

Opinion: Wanting to avoid that one bad guest

By Scott Ramirez

On Tuesday I drove through South Lake Tahoe and counted “no vacancy” signs. I only saw one. You might think this is not a big deal until you realize that it was July 3 and our town is full.

Understanding that this is far from an accurate accounting of the state of our motel Industry, it is a departure from what I remember in past years, before the internet turned weekend rentals into a VHR invasion. In past years the “no vacancy” sign was an indicator of how full our town was, but those days are vanishing under the draw of easy homes to rent for a few nights stay. It is no wonder our motels have not been kept current given their business has been redirected to VHRs.

It is no wonder that VHRs are hugely popular considering a family can stay together, park together come and go as they please and not be bothered by strangers in the next room. They can order up a house and move in for the weekend with the click of a mouse. Few would question the popularity and draw this has for our town. The question remains, is this what we want for our neighborhoods? Is there no space left for families to live full time at Tahoe and not be inundated by a new batch of guests every weekend? Nearly every block within city limits has at least one if not more VHRs in their midst. If you listen to a scanner on any busy night, you can hear the calls for VHR complaints that pop up all over town.

My family has been lucky, most of the guests that stay across the street from us have been pleasant and interesting to meet. The owner is friendly and has reached out to mitigate problems and the huge house will likely increase the implied value of

my own home. It all sounds great until you get one bad guest. One bad guest means it is up to me to count people staying the night, up to me to count cars parking and up to me to listen for bumps in the night. If there is a problem, it is up to me to report it to the police and hope there is no retribution from the one bad guest who I just reported and will soon return to their own home. After your first bad guest, your home is never the same. You are left with the question of whether the next will repeat this whole process and you are once again confronted by that one bad guest.

VHRs do bring business to town and they do create revenue. The question remains whether the tourists who are the bread and butter of our town will return to stay in a smaller selection of VHRs and once more fill our motels as they have in past years. What the VHR industry is failing to admit is that a reduced number of rooms will result in higher room rates. Higher room rates will result in more room taxes being collected. There is a chance the city could see higher income generated by reducing the number of VHRs, assuming our guests return and fill the motels as they have in past years. This is the same reason SnowGlobe is so popular with our local businesses, funneling 20,000 additional guests on an already busy weekend causes room rates to go up because rooms become scarce (a reduced supply with increased demand means more profits). The same is true of VHRs, reduce the number available and the rates for the remaining rooms will increase. I am sure those running VHRs will insist their guests will not return to stay in motels, but history suggests this is not accurate.

The Tahoe Neighborhoods Group has a ballot measure to restrict VHRs to the established tourist core. This would phase in over a three-year period to allow VHR owners outside the tourist core the chance to decide what to do with their second homes. It is a fair minded approach to returning our neighborhoods to be residential areas and not an extension of the long

established tourist core. Please take the time to read this initiative and consider voting for it. You will likely hear that this measure will cause all sorts of mayhem for our city but remember, this is not a simple issue and those that say they know for certain what will happen are not being truthful. None of us knows for certain that reducing the number of VHRs will simply reduce the number of people visiting or cause our motels to fill again and rates for rooms go up. The city will pay for a survey and the VHR companies will cite past TOT numbers but neither can answer the question of how our guests will react. The only thing we do know is that our neighborhoods are being invaded. My neighborhood is no place for one bad guest.

Scott Ramirez is a resident of South Lake Tahoe.