

Lower Kingsbury Grade aims to improve infrastructure

By Kathryn Reed

MINDEN – A wish list of more than \$64 million worth of improvements to the Lower Kingsbury Grade area is circulating among Douglas County officials and property owners.

“It’s a major public policy decision to create a district like this,” Douglas County Manager Michael Brown said. “We would use the tax increment for water quality and transportation improvements.”

With papers scattered about him in his Minden office, all that was missing was a crystal ball to know how the proposed tax increment area might actually transform the Stateline area.



Douglas County
Manager
Michael Brown
talks about
the TIA.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

The TIA has been talked about for close to two years. A decision to go forward or not needs to be made by the commissioners by September to have everything in order for that next fiscal year, 2011-12.

At the April 15 Board of Commissioners meeting county staff will update the elected officials with the proposed list of projects.

The tax increment area is somewhat of a hybrid of what the city of South Lake Tahoe is trying to do with its proposed redevelopment area No. 2 and what Ski Run Boulevard has done with creating a business improvement district.

Besides the TIA, in Nevada a special assessment district could be created. The major difference between a TIA and SAD is funding for the SAD comes from additional fees or charges to properties in the area.

A redevelopment area could also be designated instead of a TIA. Differences include properties in a RDA being able to opt out of the plan, no taxing agencies are exempt and there is more flexibility in what can be funded.

With a TIA, it means Douglas County School District would not be impacted.

The TIA works on tax increment just like redevelopment in South Lake Tahoe. A base line year is established. From then on entities in the plan area that receive a portion of property tax dollars would be locked into that rate for the most part. As property values increase, the increased property taxes that are collected go to the TIA or redevelopment area.

Click on map to see the proposed area outlined in pink.

In the case of Lower Kingsbury Grade, if the TIA were approved, the money would go toward capital improvement and water/environmental quality projects.

“A tax increment area is helping me look at what projects I might do and how the Lower Kingsbury area might change,” Mike Bradford, who runs Lakeside Inn and Casino, said. “It provides some funding for improvements, like sidewalks and particularly

for drainage.”

All jurisdictions in the basin must do a certain amount of Environmental Improvement Projects to comply with Tahoe Regional Planning Agency mandates. The TIA could help Douglas County fund its share of those projects.

“It’s something the county, TRPA and property owners have been working on,” TRPA spokesman Dennis Oliver said. “(The TIA) could be used for water quality.”

Some of the proposed projects include stream environmental restoration to Edgewood and Burke creeks as well as improving run-off from area roads.



Overhead wires on Kahle Drive may disappear if the Tax Increment Area is created.

Capital improvement projects might include putting overhead utilities underground on Kahle Drive. If Lakeside Inn goes forward with plans to overhaul its hotel and have rooms with a view, it would mean an unobstructed vista over Rabe Meadow if the lines went away.

Improving Kahle Drive would also mean a more inviting entry to Tahoe Beach Club; another planned development that has been stalled by the economy.

Money could also go toward improving the loop road around the Stateline casinos.

The TIA would be for 30 years. The amount collected in that time is unknown. It's determined by the base year and how fast values go up.

JNA Consulting Group out of Boulder City in Southern Nevada has come up with a few scenarios. They are contingent on when three major developments – Sierra Colina, Edgewood Hotel and Tahoe Beach Club – come onto the tax role. Those properties will be valued higher when construction is complete. That property tax will help fuel a large part of the TIA.

Brown acknowledged that for the TIA now would be a good time to create it because property values are stagnant and therefore as the economy picks up, the tax increment will accordingly. However, he points out, this could be a negative for the rest of Douglas County because it will not reap the benefits of those gains.

He said it is something the commissioners have been discussing. Commissioner Nancy McDermid, who has been a proponent of the TIA, did not return phone calls or emails.

**No Saturday mail delivery
inches closer to reality**



By Kathryn Reed

If officials keep moving in the direction they are headed, Saturday home delivery mail service may not exist this time next year.

The U.S. Postal Service is projecting a \$238 billion deficit for the next decade.

Eliminating Saturday service would also mean 49,000 full- and part-time jobs would be axed. More than half are likely to evaporate through attrition.

In South Lake Tahoe there are 14 rural routes. Some of the carriers work six days a week, while others rotate the sixth day. They are paid based on the volume of mail and the number of customers.

