

Lukins Brothers – pioneers in SLT water biz

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Lukins Brothers is more than a water company. It's a family. It's a way of life. It's a part of Lake Tahoe's history as well as its future.

And despite the name, a woman runs it.

No matter what Jenn Lukins' title is, she is the face and voice of the South Shore water purveyor. It is very much a family operation, just like it was when it started in the 1940s.

But much has changed in the intervening years. Lukins talked about the history and life today concerning her company during a Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe meeting; she also delved into the history of water on the South Shore.

It wasn't that her great-grandpa Lloyd Lukins intentionally set out to get into the water business. He had a well, neighbors needed water, and he started selling to them.

At one time the family owned several acres on the outskirts of Camp Richardson on both sides of Highway 89. His family lived in what is now Evans Restaurant. Lukins Resort was a thriving enterprise. The cabins people would rent still exist – they are the little white ones used by a Christian youth group in the summer.



Jenn Lukins is carrying on the family tradition of working for the South Lake Tahoe water company. Photo/LTN file

Lloyd Lukins decided to start subdividing the land in the mid-1940s, selling the land with water.

In 1953, the state awarded Lukins Brothers a certificate to provide water to the 20 seasonal customers. Today the water company has 974 customers; of which more than 80 percent are full-time residents.

Something that Lloyd Lukins did that turned heads at the time was to put in 4-inch waterlines instead of the three-quarter inch that were the norm then. He was a visionary.

Lukins is not the oldest water company in South Lake Tahoe – that distinction goes to Lakeside Park, which started in 1904. It still operates near the state line.

In the early years there were also Globins, Tahoe Sierra, Martin Family, Tahoe Paradise and Tahoe Keys water systems.

South Tahoe Public Utility District started in 1950 as a sewer company with a pump on Ski Run Boulevard. Septic tanks were used prior to that. Now septic tanks are illegal in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

In the next decade South Tahoe PUD bought the Globin water company, and then many of the others.

Today water on the California side of the South Shore either comes from Lukins, STPUD, Tahoe Keys or Lakeside. STPUD still handles all the sewer.

What has changed the most are all the regulations from the state and feds. For Lukins, the California Public Utilities Commission and state Water Resources Control Board are the two big overseers. They control rate increases, water quality, regulate water flow for fires and other aspects of the business. The overriding issues are health and safety for customers.

Contaminants in the water are something Lloyd Lukins didn't have to contend with, but are an every day worry for his great-granddaughter. **PCE** or tetrachloroethylene was first detected in South Lake Tahoe's groundwater in 1989. Lukins' wells were affected in 2014, though it's not the only water company with PCE. The company is working to put in a filtration system, while the state continues to try to isolate the source.

PCE was a commonly used chemical in dry cleaning and automotive businesses. Lake Tahoe Laundry Works used to be at Y in the Raley's center. That is a known source for PCE contamination right there and had originally been thought to be the source of the plumes below TJ Maxx and Classic Cue.

Climate change is another issue Jenn deals with that Lloyd never had to. While regionally the use of water is declining and aquifer is healthy, it is snowmelt that recharges the underground water. With less snow predicted for the future, at some point the availability of water could become an issue in the basin.