huge thank you goes to the fine folks at Heavenly/Vail Resorts Echo Charitable Giving foundation for sponsoring our Community Cleanup Day. Clean Tahoe's annual event continues to provide the once per year opportunity for residents to unload a truckload of unwanted items for only \$5. For the past two years they have provided assistance in the form of a marketing guru, a large banner which advertises our event at the senior center, and enough funding to cover the loses which typically run more than \$2,000. This generosity ensures that we can continue to offer this event to the community without raising the price. Thank you Heavenly.

To those who became members of the program and are supporting Clean Tahoe in a bigger and more direct way, thank you. Our membership base is growing thanks to your belief in what we do.

Several businesses also chose to invest in the program by becoming business members: The Hard Rock Café stepped in this year with generous sponsorship of \$500 and a donation of more than 50 chairs from their restaurant to the Dinner Table Project. Tamarack Rentals joined and Realty World Lake Tahoe renewed as "Business Plus" sponsors with Huber Plumbing, Sugar Pine Foundation and Svadhyaya Yoga also joining at the "Business" level. All of our members are ensuring that Clean Tahoe continues to serve you at the highest level. (Check out www.clean-tahoe.org to see how you can join!).

Speaking of the Dinner Table Project, the vision of recycling some of the furniture we find and giving it back to those in need in our community is now going on its third year of

operation. Since December 2010, the Dinner Table Project has given furniture to 110 families and has received more than 136 donations of furniture. You continue to support this endeavor by donating your used furniture and helping your neighbor. It has been heartwarming indeed to see your generosity. Thank you for your help.

Then there are the locals who hike, bike and walk the paths trails and roadways. You are a mighty force of dedicated individuals who take it upon yourselves to pick up trash whenever you see it. People who take matters into their own hands and just do it. You are legions. To you, we say thank you. Thank you for caring about your community and helping us keep it clean. You are the ones who understand that it is all of our responsibility to do so. You do it for a higher purpose.

Finally, I thank the newly retired Bob Albertazzi, former community service officer for the South Lake Tahoe Police Department and our City Council for making trash ordinance violations and containment a priority. This year saw the institution of a citation process that made people accountable for mismanagement of their trash. We are seeing more animal resistant cans in place and those problem properties with the chronic trash problems are becoming fewer and further between than in years previous.

I commend your service to our community Bob; your ability to get things done is unprecedented in my eight years at Clean Tahoe. I will miss working with you and I can speak for all of the staff at Clean Tahoe when I say that our city will miss you.

It truly takes an army ... a community, and I'm grateful for all of you.

Happy New Year, South Lake Tahoe. May you all be blessed with an abundance of good things in your life. Rest well knowing

that Clean Tahoe's business is picking up.

Ellen Flynn is Clean Tahoe's program manager.