The most amount of mail is delivered on Mondays, while Tuesdays have the least volume. The average U.S. mailbox receives four pieces of mail a day. Officials say that number will drop to three in 10 years. Mail volume was down 12.7 percent in 2009.

The Postal Service says it makes \$1.40 for each delivery. That figure will drop to \$1 by 2020, according the USPS. The agency if funded entirely by its own revenue and receives zero taxpayer dollars.

Going from six to five days a week is projected to save \$3.3 billion the first year and \$5.1 billion a year starting in 2020.

South Lake Tahoe Postmaster Toni Passot said she isn't sure

how cutting Saturday delivery would affect the employees she oversees or workers throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin.

“The rural carriers still need to negotiate through their unions,” Passot said. “The retail would still be open (Saturdays).”

People with post office boxes would continue to get mail on Saturdays, too.

The Postal Service board of governors approved the cuts this spring. Now it’s up to the Postal Regulatory Commission to take action. Congress has the ultimate authority to change the number of days people receive mail even though the USPS is an independent government agency.

“Mostly residential customers would be affected. Most businesses in South Lake Tahoe don’t get mail Saturday because the business is closed,” Passot said.

She has not heard any feedback from customers about the potential changes.

The change, if approved, is slated to begin early next year.

Locally, the status of the Bijou Post Office remains up in the air. A decision is expected this month as to whether it will be closed. The Postal Service owns the building for the main office in South Lake Tahoe. It leases the buildings for the outlying offices.

SLT council to vote on

smaller redevelopment area in May

By Kathryn Reed

It will be May before a decision is made regarding the future of redevelopment in South Lake Tahoe.

The City Council on Tuesday approved Councilman Jerry Birdwell's motion to have staff bring back the project with the boundaries redefined, any mention of Lukins Brothers Water District removed, and a resolution with El Dorado County and South Tahoe Public Utility District sought.

Councilman Bruce Grego wants the performance bond language to be rewritten to reflect the various size projects that might come forth as well as compensate for inflation during the 40-year lifetime of the proposal.



Consultant Don Fraser explains redevelopment on April 6. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Councilman Hal Cole recused himself from the proceedings that lasted most of the day because he has property that borders the area.

The city's planning commission will first be tasked with going over the new proposal. That meeting date has not been set. The council is expected to vote May 4.

The redevelopment area will not change near the Y, but now the idea is to have it stop at the Upper Truckee River before hitting Al Tahoe Boulevard, and then leapfrog to include Harrison Avenue.

John Runnels was the first to speak at the public hearing. Representing the Citizens Alliance, he said, "We don't believe the size is helpful or needed."

He would prefer redevelopment were put on hold longer so the Tahoe Valley Community Plan could be approved. That plan is expected to be up for a vote late this year.

Adrian Gooch, a city employee who retired this year and has worked in redevelopment, spoke as a citizen in favor of the project. She pointed out how the county ignored the city's concerns regarding Red Hawk Casino and the financial consequences the Indian casino would have on the South Shore, as well as how STPUD didn't work with the city regarding water hookups.

A mantra on Tuesday was the city needs to do what's best for it. But on the flip side was a drum beat for cooperation and working together. Several people suggested the plan be put to the voters.

City Attorney Patrick Enright said he knows of no city to have done this, but it is possible.

Between the letters and verbal comments on Tuesday the 40 people who weighed-in were in favor of the project by a margin of more than 2-to-1.

Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, South Tahoe Association of Realtors and Heavenly

Mountain Resort all favor the project.

Staff and consultants reiterated how the plan that first began percolating in 2005 will not involve eminent domain, no specific projects are planned, no taxes will be increased and that the purpose is to create a funding mechanism for future improvements through tax increment.

What has the county and STPUD alarmed is that once a redevelopment area becomes law, it freezes their allotment of property tax dollars. It's possible if the city's 4 percent growth model comes to fruition, these entities could see increases to the property taxes awarded them. It's also possible they will reap fewer property tax dollars.

There are 10 entities in the city receiving property tax allocations that would be affected by redevelopment. Lumped together, all education gets 34 percent of the taxes, El Dorado county 21 percent, the city 18 percent, special districts 11.5 percent and South Tahoe PUD 11 percent.

Another issue with the county is whether five parcels are in the city limits.

