

# Plastic bag ban working in South Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

If the number of people who showed up at a meeting this week about South Lake Tahoe's plastic bag ban is an indication of it how it is working, it's working well.

Four members of the public attended the May 14 meeting to talk about what is working and what isn't. Mayor Hal Cole and Councilmember JoAnn Conner were also in attendance. City Attorney Tom Watson ran the meeting.

On this same day a state Assembly panel moved forward a proposal to ban plastic bags throughout California.

The ban for South Lake Tahoe grocery stores started in mid-January, while others will not be able to hand out the one-time use bags starting Oct. 15.

Connie Hinton, who owns a thrift store in town, worries about what will happen when she is no longer allowed to package people's goods in plastic bags. She said it would have an economic impact.

Today she is given bags from customers – plastic and paper – that she reuses for other customers. She would still be able to use the paper.

Hinton said there is a bit of inequity in that the Attic, another thrift store, will be able to use plastic bags in the future because it is a nonprofit.

Nonprofits are exempt from the bag ban. However, it is still impacting them. Bread & Broth used to have a plethora of grocery store plastic bags to fill with goods for people to take with them at the end of the meal. Now the group is

relying on other businesses to donate bags, such as Heavenly Sports and Michael's.

Priscilla Rohrich's problem with the ban is that she said it isn't helping the environment because people are buying boxes of plastic bags to line their garbage cans instead using a bag that once held groceries. She has a problem with corporations benefiting from South Lake Tahoe's decision.

Karen Fink, who was instrumental in bringing the bag ban to the council, said she finds no need to buy bags. Her family has found ways to use bags from cereal boxes, bread and other items in lieu of the grocery store plastic bags.

Councilmember Conner made the false comment that some stores have stopped charging for paper.

When Fink asked her which stores, Conner snidely said, "You are going to have to figure that out yourself."

So, *Lake Tahoe News* did. What was discovered is Conner was lying. Raley's charges 5 cents for paper, Safeway 10 cents for paper, and Grocery Outlet 5 cents for paper and 10 cents for reusable plastic bags.

The four major grocery stores in the city limits (there are two Raley's) all say the ban wasn't welcome at first, but now customers have gotten used to it.

Victor Guerrero at the Raley's near Stateline told *Lake Tahoe News* people even sued the chain because of the policy. The store prevailed.

"It's working. People are slowly remembering their bags," Guerrero said of people using reusable bags.

A Safeway clerk said a good number of people bring their own bags, while others pay for paper.

Conner also said there has been more shoplifting with people

filling reusable bags or walking out with carts full of goods. None of the above mentioned stores mentioned this as a problem to *Lake Tahoe News*.

The council is expected to discuss the plastic bag ban at the June 17 meeting.