

# Opinion: Securing event center's future success

By Duane Whitelaw

The North Tahoe Public Utility District (NTPUD) has owned and operated the North Tahoe Event Center in Kings Beach since the early 1980s. In the late '80s the facility was renovated with Placer County transient occupancy tax (TOT) funds emphasizing conference groups coming to the region and putting "heads on beds."

Over the years, the event center has welcomed local events, recreation programs, public meetings, weddings, conference events, wakes and other community gatherings.

To ensure community accessibility and affordability, the NTPUD board of directors has funded the center's operating deficits for most years. The last 10 years this deficit has averaged approximately \$90,000 in operating losses with subsidies from the district flexing that number to about \$135,000 annually. In addition, no dollars have been set aside to fund depreciation to address aging infrastructure. Selling or trading the facility isn't an option. A grant came from a state bond to acquire the property with a condition it be used for "park purposes."

The only funding sources for the recreation department at NTPUD comes from parking fees, rental charges, concessionaire revenue, and a 1994 voter-approved Mello Roos which generates about \$600,000 in 2017. As is the experience in most communities, public recreation doesn't pay for itself without subsidies. Between the event center, North Tahoe Regional Park, Tahoe Vista Recreation Area, and annual support to the Boys and Girls Club, the department has fallen short of being able to pay for today's cost of recreation with existing

dollars.

In late 2015, the NTPUD was approached by a private developer to consider a public-private partnership to operate and manage the North Tahoe Event Center. They proposed to fully renovate the facility, operate and maintain it to a high level and guarantee "affordability and accessibility" in exchange for a long-term commitment sufficient for a fair return on investment. Being consistent with the district's desire to avoid asking local voters for additional funding, the board embarked on a series of public workshops to vet the proposal. More than a dozen public meetings were held for this purpose.

As part of these workshops, the board decided to give any interested company an opportunity to respond to a request for proposals to provide operation and management services for the North Tahoe Event Center. After an exhaustive public process with hundreds of hours of staff and volunteer time, a selection by the board of directors of the top proposal (out of three) was made to negotiate with Laulima, the original proposer. This is the developer that also plans to create a 100-plus room hotel, including mixed-use development of the Ferrari family properties purchased earlier in 2017.

As of today, the board has moved from confidential "real estate negotiations" with Laulima to a release of a draft final lease that calls for the developer to fully fund a \$5.6 million renovation, secured by a performance bond, fully funding the operation and management costs of the entire facility for up to 30 years, plus two possible 20-year extensions if the terms of the initial partnership are being met. During this time the citizens of the district would have continued access and affordability at reduced rates, free use for community programs and guaranteed space for recreation classes including Jazzercise, yoga and others. In addition, the developer will pay the district a guaranteed annual sum, escalating in the first 10 years to \$165,000 per year, then to an escalating amount adjusted by inflation for the remaining

term. A citizen advisory committee would report annually on adherence by the partner to the terms of the lease. A complete review of the lease, exhibits, current FAQs and various attachments can be found **online**.

The elimination of the operating losses at the event center, plus the guaranteed annual revenue could defer plans to seek additional tax dollars to cover operations and capital asset replacement from the property owners in our district. A series of facilitated public workshops on the proposal are scheduled and can be found at the above website. A decision on the proposed public-private partnership could occur as soon as mid-September, culminating the nearly two-year effort to help secure recreation solvency at the NTPUD.

*Duane Whitelaw is general manager/CEO of North Tahoe Public Utility District.*

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## **Opinion: SMART Bay Area train, dumb Bay Area transit**

**By Joe Mathews**

The northern terminus of SMART, the new passenger-rail system in the North Bay, is the Sonoma County Airport Station in Santa Rosa. But after my 8-year-old son and I landed there, we learned the growing airport is more than a mile from the train.

There is as yet no dedicated shuttle from plane to train. My son wasn't up for a long walk. A public bus that would get us to the train wouldn't show up for hours. Uber wasn't picking up at the airport. My Lyft app kept crashing. And the four

cabbies outside the airport refused to take us, saying they didn't want to give up their place in line for such a short, cheap trip.



Joe Mathews

The Bay Area is our richest large metropolitan region because its people and technologies skillfully connect the world. But if you need to make transit connections in the Bay Area, good luck.

Inspired by the soft launch of SMART—the Sonoma and Marin County light rail has offered preview rides for months—I recently spent three days navigating the Bay Area sans car. I enjoyed rides on trains, ferries, and buses. But I was bewildered by the failure of a place famous for integrating culture and technology to integrate its own infrastructure across its nine counties.