"(Resolution) of the five parcels would not mitigate our concerns," Mike Applegarth with the county told *Lake Tahoe News*. "It boils down to a significant loss for the county in tax increment."

He said the county doesn't believe the city has proved economic blight exists.

Ken Weitzman, who has lived in the area for decades, said he considers the tax increment collection to be a slush fund that could be used at the discretion of any seated council for their favorite projects without oversight by the citizenry.

Another resident, Michael Cullan, said the city needs to do something, and fast.

“We are spiraling the drain. We need to take action,” Cullan said.

Wine is for drinking; grapes are for stomping

Publisher’s note: *Thank you everyone for your fun stories about wine. Janine Green of Carson City was picked by Lake Tahoe News to win the tickets to the Passport Weekend. Her story is below.*

By Janine Green

I remember my first sip, as if it were yesterday. The broad rimmed glass touched my lips as the flavors of the dark red wine swirled in my mouth. For me this love affair with wine started at a very young age. Growing up in an Italian household, wine was considered just another welcome member of the family. As I have matured, so has my relationship with wine.



Janine Green is on her way to Passport Weekend at the El Dorado

County
wineries this
month.
Photo/Provided

My palate now more enriched, I have learned that the true beauty of wine is not only its taste; wine is much more complex than that ... its nose, legs, color and clarity, "Ahhhhhh!" Each varietal of wine, with its individual personality and unique characteristics, has added flavor to my life.

Last September, while wine tasting in El Dorado Hills at Miraflores Winery, I took my love of wine to the next, more intimate level. Entering into the tasting room you could feel the energy and excitement surrounding the activities. I sat and slowly removed my shoes and then took my place behind the other participants. The anticipation I encountered was similar to how I feel while I wait in line for an amusement park ride. As I approached the vats filled with grapes, I reflected back to my childhood, watching Lucy grape stomping in my favorite episode of "I Love Lucy". How much would my stomping dance compare with this character of my past? Would I be graceful or clumsy? Not a moment more to analyze the situation, it was now my turn. I was directed to a foot bath and then assisted up the stair.

As I stepped down, I giggled with fear and excitement, feeling grapes explode between my toes. While I moved from vat to vat, I was intrigued by the texture and consistency of the fruity substance that surrounded me. Knowing that one wrong step would leave me bathed in this sweet watery pulp. Suddenly, an awareness and appreciation of the love and labor it once took to produce a barrel of wine overcame me. Had my ancestors once stomped grapes too?

While I stomped, sipping a glass of Merlot, I envisioned the final product that someday I would have the opportunity to

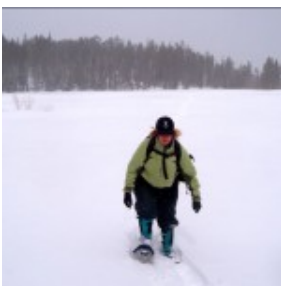
taste. The simple delight of this moment enveloped me. Stepping out of the vats with pink stained feet, I knew my love affair with wine had deepened. I have now seen and experienced the raw and unrefined side of wine. It brings a smile to my face even at this moment, glass in hand, longing for my next encounter.

Foul weather dampens snowshoe trek to Round Lake

By Kathryn Reed

By April the word snow has taken on an unpleasant definition with me. The nice words for it are yuck and icky.

Still, I wasn't going to let the doldrums win. So out came the book "Snowshoe Routes Northern California" by Marc J. Soares. I didn't want to go any place I had been before and I didn't want to drive far.



Sue Wood
trudges
through Big
Meadow on a
snowy Easter.
Photos/Kathryn

Reed

We ended up picking the Big Meadow and Round Lake route. Sue and I had done this plenty of times as a hike on dirt, but never in the snow.

Parking is a little sketchy along Highway 89 headed up Luther Pass from South Lake Tahoe because the Big Meadow lot is not accessible with snow on the ground. Caltrans plows a couple cut outs, so it is do-able without the threat of being towed.

Even though we are familiar with the route to Round Lake as well as Dardanelles Lake, we wouldn't have done this had other people not already been there. In a different season everything looks unfamiliar. Plus, we were well aware of the forecasted storm for Easter Sunday. We didn't really want to become the story.

Immediately I knew the route the earlier snowshoers were leading us on was a bit suspect. Still, it finally seemed to track the route I had been on sans snow.

