

# Time for Tahoe to be a hub for the arts

By Robert Schimmel

On Sept. 17, the City Council addressed the recent issue of the ordinance regarding Temporary Arts and Crafts Fairs, and it was heartening to see how the process went. With the council apparently leaning (3-2) in committed fashion to cutting the fairs from 12 to four per summer starting in 2014, speakers in defense of the status quo spoke passionately against the change.

I added my comments at the end in support of the “big picture” of the Arts in Tahoe and will come back to that.



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The heartening part during the council’s discussion and was that one member appeared open to new information and a consequent altered position. Hal Cole, in humorous fashion, accepted responsibility for this issue coming to the floor circuitously, so his questions and responses appeared to be quite sincere as he weighed facts and opinions. The ultimate act of wisdom came from Mayor Tom Davis when he made the motion to back off the draconian cut of 12 to four and moved that it be 10 for 2014 with a reduction of two per year until four is reached in 2017, supposedly.

This motion was seconded and approved 3-2 (Conner, Davis and Cole), which showed Cole's willingness to adjust in response to the evidence, and needs of the parties affected, including the city's future loss of revenue from this reduction.

In recognition of the case made for a "high end" image to which I also aspire, there is no reason that arts and crafts fairs can't be upgraded to help make and sustain an everyday economy that means "Tahoe = Art+". Fears that such fairs and/or larger festivals compete with galleries, etc. has some merit, but it's lopsided in that different clientele patronize each venue.

The "pie" is not static or limited. The competing art venues actually create more business for each other, and the more people we attract, the more adjacent spending occurs within the community. Art Meccas all around the country have very successful outdoor festivals on a regular basis, but they didn't get that way overnight. We need to work with those making the fairs possible, create or delegate a city liaison to work on a long term image/vision with such people, and make this a town known for its ongoing cultural life supported by local, professional talent and others. Taos, Jackson Hole, Park City, Scottsdale, Santa Fe, etc. have less natural talent and resources and have done it. Why not Tahoe?

This addresses the big picture of how Tahoe itself needs to come together and promote a vision that attracts visitors based on what is here and God given: our rare, stunning geography plus its resulting unlimited recreational possibilities. Arts and culture tied to geo-tourism sound like a winner to me in response to our needs for diversification of our economic base that has too long depended on the casinos. In South Lake Tahoe, are we willing to build a foundation for long-term growth that can include all the areas represented by environmental, medical, geo-tourism, the arts and clean industries? Will we strive to build up our communities around cultural excellence and an educational system that has

incredible potential in its improving elementary magnet schools' programs, its impressive South Tahoe High School TADA and extensive Lake Tahoe Community College arts, music, theater programs and facilities?

Currently, too many rules and regulations squelch creativity and make it impossible for artists and promoters to put Tahoe on the map as "the place to shop for and experience amazing art exhibitions, public art happenings, etc." We have lost and will continue to lose participating artists even if they remain in the area. Why not encourage our own and attract other world-class artists, musicians, performers, etc.? Many new ideas and opportunities are already here and the upscale direction is right under your noses with redevelopment, new technologies, etc. Regulations are part of the problem; we must corral them and put energy into developing an attitude of how to succeed not you can't.

Let's join with the countless efforts to create such change through citizen-based groups like the lake Tahoe Sustainability Collaborative, which is working around the lake to build common ground and opportunities for year round stability and a place for families to grow with a real future ahead. And what should our city and local governances be doing? Laying the pathways and groundwork for making such efforts viable by allowing individuals to create and compete.

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