A Small Town with a Big View

THE CITY OF SOUTH LAKE TAHOE’S FIRST 50 YEARS
Welcome to South Lake Tahoe
Before it was a city, South Lake Tahoe was a hub for resources and it was also a transportation crossroads. Why did it incorporate? What are the steps toward incorporation? Who started it? What has happened as a result? The story of a city is not just about policy and services, it’s the story of its people.

Among some memories, a school district was formed, individual businesses sprung up, a fire district was created, community activities became the norm, an above average snowfall drew much attention, the road over Echo Summit became “All Year-High Gear” and what was to become South Lake Tahoe was identified by four post offices, Tahoe Valley, Al Tahoe, Bijou, and Stateline . . . or were the post offices identified by the communities?

Those are just a few of the recollections of our past.

Everyone has a view of what occurred but memories fade into history.

So now we focus on the 50 years that bracket the creation and events of the City of South Lake Tahoe. This volume will take us though that time with pictures and brief narrative.

We are told a picture is worth a thousand words and herein we have proof of that assertion. These photos will bring back many memories as we remember the past, celebrate the present, and hope for the future.

—DEL LAINE, Former Mayor and City of South Lake Tahoe Councilmember
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Introduction

I will be forever grateful for my father’s decision to move his family to Lake Tahoe. I will always remember that first glimpse coming over Echo Summit. I saw the largest, bluest body of water I had ever seen. It was surrounded by the tallest mountains frosted with the whitest snow. I’m certain that moment is experienced by every visitor seeing the lake for the first time.

What a great place to grow up! What a great time to be alive!

The 1950s was a golden era for America and especially our state. As our roads and highways improved, so did our automobiles. The Sierra was now just hours away from the growing asphalt and concrete that our cities were becoming.

Tahoe was becoming a tourist destination. If there was ever any doubt about Tahoe’s appeal, it was erased by the Squaw Valley Winter Olympics in 1960. The entire country, as well as much of the western world, was seeing Lake Tahoe for the first time.

Our little community had to expand, and quickly, in order to accommodate the flood of visitors wanting to see it for themselves.

With very little supervision or support from our county seat in Placerville, we built roads, subdivisions, a sewer and water district, and rows of motels. We also had to supply the support services needed to sustain this growth: specifically, police, fire, and snow removal.

The desire for local control along with the necessity of federal and state funds to support the needs of this growing community lead to one historic vote, and on November 30, 1965 the City of South Lake Tahoe was born.

This book is intended to document and celebrate the 50 years since that historic decision.

As the pace of innovation continues to accelerate and as our society anxiously anticipates the next big thing, we soon lose sight of where we’ve been.

History is what binds us, connects us. History allows us to stand on the shoulders of the generations before us in order to get a better view of the future.

The people you are about to meet are the pioneers, the visionaries. It is their story you are about to read.

As mankind makes further strides to accommodate a burgeoning population, I sincerely hope that our future development will retain, if not improve, the piece of heaven that my father chose to raise his family.

—Mayor Hal Cole

Mayor Hal Cole was first elected to the City Council in 1994. He is the longest serving City Councilmember for the City of South Lake Tahoe and has served as Mayor six times.
In 1964, wanting to have control over its police, fire, and snow removal, the Citizens for Local Government (CLG), a group of South Lake Tahoe residents and business owners, spearheaded an incorporation effort, citing a lack of interest from the county government. The grassroots organization believed that local control was necessary to solve local problems, but they fell short by 378 signatures. In February, 1965 a hearing was held before the El Dorado County supervisors to decide if a 30-day extension to pursue the remaining signatures would be granted. It was, and the CLG went to work canvassing, mailing, and getting the word out any way they could. They succeeded on their second attempt and the incorporation of South Lake Tahoe would be on the ballot.
In an impassioned and articulate letter to the *Tahoe Daily Tribune*, the Citizens for Local Government stated that although the South Shore area held one-half of the county population and 60-to-80 percent of the total building permits issued, it was not fully represented at the county level. “This area is a prime source of revenue to El Dorado County. Yet no one is able to tell us how much of our taxes are returned to improve our area . . . it is obvious we are getting short-changed,” the letter stated. A desire for a police department, fire department, and public works department for snow removal were also cited as reasons for incorporation.

On the ballot November 9, 1965 was the vote for incorporation, nineteen city council candidates, and two choices for the city’s name: Lake Tahoe, or the City of South Lake Tahoe.
1950  South Tahoe Public Utility District Formed
1951  Lake Tahoe Unified School District Formed
1956  Heavenly Ski Resort Founded
1959  South Lake Tahoe Airport Opens
1960  1960 Winter Olympics Held at Squaw Valley
1963  Barton Hospital Opens
1965  November 9, 1965 Incorporation Vote
These articles from the *Tahoe Daily Tribune* in 1965 show the arc from frustrated citizens to city council candidates.

Prior to incorporation, there were four neighborhoods, each with its own flavor: Al Tahoe, Bijou, Tahoe Valley, and Stateline. These neighborhoods would become the City of South Lake Tahoe.