After 40 minutes at the airport, we called our own cab, which took us to the train station. The first 43-mile segment of what promises to be a 70-mile train runs from Santa Rosa to San Rafael, and has bathrooms and a café that sells wine. The ride took 90 minutes and offered a grittier view of Sonoma and Marin Counties—mobile home parks, old industrial properties—and glimpses of Mt. Tamalpais and Mt. Diablo.

The SMART train is eventually supposed to reach the Larkspur Ferry Terminal; a 35-minute boat ride from San Francisco. But the first segment ends two miles short of the ferry. There's a bike path to the terminal, and a bus station in San Rafael that can get you to the ferry, but that bus ride would take 26

minutes. We opted for an Uber and got there in eight minutes.

We shouldn't have hurried: The ferry left 10 minutes late. But on a clear day, we enjoyed views of the Golden Gate Bridge. At the Ferry Building, I bought my son ice cream at Gott's.

After meetings in San Francisco, we went to BART's Embarcadero Station, heading for Oakland Airport and a flight home. But the first six trains were too full to board. BART is a system built for 60,000 riders that moves more than 400,000 daily. The system badly needs more cars, better maintenance, governance that isn't dominated by unions, and a second tunnel under the bay.

When the seventh train arrived, we pushed our way in. "That's rude," said one rider.

"We're from L.A.," I replied.

We made the flight, but the day produced sticker shock. The four-station ride from San Francisco to Oakland's Coliseum Station, from which a tram takes you into the airport, cost \$10.20 each. Add that to my \$11.50 ferry ticket (my son's was \$5.75), the \$9 Uber ride to the ferry, the \$11.50 one-way fare on SMART, and \$10 for the airport cab ride, our journey was pushing \$70. In L.A., a Metro ride is just \$1.75, with free transfers.

A few days later, I was back in San Francisco, contending with delays on Muni, when I needed to get to San Jose, a city BART doesn't quite reach yet. So I needed to use Caltrain; BART and Caltrain share a station in Millbrae, but the schedules aren't synchronized, meaning I could wait for 45 minutes. So I walked 25 minutes from BART's Powell station to the Caltrain at 4th and King.

In San Jose, I disembarked at Diridon Station, which may have a bright future as the northern terminus of high-speed rail. But for now, it is just another setting for connection

frustration, as I waited a half-hour for a light rail train on Santa Clara County's VTA system.

The next day, I needed to get to San Jose Airport, and took Caltrain to the Santa Clara Station, which offers a VTA bus shuttle. But the bus driver refused to open the bus door for 15 minutes, even during a brief rain. And the shuttle took a meandering route with a stop at a soccer stadium.

No wonder less than one-third of Bay Area residents commute by transit. If the region is ever going to be the design-savvy ecotopia of its dreams, it must combine these systems and put the rider's needs first.

Right now, using Bay Area transit makes you feel powerless. And that should be unacceptable in California's most powerful region.

*Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.*

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# **Opinion: Proving the future is bright**

**By Ted Gaines**

To watch the news is to imagine a politically-obsessed America pulling apart at the seams, with opponents mobbing up and attacking each other at every turn and the two parties and their talking head proxies endlessly screaming at each other about the real meaning of President Trump's tweets. It's a phony picture. The essence of this country isn't government at all and you might never see it on the news. It's everyday

people – hardworking people of every creed and age, living their lives the best they can regardless of what the government is doing – who make this state and nation what they are. It's those people who make me believe that California's future is bright.



Ted Gaines

Recently that belief was driven home to me when I met three very different groups of people in the North State. I came away inspired by their stories.

North State ranchers have lived off this land for more than a century and have experienced every up and down imaginable, but they've persevered. Now, as the dry creek beds and barren mountains of years past have disappeared, they look forward to getting more water and getting their businesses back on their feet.

Illegal marijuana cultivation is stealing rancher water and polluting land with indiscriminate pesticide abuse, making it harder for legitimate ranchers to thrive and breaking their hearts at the same time. These men and women are the original conservationists. It's not just words with them; they depend on clean water and healthy soils for their livelihoods. It's why they have such a deep connection to the land and are such careful stewards of their property. I know that a solid ranching economy in the North State will secure these lands for generations.

Despite these new challenges, the ranchers were ready to fight for their futures in California, and just asked me to try to

get government out of their way. They were eager to roll their sleeves up and get to work. They weren't looking for government handouts or help, just freedom, so they could continue the agricultural legacy their ancestors built.

