

ADVERTENT INCOMPETENCE

In the latest issue of the Fifty Center, the Fifty says Mammoth Lakes Police Chief Randy Schienle admitted to providing them with some “inadvertently inaccurate” information regarding the number of 911 calls Steve Searles has responded to in the past two years.

Instead of apologizing for her paper’s error, Editor Diane Eagle writes, “We have researched the stories written and published on Dec. 11. The stories are accurate representations of information given to the Times, and we stand by those reports.”

In other words, if the Fifty had been covering the O.J. trial, it would’ve reported that O.J. was not guilty because O.J. said so, and wouldn’t have interviewed anyone but O.J. for a contradictory point of view. That way, they’d be assured an accurate representation of information given, right?

The Fifty owed Steve Searles a phone call to respond to the numbers the MLPD threw out there *BEFORE* it went to press.

But speaking of editorial mistakes, I received a call from James Feeney this week pointing out a front page blunder in The Sheet.

Feeney, a building inspector, has not been offered early retirement by the Town. “I’m 39. I wish I could retire,” said Feeney on Monday. Instead, Feeney was laid off. The Town had represented to the media and public that all its staff reductions were targeted to those who could be offered early retirement or otherwise had something to fall back on. Feeney does not meet that criteria, and no explanation has been offered as yet as to why he was dismissed.

I ran into Mono County Assessor Jody Henning on Wednesday. She says she has finally received the appraisal for Mammoth Mountain (the County’s been waiting to reappraise the property ever since the Starwood purchase in 2005), and is now in the process of reviewing it.

From the “what a difference a year makes” department comes word that Cypress Equities, which bought the Hillside Property next to the Westin for a reported \$53 million last year, couldn’t unload the same property for a minimum bid of \$10 million at a recent auction. The company has since apparently spun the property off to a subsidiary.

Finally, I was very impressed to see Santa riding around town atop a fire engine on Christmas Eve. Very festive. Great idea. Someone will probably get fired for it. Makes everyone else look bad.

And from Geisel’s desk...

MLTPA is Tiny Tim in State’s “A Twisted Christmas Carol”

It’s like an aberration of the Dickens holiday tale. Tiny little Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access has every right to expect good things to happen to it. Executive Director John Wentworth has been hands-on, working with developers on connectivity points in the planning stages of several area developments. He’s also served on the steering committee for assembling the administrative tool for distributing Measure R funds when they arrive sometime early next year.

Sacramento, on the other hand, has been forging a chain of financial disaster that’s dwarfed only by the one hanging over Washington, D.C. And so, reacting the wrong way to a visit from the Ghost of Christmas Budget Problems Yet To Come, the state of California took a miserly, Scrooge-like approach to things and froze Prop. 84 funding.

According to a recent Los Angeles Times story, the state’s Pooled Money Investment Board met on Dec. 17 to consider its situation, and by the time Mammoth’s Town Council met that evening, the PMIB had pulled the plug on thousands of public works and other projects supported by General Obligation bond measures such as Propositions 50 & 84, freezing spending of tens of millions of dollars ... effective immediately. No two-week notice; not even two days notice. Spending stopped by end of business that Wednesday ... period.

An e-mail notice was sent at the end of the day to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC), whose sole source of funding is Prop. 84. On Friday, the SNC relayed word to Wentworth that his SNC-provided operational revenue stream had effectively evaporated. MLTPA’s 2007 grant from the SNC for \$120,099, which was contracted, and being spent and budgeted to get the organization through March 2009 is now “indefinitely suspended.”

**the
sheet**

News, Views & Culture of the Eastern Sierra

Vestri incompetence teneo haud reus? - Lord Rathbone

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A statement issued by the SNC further explained: “The severe budget situation has contributed to the difficulty in selling bonds authorized under Prop. 84 [an extension no doubt of the nation’s larger credit crisis]. The PMIB has taken this action to preserve necessary cash resources to pay the day-to-day operational needs of the state for the balance of the fiscal year, pending further action by the PMIB in January.”

Meanwhile, Wentworth said the Town of Mammoth Lakes has likewise seen two critical grants from the SNC suspended: \$185,535 awarded just this Dec. 8 for the CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) analysis of the Trail System Master Plan and the Parks, Open Space, and Recreation Master Plan, and \$196,000 for Collaborative Planning with the U.S. Forest Service for transit, circulation and recreation planning in the Mammoth Lakes Basin.

**By the way, the Town had counted on spending \$70,000 of this SNC money over two years to backfill a senior planning position. Just wanted to say this now, as if I don't, Staff will hide this acorn from Council 'til the snow melts.*

“The legislative branch is not dealing with the budget situation,” Wentworth opined to The Sheet. “We got no notice. None. Dec. 17 ... that’s it. How do you plan for that?” For the time being, Wentworth said the organization is running on “improvised financing,” he hopes will keep them afloat until Measure R money arrives. They are, however, “running on fumes,” as he put it.

Without some kind of monetary booster shot, however, it’s going to be close; Measure R funds will likely not be available until late spring of 2009 at the earliest. One possible lifeboat could come in the form of the economic jump-start planned by the Obama administration, which takes control of Washington D.C. in less than a month. President-elect Barack Obama is preparing to launch a large public works project as part of his \$500-650 billion general economy recovery program. With perhaps 2-3 million jobs created, Wentworth hopes some of that recovery spending finds its way to the Eastern Sierra. “That kind of money and matching Measure R funds will build a lot of trails,” he said.

Wentworth said any kind of donation to the cause of keeping the lights on and small staff at its desks would be a godsend. “No amount is too small ... or too big,” he said. He also encouraged readers wishing to voice their disapproval to district representatives Assemblyman Tom Berryhill and State Senator Dave Cox to go to MLTPA.org for info on how to help. “Call ... ask them what the heck they’re doing in Sacramento,” Wentworth said. “They’re breaking things right and left, breaking the state.”

A press release from the Town said staff thinks that only one future Mammoth Lakes project might be on that state’s public works hit list: the Meridian Blvd. rehabilitation/construction project. Prop. 1B committed minimum funding to cities and the Town has already received its allocation of \$400,000 to proceed.