Normally, it's a bunch of switchbacks. This had sharp turns and then went straight up.



Scenery is stunning along this trail.

The book says you'll cross Big Meadow Creek. We never saw it or heard it. It's probably buried in all this snow or possibly frozen.

Boughs full of snow filled the looming conifers as though it were the middle of winter. Branches hung from the weight of the white stuff. A Tahoe Rim Trail marker barely peaked out at one point.

Trekking into the forest, the sun flitted in and out, casting shadows in a playful dance.

The trees protected us from the wind that whistled through the tight knit trees.

The worst part about the trail was the dog poop. As someone who used to hike with her dog, I understand the charm of an outing with the four-legged members of the family. But pick up after them in every season.



A bit of sun dots the trail for Sue Wood.

We finally hit the expansive meadow. By then the snow had started to fly. And fly it did – in all directions except vertical. Waterhouse Peak was obscured by storm clouds settling in.

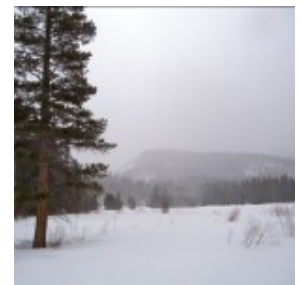
The start of the hike is at 7,237 feet. By the time we got back to the Jeep, it was snowing there as well.

At the edge of the meadow we lost the trail set by earlier shoers. Across we went, heads down as the wind whipped around us. Snow was picked up and spun like mini tornadoes. The sun was no longer anywhere to be found. The wind was howling, not

whispering.

The book says to follow the edge of the meadow. The author says it can be wet as the snow begins to melt. I remember in summer walking straight across, so that's what we did. It was all good with so much snow.

With how exposed the meadow is, the sun is bound to dry this area out fast as the seasons change.



Big Meadow
does not look
inviting.

On the far side of the meadow there was no evidence anyone had been there before us. We called it a day. Foraging farther in search of a lake when a winter storm advisory for the afternoon had been issued was not something we were about to do.

It's definitely a route I'll try again, but next time it will be on a sunny day. Even though most Lake Tahoe ski resorts will close this month, the snowshoe season will last much longer.

California creates another watchdog group for Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed



Another layer of government is encapsulating Lake Tahoe.

In March, members of the California legislative Joint Committee for the Protection of Lake Tahoe were named. The bill was passed last year to create the committee.

Lake Tahoe's two representatives, Assemblyman Ted Gaines and state Sen. Dave Cox, both Republicans from Roseville, are on the panel. Joining them are the man who wanted to create the committee, Sen. Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento; along with Sen. Fran Pavley, D-Santa Monica; Assemblywoman Fiona Ma, D-San Francisco; Assemblyman Ira Ruskin, D-Palo Alto; and Assemblywoman Nancy Skinner, D-Oakland.

Members have yet to meet and there is no date for a meeting.

Steinberg chairs the panel.

"The Lake Tahoe region is a vulnerable ecosystem that we must protect while also repairing prior environmental damage," Steinberg said in a press release last year after the legislation was approved. "This committee is essential in this process as it oversees capitol (cq) investments in conservation and restoration measures."

His contention is the state committee will help implement the Environmental Improvement Program that has been operating

without him and the others for more than 10 years.

When Gaines was in South Lake Tahoe last week he chatted with *Lake Tahoe News* about the latest layer of government. He isn't sure what all the committee will do, but he wanted to be on the panel to ensure he had input into anything that might affect his constituents.

Gaines said the language is vague in the statute that was passed by the Legislature.

If nothing else, Gaines hopes the committee could help stimulate the economy in the region, while also helping ensure lake clarity remains a priority.

Because the seven members haven't met, it's unknown what their true collective intentions will be or if the the team was merely created for taxpayers to fund a trip to Tahoe for people who don't represent the area.

Grego adamant taxpayers should pay his legal bill

By Kathryn Reed

A \$937.50 check to South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Bruce Grego signed by the city manager and city treasurer is not sitting well with Grego's colleagues. How it got approved is unknown. Other council members have said it will be a topic of conversation at Tuesday's meeting even though it is not on the agenda.

(The council meeting starts an hour earlier than normal – 8am – at Lake Tahoe Airport with discussion about how to replace

outgoing City Manager Dave Jinkens.)