In Placerville, I visited with the executive director of the privately-supported and volunteer-driven Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA). CASA recruits and trains people from the community to serve as advocates for abused or severely neglected children as they seek justice in our court system.

The CASA advocates usually take one case at a time and build a relationship with the child they are representing. They bond with the child, learn about the child's special, individual circumstances, and they use that knowledge to report to the judges overseeing these cases, so they can make informed, compassionate decisions about the most helpful services and support for each of these children.

The CASA volunteers, donors, and other supporters together serve as a solid foundation for these kids' futures, helping during their crises and together forging a more successful life path. One child at a time, CASA is creating healthier, more loving communities for us all.

But my favorite visit, one that brings a smile to my face even now as I think of it, was with 11-year old Preston Sharp, the flag planter. Starting in 2015, this young man started placing small flags on the graves of local veterans in Redding to honor their service. Since then, Preston has planted an amazing 28,000 flags on gravesites from Redding to Sacramento, and he's branching out to Reno and wherever else his commitment takes him. I'm proud to know such a young patriot who shows such great empathy for veterans and their families.

I wanted to recognize Preston, and gave him an award from my office to honor his efforts. He appreciated it. But in the end, he said he was not acting to get an award from the



government, but because he wanted to give veterans the respect they had earned. He is a fine young man with the right priorities.

These three stories seem unrelated but they aren't. They are all, in their way, stitching together a unified state – one child, one ranch, one flag at a time. Like a million little streams feeding into one mighty river, these Californians and others around the state are achieving on their own, with their individual accomplishments all pouring into a single California, robust and full of hope. Sacramento can't mandate these acts, only get in the way.

Politicians come and go, and parties come into and fade out of power all the time. But the California spirit and the talents and desires of the builders, the achievers, the doers, is forever.

Our future is bright.

*Ted Gaines represents the 1st Senate District, which includes all or parts of Alpine, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Shasta, Sierra and Siskiyou counties.*

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# **Opinion: Take me out to the California League**

**By Joe Mathews**

Take me out to the ball game? Sure, as long as you're taking me to San Jose or Lake Elsinore.

Those cities don't have major league teams—that's the point. In California, Major League Baseball is miserable. Big league games run long and cost hundreds of dollars for families to attend. The stadiums in Oakland and Anaheim are dumps, as are the teams in San Francisco and San Diego. In Los Angeles, the championship-contending Dodgers greedily cling to a contract that prevents most Angelenos from watching them on TV.



Joe Mathews

But there is an antidote to big-league baloney: the California League—our very own minor league. The games are fast-paced (the lack of TV commercial breaks helps), the ballpark entertainment is fun, and tickets are affordable.

Of course, the California League is Californians, and mirrors the challenges of our high-cost, high-poverty state. The league has teams in Stockton and San Bernardino, cities known for surviving municipal bankruptcies. The California League is strongest in two of the state's most economically challenged regions—the San Joaquin Valley and the Inland Empire each have three teams. The other two squads are in Lancaster, in L.A. County's high-crime High Desert, and San Jose, a city with wealthy residents but a starving government because it has too few sales-tax producing businesses.

Like California itself, the league has had trouble with out-of-state migration. After the 2016 season, two of the 10 teams were shut down and shifted to the Carolinas. One, the High Desert Mavericks, left after the city of Adelanto canceled the Mavericks' lease in the publicly owned ballpark. The other,

the Bakersfield Blaze, departed after seven years of unsuccessful attempts to replace aging Sam Lynn Ballpark.

Charlie Blaney, the California League's president, told me that the state's elimination of local redevelopment agencies earlier this decade has thwarted attempts to build new ballparks. It's hard to construct housing in California—for people or minor league teams.

At the same time, the history of the league (it dates to 1941, nearly 20 years before major league teams arrived) help make it great. In Visalia, you can watch the Rawhide play in Recreation Park, built in 1946, a place so intimate you can hear the players chatting with each other. In Riverside County, you can join the passionate crowds at The Diamond, home of the Lake Elsinore Storm, a Padres affiliate that draws 200,000 fans a year in a city of 55,000.

But there is no place better to watch a ball game in this state than in the league's oldest park, San Jose Municipal Stadium, which opened in 1942.

The San Jose Giants, an affiliate of San Francisco's Giants, spruce up the old place with paint-baseball cartoons, baseball quotes, and baseball banners cover every flat surface. The lovely old grandstand pleases nostalgists. The open picnic space down the left field line appeals to party-throwing millennials. Behind the plate, Giants staffers keep their office doors open so fans can walk in. The players are close enough for fans to get to know personally; in the right field corner, young women spent much of the game I saw flirting with pitchers in the Giants bullpen.

