

Alder Inn fiasco threatens LTCC students



By Kathryn Reed

Eleven Lake Tahoe Community College students may be evicted from the Alder Inn because the man who for several years represented himself as the owner of the Ski Run Boulevard property has allegedly absconded with their money and that of the real owner's.

No one is sure where Joseph Balius is – or his wife, Kira, and their children.

When he was president of the Ski Run Business Improvement District he represented himself as owner of the Alder Inn.

The truth is June Stefani owns the hotel-apartment complex. Balius had a lease option to buy the property. That option expired Sept. 30.

Stefani, who lives out of the area most of the year, had allowed Balius to be delinquent in his lease payments for about a year, which amounted to an undisclosed five-figure amount. She didn't find out about issues with the students until this month.

Until this month people were still using the inn as a lodging facility. Students said it was packed during Labor Day weekend. They don't understand why Stefani has cut off this revenue source.

The rooms the students are living in look like a basic hotel room, not even like a normal studio apartment. A dorm size refrigerator, coffee maker and microwave are the kitchen. A bed, television, table and chairs are the room, with the bath in the back.

The converted rooms still look very much like a 1970s-era hotel room.

LTCC students react

Students should be studying, glued to computers. It is midterm week, after all.

But the Internet access that was supposed to be part of their rent was turned off this month when Stefani came to town.

Several students were gathered in one room Wednesday talking about their uncertain future, saying how the "for sale" sign went up on the complex that day, and that Stefani has threatened to give them a three-day eviction notice if they don't pay \$200 to cover utilities for October and November.

The students and parents say they have contracts stating utilities are included in the fees they have already paid.

"We paid for an entire year, all through until June. We have the documentation, we have the receipts, we have the contract," Donna Hall, a parent of one of the students told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I do object that we are supposed to walk away because (Stefani) is unhappy."

Six students have paid through the fall quarter, two through the spring quarter in March, and three until the end of the school year in June.

Hall has paid about \$6,500 for her daughter to live at the Alder Inn.

Steve Addison, 21, is in the college's EMT program. He

described it as a “pretty messed up situation.” He added, “It’s not our issue.”

That’s what the students keep harping on – they shouldn’t be kicked out when they haven’t done anything wrong and especially because they’ve already paid to live at the Alder Inn.

“I’m sorry (Stefani’s) business practices are bad, but I shouldn’t get screwed,” said student Katy Manoff.

College’s role

Students and parents don’t believe the college is doing its part to help in the matter.

“We were under the impression they endorsed this place,” Manoff said.

Until earlier this month, the Alder Inn was listed as student housing on LTCC’s website. When the Alder Inn started allowing college students to live there in fall 2007, the college did a huge public relations push to promote the relationship. Officials were even bragging early this fall about the number of students at the Alder Inn.

The inn is mentioned in several of the board minutes during the last two years.

Minutes from the Aug. 31, 2007, board meeting state, “Susan Middleton informed the Board that we only have eight students in four rooms taking advantage of the off campus student housing offer at the Alder Inn.”

The Aug. 5, 2008, minutes reflect college President Paul Killpatrick having taken a tour of the Alder Inn.

On Wednesday night www.tahoecollegehouse.com still listed the inn as LTCC housing. The site says, “Our goal here at the Alder Inn is to provide students with a secure and safe living

environment while attending our beautiful campus at Lake Tahoe Community College.” The number listed on the site is disconnected.

Killpatrick on Wednesday said the college’s housing site “functioned as a bulletin board, as a listing.”

“On advice from our legal counsel we have not gotten that involved,” Killpatrick said. “We think the only bad guy in this is Joe, who ran off with the funds.”

Finger pointing

But students want more. They don’t feel like the college is helping them at all, and yet, it was through the college that they ended up at the Alder Inn.

“We can’t get a straight answer out of anyone,” Manoff said.

Stefani acknowledged to *LTM* that she has been the owner of Alder Inn for about 30 years and that Balius had the lease option for the last five years.

It was former South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Ted Long who had the original lease option.

“What it was is I had loaned him the money to do the deal so it was in my name,” Long said. “I sold the option to him for a buck.”

Long said he last heard from Balius, who he describes as a good friend, about a month ago via email saying he was leaving the Alder.

Stefani said Balius told her the property was in escrow, but it fell through. All she knew is that she would get paid and the property would no longer be hers.

“I had nothing to do with the property. Zero. I had not been on it for five years until Oct. 1,” Stefani said. “He has run

off with a lot of my money and lot of the students' money and students' money who are not even here yet. I've been getting calls from parents."

Stefani says she never received a penny of the money the students paid in rent.

Legal matters

Rick Martinez with the South Lake Tahoe Police Department is investigating the matter. He would not provide *LTN* with any information Wednesday.

Martinez and Assistant District Attorney Hans Uthe met Wednesday to discuss the case.

Uthe told *Lake Tahoe News* on Thursday that they are in the information gathering phase and not looking for Balius at this point.

"It is going forward as an investigation. It's too early to tell where it is going to come out," Uthe said.

The students say Martinez told them they don't have a case, it's Stefani's fight – unless they are evicted.

Attorney Bob Henderson is representing Stefani.

"We have not decided what we are going to do. We have been in contact with the community college," Henderson said. "We are going to try to solve the problem, but I don't know what solution will be reached until we reach it. We can't let the property sit there and the utilities, and no money exchanging hands."

LTCC board President Kerry David would like to find a way for the students to stay and to have Internet access turned back on – which would probably cost less than \$2,000 for the rest of the fall quarter.

“We are concerned for them,’ David said of the students.

He said the college acted as a referral service, but received no monetary compensation from doing so.

“This guy should be in jail. He basically took money from students and has run,” David said. “We are supportive of the students and sympathetic to the students, but their contract was with the Alder Inn, not the college.”

At Tuesday’s college board meeting, trustee Fritz Wenck commented how he and his wife are providing housing for a LTCC student who was homeless. Perhaps other doors could open to the 11 students at the Alder Inn if Stefani does not honor their contracts.

Hope for ridding Lake Tahoe of Asian clams

Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

STATELINE — Experts have identified an effective way to kill Lake Tahoe’s Asian clams, a promising development to control an invader spreading around the landmark Sierra lake, land-use regulators were told Wednesday.

Scientists briefed governors of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency on studies concerning invasive species at Tahoe and said that under proper conditions, the use of plastic “bottom barriers” laid atop clam beds results in 100 percent mortality of Asian clams within 28 days.

“It worked incredibly well. We know how to kill the clams,” said Geoff Schladow, director of the University of

California, Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center.

Read the whole story

Garridos go back to court

Martha Bellisle, Reno Gazette-Journal

A pre-preliminary hearing is scheduled Thursday in Placerville for Phillip and Nancy Garrido, Pierson.

At the hearing in El Dorado Superior Court, prosecutors may seek a date for a preliminary hearing or continue the case, said Nancy Anderson, executive secretary for El Dorado District Attorney Vern Pierson.

Read the whole story

Poland to be reinstated as South Tahoe police officer

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe Police Officer Johnny Poland is returning to the streets.

The judge issued his ruling late Wednesday afternoon in Poland's favor.

After Poland was fired in June 2007, the 10-year veteran

fought the dismissal. A three-person arbitration panel ruled in his favor in January 2009. The city fought that ruling. Both sides went before El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Steve Bailey this fall.



Johnny Poland

The nine-page document agrees with what Poland and his attorney presented in court.

When reached about 3:30pm Wednesday, Poland told *Lake Tahoe News* he feels vindicated and is ready to go back to work. He expects he'll have to go to some classes to get ready for being on the streets because it has been nearly 2.5 years since he has been a sworn officer.

Poland, who was trying to hold back tears, said the last couple weeks have been the hardest of the whole ordeal. The waiting, the not knowing what the future would hold.

Police Chief Terry Daniels could not be reached for comment.

City Manager Dave Jinkens learned of the decision from *Lake Tahoe News*.

"The matter was decided in a place where it should be. We will make everything for the transition back be successful," Jinkens said.

The city has 60 days to accept the decision or appeal it to the state Supreme Court.

The trouble began in November 2006 when Poland was accused of

mishandling a lockdown situation at South Tahoe High School.

Poland will remain on paid leave until the city makes its decision. It's unknown if the council will take this matter up at its next meeting on Nov. 3.

Councilman Bill Crawford said the decision is something to celebrate. He and Mayor Jerry Birdwell wanted to accept the arbitration panel's 3-0 vote to put Poland back to work.

"Based on everything in front of us it felt like it would be right for a judge to decide. It boiled down to whether a judge should decide," Mayor Pro Tem Kathay Lovell said of that vote. "We didn't decide his guilt or innocence. It was a decision if a judge should decide to uphold the arbitration."

Councilmembers Lovell, Hal Cole and Bruce Grego voted to discard the arbitrators' decision and take it to court.

Lovell is ready to move on.

"We follow the judge's decision – that's an easy call. That's how it works, how the system is supposed to work," Lovell said Wednesday. "He comes back to work and that's how it is. He has to be accepted back and go to work."

EDSO issues phone scam warning

El Dorado County Sheriff's Office is warning the community of telephone fraud scams targeting the elderly.

The scam operates as follows: An unknown male suspect telephoned an elderly victim and states, "Gramps or

Grandma, I need help. I got into some trouble (or an auto accident) in Canada. I need bail money.â€ The victims usually reply, â€œIs this (name of grandchild the callerâ€™s voice resembles).â€ The caller responds, â€œYes, this is (name victim provided).â€

The suspect caller then requests the elderly victim wire transfer him money so he can get bailed out of jail. The suspect caller asks the elderly victim to keep this a â€œsecretâ€ because he is so embarrassed. The suspect caller is usually very emotional when speaking with the elderly victims. The victims are told to wire the â€œbail moneyâ€ via MoneyGram to Canada (Vancouver, Toronto or Montreal). Typical dollar amounts wired to Canada by the victims are usually in \$5,000 increments.

On some occasions, the suspect will re-contact the elderly victim advising him/her that he received the â€œbail moneyâ€ but now needs additional monies wired for release of his passport.

In some instances, the victimâ€™s caller ID feature has captured the suspect callerâ€™s telephone number. Investigators are trying to follow up on these phone numbers but many appear to be originating from pre-paid wireless telephones. Investigations are continuing. The purpose of this notice is to alert the elderly citizenry of this particular devious scam.

Electrical fire to blame at

Pisano's

A blaze last week that gutted popular Pisano's Pizza in Homewood was the result of an electrical fire.

Extension cords overloaded the system, according to fire officials.

North Tahoe Fire Protection District and Placer County sheriff's officials did the investigation into the Oct. 19 blaze.

It's unknown if the owners will re-open.

Lukins water rates to jump 36%



By Kathryn Reed

For the first time in nine years, the 953 Lukins Brothers Water District customers are about to open bills that reflect a general rate hike.

Annual water bills for the small water company that serves customers near the Y along Emerald Bay Road in South Lake Tahoe will go from \$294.84 to \$395.52. This is an increase of 36.03 percent.

Jennifer Lukins said ratepayers knew the increase would be coming because the proposal has been before the state Public Utilities Commission for a year and public meetings have been conducted, as well as letters having been sent.

Smaller cost of living increases based on the Consumer Price Index occur about every two years. The last one was Sept. 1, 2008.

The previous general rate increase was 25.46 percent in 2000. Prior to that that it was in the early 1990s that Lukins had a general rate increase.

South Tahoe Public Utility District, which encompasses most of the South Shore on the California side, has small annual rate increases. Single-family residences in that jurisdiction pay \$467.88 a year.

Lukins said the company that was started by her grandparents in the 1940s would like to have smaller, more consistent rate increases but the firm doesn't have the staff to deal with the work involved to make that happen.

The company has three full-time employees. The rate increase will allow the hiring of a part-time person to work in the field.

Lukins had wanted to increase prices by 66.7 percent, but the state PUC scaled that back.

The company plans to use the additional \$126,460 in annual revenue for operating expenses.

Lukins is still trying to obtain funding to upgrade its old and outdated infrastructure. A meeting with Lukins and city staff is expected soon so all are on the same page as to what is being done to secure state, federal and private money for that endeavor.

Harrah's posts \$1.6 billion third quarter loss

Steve Green, Las Vegas Sun

Still struggling with the recession, Harrah's Entertainment Inc. of Las Vegas today posted a \$1.33 billion charge against earnings to write down the value of certain assets around the country, and overall posted a third quarter loss from continuing operations after taxes of \$1.621 billion.

The loss, compared to a loss of \$123.2 million a year earlier, was driven by the one-time writeoff as well as a 13.7 percent decline in quarterly revenue to \$2.282 billion.

[Read the whole story](#)

City trying to clear the air on medicinal marijuana



By Kathryn Reed

The on again, off again discussion of pot dispensaries in South Lake Tahoe is on again.

The City Council plans to discuss the matter at the Nov. 3 meeting at Lake Tahoe Airport. No action is expected that day, though the council could direct staff to draft policy or an ordinance.

Three medical marijuana outlets exist within the city limits. Because state and federal law don't jive, it can create problems for local municipalities when it comes to regulating the businesses. At it stands, the three are not paying any taxes to the city – either through a business license fee or sales tax.

California and Nevada are two of the 14 states to allow medicinal marijuana use. California did so through Proposition 215, called the Compassionate Use Act of 1996.

In 2003, state Senate Bill 420 – "The Safe Access" bill that was designed to give cities and counties in California better guidelines was approved by the Legislature and took affect the next year.

Earlier this month, the Obama administration issued an edict stating federal law enforcement will not arrest people associated with or close medical marijuana establishments that are following state law.

"This is a step forward in the clarification process. Now federal law should be changed if the feds are to allow states to regulate. As long as existing federal statutes remain in place prohibiting the use, the matter is arguably muddied," City Manager Dave Jinkens said.

On Nov. 3, the City Council is expected to discuss Proposition 215, SB420 and federal law.

"The council looks forward to receiving input from the public, medical marijuana dispensaries and any other interested party on the issue," Patrick Enright, acting city attorney said.

Council meetings begin at 9am and are at Lake Tahoe Airport.

Sheriff Neves talks about resignation

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County Sheriff Jeff Neves is resigning in December, more than a year before his term ends.

He told *Lake Tahoe News* on Tuesday morning it has everything to do with wanting to spend more time with his family “to make up for missed anniversaries and birthdays celebrated without him.

Some speculate the reason Neves is leaving is so the candidate he wants to replace him will have a leg-up in the June 2010 primary.



Jeff Neves

To that theory, Neves said he believes the Board of Supervisors will not appoint one of the seven candidates who has declared his candidacy for the 2010 sheriff’s race. However, his resignation letter strongly urges them to appoint a captain in the department. Neves on Tuesday said he believes the board will appoint Undersheriff Fred Kollar to fill out

the remainder of the term.

Neves's Oct. 23 resignation letter to the Board of Supervisors didn't say much despite filling an entire typed written page. (Click letter to read his words.)

In his resignation letter Neves tells supervisors he thinks candidate Capt. Craig Therkildsen should be appointed interim sheriff. As a back up, he says Kollar would be his second choice.

Kollar says he has no desire to be sheriff except on an interim basis, and that he had intended to retire when Neves left office. If Kollar is not appointed sheriff, it's unknown if the interim top cop would keep Kollar. The sheriff appoints the undersheriff.

"I would take the job merely because we are going into a very contentious election year where several people are vying for sheriff. By putting me in you get someone who is not involved in that process," Kollar said. "I would bring stability, continuity and hopefully keep election year politics out of the office as much as possible."

On top of that, as undersheriff he is integrally involved in the budget process. The county will begin working on the 2010-11 budget right after the first of the year. The fiscal year for the county begins July 1.

Kollar has been with the department for 30 years "with about a dozen of those years in the South Lake Tahoe office.

Supervisors are expected today to discuss in closed session the looming sheriff's vacancy because sheriff's department personnel issues were already on the agenda. Because the sheriff matter was not original on the agenda it's possible the discussion could violate the Brown Act, the state opening meeting law.

Neves, who was first elected to the highest law enforcement position in the county in 2002, months ago said he was planning to retire at the end of his second term.

Instead, his last day will be Dec. 26. After 30 years in law enforcement, all with this sheriff's department (seven years at the Lake Tahoe office), Neves said he plans to do more volunteer work and continue his work on nonprofit boards.

The sheriff's primary is in June. It's possible more candidates could declare before then. A candidate needs 50 percent, plus one vote to win it outright; otherwise the top two finishers would be in a runoff in November, with the winner taking office in January 2011.