The check to Grego is for expenses he incurred last year when he was seeking an opinion from the Fair Political Practices Commission as to whether he had a conflict of interest regarding the convention center project or what is generically called Redevelopment Area No. 3.



Bruce Grego

Normally the city attorney reviews potential conflicts. If an FPPC ruling is sought, it's the city attorney who writes the letter, not outside counsel. Grego enlisted Dennis Crabb of Rollston, Henderson, Crabb & Johnson, Ltd. in South Lake Tahoe to help in his quest. He, not the city, hired Crabb to work with the FPPC to determine if having Lakeside Park Association as a client would be a conflict.

The FPPC said there is no conflict, which has allowed Grego to vote on convention center issues.

Crabb on May 6, 2009, billed Grego \$937.50 for 3.75 hours of work. The city wrote a check dated March 11, 2010, as reimbursement to Grego for that amount.

Grego said he submitted the invoice at least six months ago. Why the delay in payment is not known. A copy of the invoice was not available Friday because city offices were on furlough.

However, Grego really tried to get paid last summer, according to an exchange of emails. At that time he was denied

reimbursement. Why there is a reversal of opinion is not known.

A memo to Grego from then City Attorney, now Assistant City Attorney, Jacqueline Mittelstadt dated Aug. 20, 2009, says, "Given that the South Lake Tahoe City Code does not authorize a single council member to hire outside counsel, nor allows the City Manager or City Attorney to retroactively hire legal counsel, I replied with the attached memoranda dated July 27, 2009 to Mr. Jinkens. As you can see, I recommended that this invoice be discussed with the City Council Finance Committee so that, if there were an appetite for Council approval of the fees, the matter could plausibly be taken as a consent item. As you can see from the note on the Memo, Mr. Jinkens replied 'My question is would reimbursement be legal?' The response is unfortunately, no. The City Code and the purchasing regulations do not appear to allow a retroactive payment for legal fees incurred by a single council member. It would require City Council consensus to return the item to the Council for approval in order to reimburse you for these fees. I did vet the issue with the finance committee and they did not feel they could approve the fees either. Full council consensus and subsequent action would be required. Please let myself or Mr. Jinkens know if you would like this matter to be placed on the Council agenda."

The finance committee is Councilmen Hal Cole and Jerry Birdwell.

"When I was mayor, Bruce came to me with this bill. I told him that individual council members do not have the authority to spend city money without the consent of the City Council. The City Council did not approve this expenditure," Birdwell said. "What makes this worse is that Bruce went behind the council's back to get the city to pay it anyway."

Birdwell believes Grego must pay the money back to the city.

“To vote is paramount to what we do on the council. I think it was appropriate. It was a moderate charge,” Grego said of the bill. “I think it should be addressed as a public expense and not a personal expense. Because this matter directly dealt with my ability to vote, that is a legitimate claim for reimbursement.”

When Grego spoke with *Lake Tahoe News* on Friday he said Cole’s letter to the FPPC was written by outside counsel, with expenses paid directly to the city.

“If I need legal advice, that’s what my city attorney is for. I would not seek outside counsel,” Cole told LTN. “If I did that, it would be my expense. If (the city) hired someone else, I didn’t know it.”

Jinkens is out of town. In an email he said, “I am having checked some background information in response to your voice message and will respond when I receive it. I am out of town but will reply this weekend.”

He was advised a story would be published Saturday. No response was forthcoming. Therefore it is not known if outside legal counsel was ever really sought in Cole’s case, and if it were, what the fee was and to whom it was paid.

(The FPPC ruled Cole couldn’t vote on Project 2 because he owns property too close to the proposed project.)

A series of emails dated March 1, 2010, involving Jinkens, his assistant Tina Shannon, Redevelopment Director Gene Palazzo and City Attorney Patrick Enright ultimately authorize the March 2010 check to Grego to be written. Enright did not return a phone call Friday.

“Please have a check processed to reimburse Councilmember Grego in the above amount from the New Plan Area Account” is handwritten by Palazzo on a printed email to him from Shannon.

The email in part from Shannon says, "Dave (Jinkens) told me to process the payment and expense to RDA, as was done with Mr. Cole's opinion."

