

Opinion: Library needs to upgrade wireless capacity



Steve Haerr of South Lake Tahoe uses the library's Internet. Photo/Denise Haerr

By Kay Henderson

Seven months ago, through the passage of Measure L, local residents voted to continue financial support of a key community resource, the South Lake Tahoe Library. Now we face our first major post-election challenge. There has been greatly increased use of our library's Internet connection due to people using our WiFi capability to access information via personal devices, such as phones, tablets, and laptops.

As a result, our library's Internet connection, put into place in the 1990s, is no longer adequate and service has become very slow.

We are not the only library facing this challenge. This past fall, I conducted a phone survey of the branch managers of other libraries in the Tahoe basin and Truckee. Across five counties and two states, demand for WiFi in our local libraries has surged and managers have worked hard to meet that need. Some have succeeded and others are still working on the problem.

A common thread is that installing a fiber-optic line, which can handle the large amount of use in a library, is expensive.

Upgrading the Internet service at the South Lake Tahoe Library is badly needed.

As branch Manager Katharine Miller notes, "The library in any community serves as a key access point for information. We want people to have access to both physical books and online resources. To do that, we need to ensure the speed of our Internet service meets the demand of the public."

South Lake Tahoe Friends of the Library is working to meet this need. On Jan. 20 at 6pm at the library, we will be looking at this issue. Heidi Hill Drum and Bev Ducey from the Tahoe Prosperity Center will background us on the work their organization is doing to determine needs and write grants to upgrade Internet and cell phone service throughout the basin. The branch manager will then discuss various options for improving Internet service at our library and possible means of funding. A question and answer session will allow audience members to get information on specific topics and share suggestions. Light refreshments will be served.

We invite all interested members of our community to attend.

Kay Henderson is past president South Lake Tahoe Friends of the Library.