The stadium shows signs of age-worn spots on the field, and a lack of bathrooms that requires the presence of port-a-potties. But I paid \$13 for a ticket and sat just to the right of home plate, 10 rows up. (You can't sit in Dodger Stadium for less than \$21 even at the cheapest game.)

The game was played well and fast—just over two hours. Every minute between innings was filled with entertaining promotion. Fans played blackjack against the mascot Gigante (to promote a local casino). In a nod to a plumbing company sponsor, a toilet was carried onto the field and a child was invited to throw balls into it. Late in the game, two fans faced off in an air guitar contest.

The crowd was diverse in ethnicity, race and age, and large for a weeknight. Fans really came alive when the night's designated "Beer Batter," Arturo Nieto of the visiting Modesto Nuts, came to the plate. The fans taunted Nieto until he struck out swinging, which triggered the announcement that beer would be half-priced for the following 15 minutes.

"Don't run too fast and don't drink too fast," said the public address announcer, as one-third of the crowd scurried to the beer stands.

I hadn't planned to stay the whole game—I had to get to Salinas for an interview the next morning. But the hot dog and the Fritos nachos tasted great, and I was having too much fun to leave early. And I can't wait to go back.

*Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.*

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## **Opinion: Learning about the U.S. via trains**

**By James McCommons**

Amos, a one-legged Amish man, was having trouble with his new

prosthesis. He left the leg in his sleeping compartment and came to the diner on crutches—a hazardous ambulation on a moving train.

Because Amish do not buy health insurance nor take Medicare or Social Security, he rode the Southwest Chief from Chicago to California and went to Mexico to see a doctor. He paid cash for the leg in Tijuana.

“A van picked us up at the border and took us to a clinic,” he told me. “They have everything down there.”

Now he was eastbound, crossing the treeless high plains of eastern Colorado. Amos stared out at the sagebrush and sighed, “I just want to be back on the farm. I don’t suppose you know anything about feeder calves, do you?”

I knew enough to make conversation, and by the time dessert arrived, I had learned how to finish, or fatten, a calf with corn.

I’ve ridden Amtrak since college, and, in recent years, logged nearly 100,000 miles researching and promoting a book on rail policy. Dinner with Amos was one of my more remarkable encounters. But it wasn’t entirely unusual. During meals in the diner, where Amtrak practices community seating, Americans who might never otherwise encounter one another sit face to face at tables and break bread.

All mass transit brings Americans together, of course. When we travel, the self-segregation we otherwise practice—by race, income, education, politics, culture, religion, class, or political tribe—evaporates. But a train is special. Unlike a 20-minute commute on a city bus or subway, or an airline flight in the cramped seat of a fuselage, a train requires the commitment of time and space. Passengers ride together for hours, even days, and during the journey have the liberty to move about, eat and drink, and socialize.

Trains also have an intimacy with landscape. Incapable of negotiating steep topography, they follow valleys, hug rivers and ocean fronts, and strike out across plains and desert basins. Train travel induces a sort of reverie—a hypnotic feeling of being adrift on the geography of America. Passengers, many of whom are seeing the country for the first time, marvel at its beauty, diversity, and exoticness. And those feelings carry over to an inclination to engage one another and embrace the same diversity within the rolling coaches.

So while I still fly on airplanes, if I can work a long-distance train into my travels, I get aboard. When I want to feel and hear the zeitgeist of America, I get on a train.

Early in the Great Recession, on the Empire Builder—running from Chicago to the Pacific Northwest—I encountered jobless men converging on North Dakota with just a few dollars in their pockets and the hope of work. In Williston, men who had arrived months earlier in the oil patch boarded the train to go home for a few days and see family before heading back to sprawling “man camps” erected by Halliburton.

A roughneck having a beer in the observation car told me a woman was arrested for prostitution the day before at his man camp.

“The cops called it a crime. It was a public service. Those man camps are tense.”

The train rolled past campers with no running water parked out on the frozen prairie and rigs flaring off natural gas like colossal candles. The snow and sky shone red and apocalyptic.

He had not been home for weeks.

“There’s no place out here for a family. And my wife, she’s sick. She got the cancer.”

On the Sunset Limited in New Mexico, I chatted with a Texan returning home from Los Angeles after being checked over at Kaiser Permanente. He tapped his chest.

“A weird virus took out my heart muscle. Two years ago, I had a heart-lung transplant.”

We watched pronghorn antelope sprint away from the train and mule deer standing in dry washes.

When he got up, he clapped me on the shoulder, “Every day is a good one ... remember that.”