This would indicate the money being used is from Redevelopment Area No. 2, which the city will vote on Tuesday. With city offices being closed, it's not known how or why the money is from that account.

"You raise a good question 'Why wasn't it billed to the City Attorney's Office?'," Mayor Kathay Lovell said. "The city attorney can seek another opinion. They often do that if they don't have the expertise or it's a time issue."

Neither Lovell nor Cole was aware of the Grego reimbursement until *Lake Tahoe News* telephoned. Birdwell was not issued a copy of the warrants with his April 6 agenda packet. Councilman Bill Crawford was the only council member besides Grego who knew about the issue.

"It looks to me that Mr. Grego and perhaps the city manager's behavior is ethically questionable," Crawford said. "Mr. Crabb sent the bill to Mr. Grego. That was his client, not the city, so I don't think it's correct to reimburse Mr. Grego under those circumstances."

Grego said Crabb did not want to bill the city. Grego didn't have an explanation for why the former South Lake Tahoe city attorney would make that decision. Crabb did not return a phone call Friday.

Grego started the whole process with now former City Attorney Cathy DiCamillo, who no longer lives in the city. He said he didn't like her draft letter to the FPPC. He said he didn't want to wait for her to return from vacation to craft a final version because the vote on the Mello-Roos bonds regarding the convention center was going to be up for a vote.

But the reality is the vote was June 4. This was after

DiCamillo had retired. Mittelstadt and Enright occupied her office June 1.

“It’s definitely money well spent. The benefit of my actions are the benefit of the public,” Grego said. “I voted to stop the issuance of \$25 million of bonds. My vote did matter.”

The vote was 5-0.

When Grego was asked how he could keep voting against funding most of the training/education requests from city staff to do their job, he said those moderate charges are different.

“This is something that went to the foundation of why I ran for office and the issues regarding the hole and trying to find a solution,” Grego said as to why he believes taxpayers should pay for outside legal advice that is usually handled in house.

STHS construction zone about to be teaching center

By Kathryn Reed

An excitement was in the air as more than a dozen people toured the Construction, Arts and Transportation Academy at South Tahoe High School. Between now and April 18 the final touches will be put on the building that will welcome students April 19.

Between the \$64.5 million bond approved by voters in November 2008 and the more than \$30 million Lake Tahoe Unified School District will receive from the state in matching grant dollars, the facilities in the district are being transformed.

Most of the dramatic changes are occurring at the high school, though every school will reap the benefits of the bond.



STHS Principal Ivone Larson, center, begins a tour of the CAT building. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Angela Swanson, former board member and now consultant for the architectural team, gave the committee an update on state dollars. With bond sales going well in March, \$4.3 million should be in LTUSD's coffers in June. Although the state has approved \$30 million in matching funds for LTUSD, much of the money is not in hand.

On Wednesday it was the bond oversight committee's opportunity to tour one of the two buildings currently under construction at South Tahoe High. The other building is in the back of the campus called Stadium View because it overlooks the football field.

(Click [here](#) for more info on both buildings and some history.)

The committee is tasked with making sure the dollars are spent appropriately. Proposition 39 mandates the district do the projects outlined in the bond proposal. This means as board members change, pet projects cannot be introduced. What can change is an expansion of what's in the bond, which is how the sports medicine building can become a reality.

“This is a building like you’ve never seen in this district,” STHS Principal Ivone Larson told the group as they entered the CAT building.

Joe Stewart of SMC Contracting was part of the tour.



Contractor Joe Stewart, center, speaks with Josh Mercow and Harold Singer on Wednesday.

“The complexity of the building was a challenge. But ultimately the complexity is the beauty of the building,” Stewart told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The CMU (concrete masonry unit) is structural, but it’s also part of the design.”

The concrete blocks will help with energy costs because of how they retain heat. Solar was looked at, but it didn’t pencil out.

Natural light filters in from the multitude of windows. Studies have been done that prove people learn better with natural light instead of under fluorescents.

“Smart lighting controls the system. It will sense occupancy and daylight harvesting,” LTUSD Facilities Director Steve Morales said. This will save on energy bills.



Views from the art room.

Instructors will be able to control the lighting as well. It's possible to dim the lights over the students so the focus is on the teaching wall.

Smart boards may be the one item not installed when classes begin after spring break.

