

# Money an issue for temporary SLT control tower

By Kathryn Reed

Safety is the No. 1 reason South Lake Tahoe officials are looking to have a temporary air traffic control tower at Lake Tahoe Airport during the annual celebrity golf tournament.

This is the busiest week of the year for the airport. According to the FAA, in 2014 there were 362 aircraft at the airport for the golf tournament. That's an average of 52 planes a day. More than 60 percent were larger jet aircraft.

The cost, though, for controllers is more than the city wants to incur. That is why City Manager Nancy Kerry on June 8 will be asking the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority board to help defer the costs.

"In the past the costs for providing a temporary air traffic control tower was borne primarily by the FAA because it did not trigger a \$10,000 threshold to establish a reimbursable agreement. This year the FAA has relocated its temporary air traffic control tower facility from Reno to Boise, Idaho, and costs to bring the facility here was quoted at \$16,000 for the five-day period," Airport Manager Mark Gibbs explained. "This is above the \$10,000 trigger requiring the city to pay for the costs associated with the tower per FAA policy."

Per the FAA's suggestion the city looked into having a private air traffic control firm do the job for the July 11-16 event. Tower Tech Inc., which provided air traffic control services here during the 2007 Angora Fire, would cost \$13,500. That fee covers equipment, personnel and insurance.

These people have the same certifications as controllers who work for the FAA. Three people would work from 8am-5pm each

day.

The tower would be on a trailer behind a truck, and would be on the airport ramp near the terminal.

“When you have no air traffic controller managing the airport terminal airspace, aircraft radio traffic becomes congested. Without a ‘moderator’, pilots will try to talk over one another making for a confusing situation for all,” Gibbs told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Radio messages could be missed and pilots rely on one another to report where they are at all times. If the radio traffic becomes too congested to report properly, a dangerous situation results as pilots try to keep situational awareness of all other air traffic in the vicinity and fly the airplane.”

A bonus to having the controllers is they can “ensure aircraft use the noise abatement flight path into/out from the airport.” This means there should be fewer planes circling over neighborhoods.

According to Gibbs, it was complaints about safety by Caesars Entertainment and Edgewood Tahoe in 2013 that led the city to contract with the FAA. However, not every year has there been a temporary tower.

Harrah’s Lake Tahoe, whose parent company is Caesars, is the host hotel. Edgewood leases the golf course to NBC/American Century – owners of the American Century Championship tournament. Edgewood told *Lake Tahoe News* it would not contribute to the tower.

To date for this year, Mountain West Aviation, Tahoe Beach Retreat, Lakeside Inn and Caesars Entertainment have agreed to help underwrite the temporary tower.

Phil Weidinger, who handles publicity for the tournament, never got back to *Lake Tahoe News* in regards to whether NBC and/or American Century would step up to cover the costs since

they are the ones making the bulk of the money on the tournament.

Most of the people in those planes are players.