Over the years, I’ve dined with school teachers, a deputy sheriff, a distraught widower, an apprentice mortician, a veterinarian recruiting for slaughterhouses, a priest who discovered the call in Vietnam, an aging movie star, and a wheezy 98-year-old who was a door gunner on a Flying Fortress. A woman at our table whose own father had been a POW in Germany said, “Thank you for your service.”

He seemed bemused: “It wasn’t my idea. I got drafted.”

In Everett, Wash., my train picked up a cocky young man who told us he had piloted gunships in Iraq and was taking the train to Wenatchee for the funeral of a comrade who had committed suicide. Someone bought him a beer. Years later in Kansas, I ate a steak with a huge man in his late 30s, straw-colored hair flaring out beneath an oily baseball cap. He was like a sheep dog gone feral. He’d been in the “special forces.”

Inwardly, I groaned. Is anyone just a grunt, a cook, or a clerk anymore?

“I got fragged over in the sandbox and had to get out. I’m 6-foot-5 and used to be 215. I could run forever,” he said. “After my wife left me, I let myself go.”

He laid natural-gas pipeline in Oklahoma, lived in motels, ate

Chinese and take-out pizza each night, and guzzled gallons of beer. Flush with money, he apparently lived a lonely, haunted life.

Always, I take late meal reservations so if my companion(s) are compelling, we can linger over coffee or a glass of wine. The dining car stewards are in no hurry to bus the tables and throw us out.

Not all meals are a pleasure. Teenagers remove their retainers at the table, young lovers speak only to one another, people text on their smart phones, passengers come to the diner still wiping sleep from their eyes, and others have no filter for what passes as dinner conversation.

Leaving St. Louis, I met two sisters heading west to visit a son. The mom said, "He's such a good boy, called me every day when my husband passed." The boy had testicular cancer when he was 16 but had still impregnated his wife on two occasions. Unfortunately, the poor dear miscarried both times.

She prattled on and on. As my father used to quip, some people never come up for air. I gobbled my food and fled the car.

On the Coast Starlight outside Salinas, the owner of a restaurant in the Wilshire district of Los Angeles told me she was worried. There were Muslims on the train. "Are they in Michigan, too?"

Yes, I say. Muslims are urban homesteading blighted neighborhoods in Detroit. "They're making a go of it there."

"Michigan wants Muslims?"

I listen, nod, and try not to be judgmental or revealing. If the conversation grows intense or tedious, there is always the window and a "Hey look at that" as a way to change the subject.

We could be looking at a hillside of wind turbines in Iowa,



iceboats racing on the Hudson River, dapper worshipers exiting a corrugated tin church in Mississippi, delinquent kids in New Jersey heaving rocks at the train, kudzu vines strangling telephone poles in Georgia, or homeless men huddled in cardboard shacks beneath I-5 in Seattle.

A train trip unspools in an endless stream of images and words. And if you listen well, you hear America.

*James McCommons teaches journalism and nature writing at Northern Michigan University. He is the author of the 2009 book "Waiting on a Train: The Embattled Future of Passenger Rail Service."*

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# **Opinion: Eliminating DACA would be wrong**

**By Minerva G. Carcanó**

For a nation that prides itself on its care for children, efforts to eliminate the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program seem contradictory to this value and mean-spirited. Eliminating DACA would be a punishing of the innocent and a crippling of our future.

Nearly 800,000 young people have benefited from DACA. Under DACA these young people have been able to come out of the shadows receiving short-term but important legal status, and work authorization. DACA recipients, however, have received no free benefit. They have had to pay legal and processing fees to become recipients of DACA. They have had to keep their DACA up to date by paying additional fees, attending school at their own cost and working. For the opportunity to stay in the

country they were brought to without any say on their part, DACA recipients have had to work hard. They have received nothing for free. These same DACA recipients do, however, bring great benefits to the U.S.



Minerva G.  
Carcanó

It is estimated that DACA recipients represent 695,000 of the nation's workforce. According to a recent study, "A New Threat to DACA Could Cost States Billions of Dollars" by Nicole Prchal Svajlenka and others, removing DACA recipients from the U.S. workforce would result in a loss of \$460.3 billion from the national GDP over the next decade. DACA recipients have benefited the economy of the entire country. The loss of their labor would conversely have a negative impact on our national economy. From a practical economic perspective, eliminating DACA seems very short-sighted.