Even what the floors are made out of was given careful consideration. A rubber floor with resins that will eliminate the need for them to be refinished are in the construction area. The arts section has a concrete floor with a finish for durability and ease of cleaning.



Construction, Arts and Transportation building at STHS.

It doesn't look like your typical auto shop or construction learning area. The exterior blends with the environment. It's neither over-the-top Tahoe architecture, nor the typical institutional design.

The views from where the art students will study are stunning – or perhaps, inspiring, as Larson put it.

Committee member Amanda Adams asked whether the campus could be used as a demo-learning area for locals needing to put in BMPs, the erosion prevention measures.

Morales said part of the revegetation plan was designed by students and will be implemented by them as well.

By being three months ahead of schedule it means Stewart and his guys will be able to start demolition of the little theater the first week of May, with asbestos abatement beginning April 12.



LTUSD
Facilities
Director Steve
Morales
explains the
intricacies of
the building.

A special groundbreaking ceremony for the performing arts-media building will be May 21.

Replacement of the tennis courts should begin July 1, with players able to use them by Aug. 15.

The school board is having a special meeting April 6 to vote on contracts for projects that are in the pipeline.

Lakeside Inn Casino spoof not completely false

By Kathryn Reed



Whoever was the originator of the Lakeside Inn's day-early April Fools' Day joke probably should get a raise.

Facebook chatter on Wednesday was amusing. For those who don't do Facebook or skipped a day, click to know what's going on.

It was prompting calls to the Stateline casino to find out where the truth was. PR folks on the South Shore were helping promote the hype via social networking. A slew of local recognizable names/faces were in on the act – Lew Feldman, Jerry Birdwell, B Gorman and Julie Regan. Even Charles Barkley had a quote.

Having a zipline from the top of the proposed 50-story hotel tower to Emerald Bay sounds like more than your average E-ticket ride. The regulatory process for something like that, if it were really proposed, might provide for more spectacular fireworks than the ones shot off over Lake Tahoe each Fourth of July.

"The town has been under so much pressure for a couple years now that we think it's healthy to share the humor," Mike Bradford, president of the hotel-casino said as to why they created the make-believe development project.

But the truth is Bradford for a long time has thought a zipline from somewhere on Heavenly Mountain Resort to the lake would be an ultimate attraction.

Even though what's proposed on Facebook is not going to happen – for many obvious reasons to anyone who knows about the rules and regulations at Lake Tahoe – the property does want a face-lift of sorts.

“What we would like to do is some sort of resort spa development,” Bradford told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We will raze all of our rooms and build a whole new facility.”

That is the truth.

The 25-year-old property that is considered a locals' spot for gaming and dining, doesn't want to lose that character. But at the same time, it knows gambling is not the primary focus of people living in or visiting Tahoe.

Bradford was at the March 25 Tahoe Regional Planning Agency meeting where he told the Governing Board he wants to transform the Lakeside Inn.

“It's no secret he would like to do things,” TRPA spokesman Dennis Oliver said. “He wants to remake his business so he can respond to the decline in gaming.”

Lakeside has acquired neighboring properties to the north for a combined 8-acre parcel.

“Gaming will always be an important part of our economic model, but it will be less a part of it,” Bradford said.

Lakeside has 124 rooms – all without much of a view. They are basic, ordinary and cater to the person coming to town to spend their time in the casino. Because that person for the most part does not exist anymore, Lakeside wants to start over.

Views of Lake Tahoe and Rabe Meadow are from the second floor. But none of the current rooms are that high. That will change in the future.

“The economics of hotels are such that simply redoing rooms isn’t cost-effective,” Bradford said.

Bradford said talks are under way with potential developers as well as boutique hoteliers. He foresees the project to break ground in three to five years, with it taking about a year to complete.

The hotel has a summer-only pool and year-round hot tub. But Bradford said they don’t meet the destination resort standards. That will change if his ideas get implemented. And they are likely to be some of the initial upgrades.

“I envision a facility that has a more recreation focus,” Bradford said.

With the Tahoe Beach Club one day going in at the end of Kahle Drive, Lakeside wants to provide its guests access to that development’s beach club. The current casino is also within easy access of Rabe Meadow and then Nevada Beach. The proposed Stateline-to-Stateline bike trail will be in the area.

Dining options are likely to expand. Room service will definitely be added, Bradford said.

