

# Opinion: SnowGlobe, a story of unplanned issues

By Scott Ramirez

SnowGlobe has been a popular local event to those who attend, a frustrating bombardment of sound to nearby residents, a story of safety planning for SLTPD, STPUD, Barton Hospital and other local public services and a story of unplanned issues for both the city of South Lake Tahoe and those running SnowGlobe.

This event began when then City Manager Tony O'Rourke brought the event to town. The first year included no defined noise limits at all and there were many complaints. The complaints were so bad that SnowGlobe offered those with noise sensitivities to go to Murphy's Irish Pub on Emerald Bay Road between 9-11pm for drinks and appetizers on them.

Nancy Kerry, then spokeswoman for the city of South Lake Tahoe, arranged for bass levels to be turned down and had one night end early.

The following years the city negotiated the 95 dB based in discussion with SnowGlobe. They spoke with other agencies and venues to come up with this number given most concerts are measured at 110-114 dB within the venue which plainly was too loud for an event in the middle of a bunch of residential neighborhoods. It was eventually agreed that three city employees would test for 95 dB levels with hand-held meters and ask SnowGlobe to turn down the sound if it peaked over 95 dbs. Only if there was sustained sound over a 10-minute period above 95 dBs would there be a violation. Considering the typical EDM sound runs 6-8 minutes it is unlikely that 10 minutes of sound would happen. Plainly these regulations were not thought out in terms of length of song, the venue itself

or how the sound radiates to neighboring areas.

Other cities have hired sound engineers to evaluate a site before a concert is brought in. Typically, there would be limits established that are cumulative and not simply over a sustained amount of time just as the effects of sound are cumulative on those subjected to those sounds. Levels might be set for the sound booth (loud), the perimeter of the venue (moderate) and in surrounding areas like neighborhoods (lower). Also, using decibels or dBs does not account for low frequency noise (LFN) or bass, which is one of the root sounds used at EDM concerts. The city and SnowGlobe have failed to plan for the noise from this event from the very beginning.

The same story can be found with regard to the play fields. There have been discussions on how to protect those fields from heavy trucks, tents and 20,000 people tramping over a field of grass meant for soccer. But there have not been any guidelines beyond having the city parks and recreation staff inspect the field and that plywood boards be used to protect the ground when heavy equipment is in use. SnowGlobe has talked about million dollar ground coverings and are responsible for repairing our playfield but there currently are no defined requirements to protect the turf from 20,000 people jumping up and down to the sound of thumping bass.

SnowGlobe is seeking a multi-year contract. If the sound issues, specifically LFN or bass sound management is not addressed, our local homes will again be bombarded with sound that has been an on-going problem since this event started. If the fields are not protected, they will yet again get destroyed and the new field the Public paid for will be little more than a rebuilt field not available until late summer (digging rules prevent repairs from happening before spring). SnowGlobe is also suggesting that the current \$50,000 in cash that the city subsidizes this event with may go away and they are hoping to expand to 27,000 people. More people will mean they need louder sound because all those people's bodies

absorb the sound (this is also why testing sound levels in a crowd doesn't work). Seven thousand more people on these fields is not going to improve the fields. Do we really want to grow this event when we are already having major issues?

Local businesses are likely happy with this event. It is described as having brought mounds of cash to town. I have to ask, if our local businesses are the ones gaining while the city is already paying \$50,000 to subsidize this event for their benefit, should these same local businesses possibly be asked to help fix some of this? I am guessing that comment will not make me popular, asking those who benefit the most to possibly help SnowGlobe and the city of South Lake Tahoe correct the problems of a venue that was never designed for large concerts of 20,000-plus people. Maybe a better question is why are we having this event where it was never intended and why aren't we looking for a more appropriate location?

The city cannot make any changes for 2018 unless there was a breach of contract. Coincidentally, SnowGlobe held an impromptu after party event at Bijou Park this year. It was well after the negotiated turn off time and in the Bijou Park. Maybe this is the time to cancel the contract and look at other venues. Wouldn't an off-season event at Sierra-at-Tahoe when our city could use the business and rooms are empty be amazing? How about SnowGlobe at the old Echo Summit Ski Area with kids bused up from town? I would suggest Harveys Outdoor Arena, but Douglas County has strict noise restrictions that prevent this option. There are other options, it is just a question if our City Council will have the courage to pursue them.

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