I have met these DACA recipients. They are bright, committed young people like other young people. They aspire to be doctors, nurses, lawyers, scientists, astronauts, teachers and preachers. They were the ones who through their political will and committed efforts obtained DACA. No one did it for them though many supported them then and support them today, including myself. They are determined to grow and learn, care for their families, contribute to their communities, and make a difference in the world. I believe they will do great things that will benefit all of us if we will continue to support them.

As a Christian, I believe that the welfare of immigrants, and

particularly immigrant children and young people, stands above broken immigration policies and certainly above partisan politics. Jesus himself time and again demonstrates through his actions the importance of children, healing them, welcoming them into his presence and declaring that God's kingdom belongs to the children.

On the contrary, those advocating for doing away with DACA demonstrate the kind of hate politics that would not only hurt immigrant children and young people, but would also contribute to the shaping of a culture of prejudice and discrimination that would hurt all children and undermine the culture of our country, a culture of respect and acceptance of the other.

Let's teach the children of this country the values of respect, and acceptance, and the belief that all children are of equal worth. Maintaining DACA and strengthening it can contribute to this lesson.

*Minerva G. Carcano is the resident bishop of the California-Nevada Conference of the United Methodist Church which is comprised of 370 congregations with 73,000 congregants in Northern Nevada and Northern California. Ninety-nine of the 370 congregations are located in Northern Nevada.*

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## **Letter: Not happy with Caltrans on Hwy. 50**

**To the community,**

As you have no doubt experienced, Highway 50, as you approach the Y, is again subject to extensive construction. I am sure that when this project is completed it will be an asset to our

community and improve the condition of Highway 50 by providing sidewalks, bike trails, curbs and gutters.



Bruce Grego

However, I am very concerned about the time frame for this project's completion. Has anybody considered the long-term negative impact on the local businesses in the areas affected? Has anyone interviewed or surveyed these businesses to learn of their economic suffering? There is almost nowhere for patrons to turn into these many businesses. Most of the ingress/egress to these parking lots and driveways are obscured by large pieces of construction equipment as well as other obstructions. Many have a driveway with a short-width metal plate causing vehicles to barely maneuver or enter the driveway.

On some days there are no "left turns" off of Highway 50 to enter the driveways to businesses, and more recently, no right turns to moving traffic. It is evident that traffic to these businesses has been reduced. How can any business hope to have any commercial activity when construction is occurring in front of their property making accessibility extremely difficult and uninviting? How many seasons of invasive construction on Highway 50 must we be asked to endure? Have we forgotten that the summer season is the primary source of income for many businesses in our community?

Since the beginning of this summer season, it is not uncommon to find only three or four construction workers on the entire construction site; despite this fact, large areas of traffic

lanes are coned off, clogging up traffic. During other times, the crew is no more than a dozen workers or so at a time. There is no reason that the construction staff could not be increased by three- or fourfold in order to complete these projects at a much greater pace. In fact, had these projects been properly staffed, this work could have been completed in 30-45 days in most areas.

In addition, I do not understand why the contractor does not complete one side of the highway before tearing up the other side of the highway. I suspect the contractor, under his contract with Caltrans, has the entire summer to complete these projects without regard to the impact upon the local businesses, as well as, the general impression it leaves with our visitors. It's a mess.

Is this the pattern we are to expect when Caltrans constructs the roundabout in Meyers? How about the Echo Summit bridge project that will shutdown our main transportation artery for two summers? Does anybody in authority care?

To add insult to injury, except for some minor efforts to fill in some of the cracks and holes, Highway 50 is still very broken up from the winter, not to mention all the damage caused by the natural gas company during their pipe relocation project. You would think with lanes being closed down for these projects, using a separate construction crew to patch holes and smooth out the Highway would be a good use of resources.

Have our local officials been involved during the contract negotiations with Caltrans and the contractors to ensure that the work would be completed expeditiously, minimizing the impact upon small businesses and all others using the highway? Where are our local government officials now to protect our community and it's businesses?

It seems all too often our city is more interested in the

anticipation of new development rather than the impacts such development has upon existing businesses and residents of our community. Can we forget the damages our community experienced with Project 3, (the hole). Or the projected damages upon housing and businesses that our community will experience with the proposed construction of the loop road.

These projects on Highway 50 have taken too long and have occurred too often. There needs to be a clear timeline for completion with adequate and well staffed construction crews so that we stop injuring our local businesses and the community that relies on our road system on a daily basis.

**Bruce Grego, South Lake Tahoe**

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## **Letter: Multi-denominational support for Bread & Broth**

**To the community,**

Thanks to a generous donor, Temple Bat Yam hosted the Aug. 14 Bread & Broth Monday meal at St. Theresa Grace Hall.

B&B, a nonprofit, all volunteer organization, began feeding the needy of the South Shore community in 1989 as a multi-denominational food outreach program. Throughout the past 28 years, volunteers of all faiths have supported the B&B program and Temple Bat Yam's Adopt a Day of Nourishment dinner is a testament to the continuing support of all faiths in feeding the hungry of our community.

Joining the B&B volunteers at the Temple Bat Yam's AAD dinner were Shelly Zimble, Julia Schwadron, and Ed and Debra Day.

B&B always looks forward to the help the sponsor volunteer crew members provide at the dinners.

For three hours, the volunteers are packing food giveaway bags, setting up the dessert and drink table, serving the dinner guests, cleaning and putting away tables and chairs and doing all of the necessary chores to feed the 90 to 100 plus dinner guests.

“It gave me a ton of pleasure to meet members of my community and to help serve folks in need,” commented Julia Schwadron. “It made it even better to do it on my birthday.”

Such is the dedication of many generous volunteers who provide incredible service and give back to our vulnerable neighbors. B&B thanks Temple Bat Yam and the sponsor crew members who volunteered their time to better the lives of others.

To partner with B&B as a donor or sponsor, contact me at 530.542.2876 or carolsgerard@aol.com.

**Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth**

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## **Letter: EDC should deny Meyers gas station**

**To the community,**

One, do we really need another gas station in Meyers? Meyers has about 10 percent of the population of South Lake Tahoe, but 15 percent of the gas stations. The market isn't expanding, so why dilute the existing market?

Two, by diluting said market, the existing businesses in

Meyers will see a reduction in revenues, and they will then reduce employee hours/wages. How is this helping struggling locals?

Three, do we really want to give the existing owner a third chance to pollute our groundwater, then declare bankruptcy when he gets sued by the state again? The taxpayers had to pay for the cleanup of the Beacon gas station. The owners have left that bill on the backs of the people.

Just how foolish are our county representatives?

In December 2001, the *Tahoe Daily Tribune* reported about a 1997 leak at the Meyers Beacon gas station that threatened water supplies. The leak at the Meyers Beacon has been labeled one of the worst spills of that time, and the ***Lake Tahoe News*** reported in May 2014 that several Lake Tahoe gas station owners are being sued by the state of California for allegedly mishandling underground storage tanks.

The 30-page complaint says the owners, Azad Amiri and Sarbjit Singh Kang were the masterminds behind everything, including using family and friends as “strawmen” as a way to “conceal their actual ownership, operation and control of the real properties.”

The Attorney General’s Office was “seeking a permanent injunction, civil penalties, and other equitable relief to remedy numerous violations observed at the facilities.” The State Water Resources Control Board has been after many of these defendants for years, with fines being levied in the past. I guess permanent doesn’t mean the same as when I went to school.

According to the **latest article in *Lake Tahoe News*** regarding the Meyers location, the state Water Board spent \$1.1 million to clean up the site.

“We worked with the attorney general to request reimbursement



and we received a fraction of that amount back. The state is no longer pursuing reimbursement of funds,” Lauri Kemper with the Lahontan Water Quality Control Board told *Lake Tahoe News*.

According to the lawsuit filed by the state, many of the defendants are residents of the Bay Area and Sacramento. An internet search on those named shows court filings for bankruptcy which included violations of §523(a)(2) false pretenses, false representation, actual fraud, and receivership lawsuits brought by various suppliers and banks as recent as July 2016.

In addition, the suit alleges that defendants Azad Amiri and Sarbjit Singh Kang hired family members to run businesses, used corporate funds as their own, and set up multiple businesses that employed the same employees and drew from the same funds.

The complaint also alleges they: commingled funds and other assets, failed to segregate funds of the separate entities, diverted corporate funds or assets without authority, failed to maintain adequate corporate records, used the corporate entity to procure labor-service-merchandise for another person, manipulated assets between entities, and used a corporation as subterfuge of illegal actions.

Companies with Tahoe ties that have been named include: Ameri Oil Company, Dara Petroleum Inc., Emerald Business Group Inc., Kang Property Inc., Meyers Holding Co., North Tahoe Station Inc., South Tahoe Station Inc., Tahoe 3208 Highway 50 Corp., Tahoe Blue LLC, Tahoe Blue Property Inc., and Tahoe Station Inc.

What is all the more interesting is that a discussion in July on the app named “Next Door” complained about the eyesore that station has been and what can the county do to enforce codes? Supervisor Sue Novasel responded, “We (the county) have been

trying for many, many years to get the owner to comply with the law but he has not complied and has, indeed, been avoiding the community's insistence to fix up or sell the property." But she briefly mentioned, "Last time I checked, the owner was still planning to rebuild a gas station with a food mart..." but failed to state that the owner had already started the formal process with the county to reopen another gas station. The *Lake Tahoe News* article indicated it has been in the works since last fall.

Supervisor Novasel also stated, "The new owner hasn't been responsive to law enforcement or our community – the legal system isn't working to get compliance from this owner." Well, the county planning and development system shouldn't be working to provide this owner the opportunity to do more damage to our area to his financial benefit.

We need better investments that are economically viable and diverse, with sustainable business plans that add to our community. Enough of the outside investments by dubious business groups that look to rape our resources and then run to the bank or use our legal system to shield their ill-gotten gains. Are our representatives asleep at the wheel or cronies working for the establishment?

**Jeffrey Spencer, Meyers**

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## **Opinion: EDC wasting money on river committee**

**By Larry Weitzman**

In case you are wondering, RMAC is the acronym for the River

Management Advisory Committee, a committee set up in the early 1980s by the Board of Supervisors to help advise them on river and nearby land use issues. It is composed of more than five members who have a vested interest in the river: an outfitter, a commercial rafter, a resident land owner, two members of State Parks, a business representative, a private boater, and two members at large.

Meetings are attended by a few people. At the one I attended on Aug. 14 about 10 interested people were there, mostly from the rafting community.



Larry Weitzman

Adam Anderson is the chair and business representative. His connection is ownership of the Villa Florentino, which is under scrutiny regarding its special use permit because of complaints. A hearing is scheduled shortly in front of the Planning Commission. Anderson lives somewhere in Placerville, away from the river. I can't tell you the names of the four other members in attendance. Also in attendance were our very competent Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Laura Schwartz and Vickie Sanders of Parks and Recreation.

The committee meets about 11 times a year, which creates a huge problem for taxpayers. But first I must describe the meeting I attended which lasted nearly two and a half hours. My time watching Looney Tunes was better spent, it was so unproductive (maybe it was a live action Looney Tunes). Not only did not one panel member understand their charge, they didn't even understand their own agenda which consisted of

three items. The first one was the approval of the prior meeting's erroneous minutes and the approval of the agenda for that night.

I also attended the prior meeting at the Marshall Gold Discovery Park Museum, which seemed to operate ultra vires. They were mostly concerned about the county's recommendation that RMAC be disbanded.

After listening to Schwartz's description of the nonfunctioning RMAC, many times not fielding a quorum, not understanding their duty or "job," not understanding their purpose, and certainly not understanding the Brown Act or how to conduct a meeting, it didn't take a rocket scientist to see the writing on the wall.

After two and a half hours, the meeting was done and nothing was accomplished but to set another meeting and perhaps another special meeting before the regularly scheduled meeting. The only thing I learned from the RMAC meeting was government dysfunction at its worst. But there is more.

Attending this meeting were two very highly paid EDC employees. In fact, their total annual cost to EDC including salary and all benefits as reported by Transparent California exceeds \$400,000. That's an hourly cost of more than \$200 an hour combined. I am not begrudging the fact that they are paid a lot of money. I am sure they work hard; I know Schwartz does. What I am pointing out is the fact that each of these meetings cost the taxpayer a lot of money.

You can be sure, with prep time, travel time, post mortem time after the meeting and actual meeting time, this meeting cost you and me at least \$1,000 or more for each one of these county dysfunctions. And they do this 11 times a year and have done so for years. You can do the math, but this RMAC thing is no free ride.

And now there is an outcry that the CAO staff, and Parks and

Rec staff has recommended that RMAC be disbanded. Why did it take this long? To add some gasoline to the fire, RMAC has been nothing more than to protect the interests of the commercial rafting industry, the concessionaires along the river and other related enterprises. Have they solved any problems? No. The noise, crime, vandalism, and pollution are as big as ever. Have they ever told the board that it's many times out of control? Of course not. But they do tell the board what a boon they are to the county. Yeah, sure. So is Walmart, Big O Tires and every other business in the county, especially the hotels and motels. We get a special 10 percent tax off that tourist industry.

Let's determine what the "industry" really costs the county, sheriff, emergency response, environmental management, code enforcement, and SUP violations. We need to know the whole nine yards and then the causation needs to pay their way. Not the taxpayers. Disbanding RMAC is a great start. That alone will save the county over \$10,000 a year, more money that can be used for potholes and senior legal. Now let's get an accounting of and for everything.

*Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.*