He expects the remodel of the existing buildings to take on a more modern, European Alpine theme instead using all the logs and rock that are typical of Tahoe.

Composter: Healthy plants need nutrient-rich soil

By Kathryn Reed

MINDEN – “America’s Garden Book” was first published in 1939. It talks about humus (not hummus) as the key to good soil composition.

In 1978, Craig Witt graduated from UNR with a degree in agriculture. Nothing in his textbooks said anything about humus; the organic matter that is created after plant and/or animal matter decompose. He left Reno for his family farm in the Carson Valley with a certificate to spray pesticides.



Craig Witt
talks
composting at
Full Circle
Compost.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

And spray he did.

“We kept adding more fertilizer and got less results,” Witt said. “My grandfather told me he was not sure about the stuff I was learning in college.”

The 350-head of cattle were producing less milk and the 600

acres they farmed didn't turn out the quantity of produce they had before pesticides were introduced.

Witt, who had his first garden as a second-grader, knew things had to change. His mother's diagnosis of liver cancer nearly 25 years ago also led him down the path of researching nutrition.

For 15 years he has been operating Full Circle Compost in Minden. In his backyard in Gardnerville last year he grew sunflowers 15-feet tall and tomatoes 12-feet high.

"Commercial garden soil looks like wood," Witt said. "Humus is the end result if composting was done right."

He is quick to point out that compost is a verb and not a noun.

The soil amendments he sells are so refined it's delicate to the touch. It's almost a silky texture instead of coarse. And there's no smell.

What people grow their plants and produce in matters because if it's not full of nutrients, the plants will suffer. Soil is like a food source for plants. What goes into the compost mix will dictate the richness of the end product.

"People are becoming more aware soil is living," Witt said.

At Full Circle Compost recipes are used to create their different blends. It's a combination of 10 percent horse manure, 10 percent cow manure, 30 percent green waste, 10 percent finished compost carbon, and 40 percent pine needles/wood waste, with the latter mostly coming from the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Witt will take green waste (for a fee) from people, as well as sell the different blends of composting material.

He said soil in this part of the Sierra Nevada is often

deficient in calcium. So he adds some of the mineral to his mixture. Feather mill is added to another blend to boost the nitrogen content.

It's possible with all the compostable matter being delivered to Full Circle Compost that a Tahoe Blend could be created. Witt says he'd need someone on the South Shore, like Tahoe Sand and Gravel or Aspen Hollow, to sell it.

For six years Witt has been composting at the Northern Nevada Correctional Center in Carson City – known casually as the Prison Farm.

All the food waste people want to give him goes here. Lira's Market in Gardnerville was the first company to bring him food scraps. Whole Foods in Reno does now. A group in Truckee this year had a zero-waste crab feed and all the shells, compostable paper products, flatware and bag it was collected in ended up at the prison. South Tahoe Refuse's collections from its pilot compost program end up at the prison, too.

Besides food waste, the crab shells, bones from meat products, meat, compostable food service products, and paper are part of the mix.

Grinders are used to blend everything together. Wood chips are mixed in. A machine turns the whole concoction. Water is regularly sprayed on the mix to keep it moist.

"When you turn it, it gives the bacteria fresh air, oxygen. You want aerobic bacteria in a compost pile," Witt said. "When steam comes off, it means moisture is leaving."

Temperatures of the mix hit 150 degrees, which is hot enough to kill any pathogens.

It takes 10 weeks for food waste to be turned into soil amendment.

Embassy Suites in South Lake Tahoe uses the compost from Full

Circle for its plants. Zephyr Cove Resort, which is part of the pilot program on the South Shore, is considering using the end product in its grassy areas.

At the office in Minden, Witt has several worm bin containers that are more suited for the backyard gardener. He said they work at Tahoe because they don't attract critters.

This is called vermicompost. It's sold in stores. If it's good quality, it won't stick to your hands.

Worms till the soil and eat the pathogens.

"You don't see worms in dead soil," Witt said.

Not only is the end product a rich compound that is good to garden with, but a liquid that Witt calls "worm wine" is produced. This can be sprayed onto plants as a natural fertilizer.

His end result looked like root beer, whereas the commercial product looked like Mountain Dew, so it was severely diluted before it was sold.

For more information about Full Circle Compost, [click here](#) or call (775) 267.5305.

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder