

# South Lake Tahoe educator leaves legacy of enriching lives of multiple generations

By Kathryn Reed

It won't just be the students at Mount Tallac High School who will be graduating June 7. So will their leader.

Susan Baker is calling it quits after 23 years in Lake Tahoe Unified School District. She is no ordinary educator in charge of ordinary students. She is a force at the continuation high school who when she sees a problem, she solves it.

In the late 1990s she was well aware that girls who became pregnant dropped out of school. There was no program for them. There was little future.

"The most important thing we needed to do was create an atmosphere that fostered academic success," Baker told Soroptimist International Tahoe Sierra. (The service club has been a huge financial supporter of the program. She gave them one last recap last month.)



Susan Baker is retiring after 23 years with Lake Tahoe Unified School District. Photo/LTN file

For many of the girls, this has been the first time they have found academic success. The theory is that it won't be the last time.

Baker calls the Young Parents Program the crown jewel of her tenure with the district. It all started 13 years ago in the Viking Lodge as an independent study program.

Now there is a comprehensive academic program for them at Mount Tallac.

In the first year there were 33 teenage moms in the program. In fall 2012 she started with one baby and one pregnant girl. She is ending the school year with three more pregnant girls.

Baker quickly realized getting the girls to school was a necessity. A taxi service helped with that. Then there were the social services, which were brought to the girls in large part through Early Head Start via the El Dorado County Office of Education.

Most of these young girls do not have good role models for being a mom. The Soroptimist pay for a nurse to be on site who teaches the girls about diet, the importance of birth control, and caring for themselves and their baby.

Nationally, 70 percent of teen moms have more than one baby. Baker has seen two girls get pregnant more than once in her 13 years. She attributes this to the nurse and the girls seeing the value of an education.

On campus is a high quality day care so mom and child are not far from each other during the school day. This also allows breast feeding, and for the two to bond throughout the day.

Just because Baker is retiring doesn't mean she is leaving everything behind. She wants to collect data on where the babies of these girls are now. She also envisions sharing her knowledge and expertise with others.

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**Notes:**

Others retiring in June from LTUSD include:

- JJ Clause (38 years)
- Linda Kurek (33 years)
- Eric Allmeroth (18 years)
- Don Borges (37 years)
- Mary Burns (24 years)
- Gini Gunsch (13 years)
- Kris Hakenson (25 years)
- Linda Loughrin (25 years)
- Eileen McEwen (36 years).

Classified staff who retired at the end of last year:

- Romeo Alaoen (36 years)
- Andy Balwing (35 years)
- Wane Blaylock (26 years)
- Sandy Bobman (35 years)
- Jerry Buckley (18 years)
- Cathy Crabtree (25 years)
- Steve Dorman (18 years)
- Cindy Farmer (27 years)
- Ken Gerrard (15 years)

- Pam Giordano (22 years)
- Birgie Lukins (21 years)
- Sandy Hood (26 years)
- Kathy Humphreys (20 years)
- Jerry Lufrano (26) years
- Cheryl Walters (33 years)
- Holly Weber – (28 years).

The school board will honor all of the retirees at the June 11 6pm board meeting.