

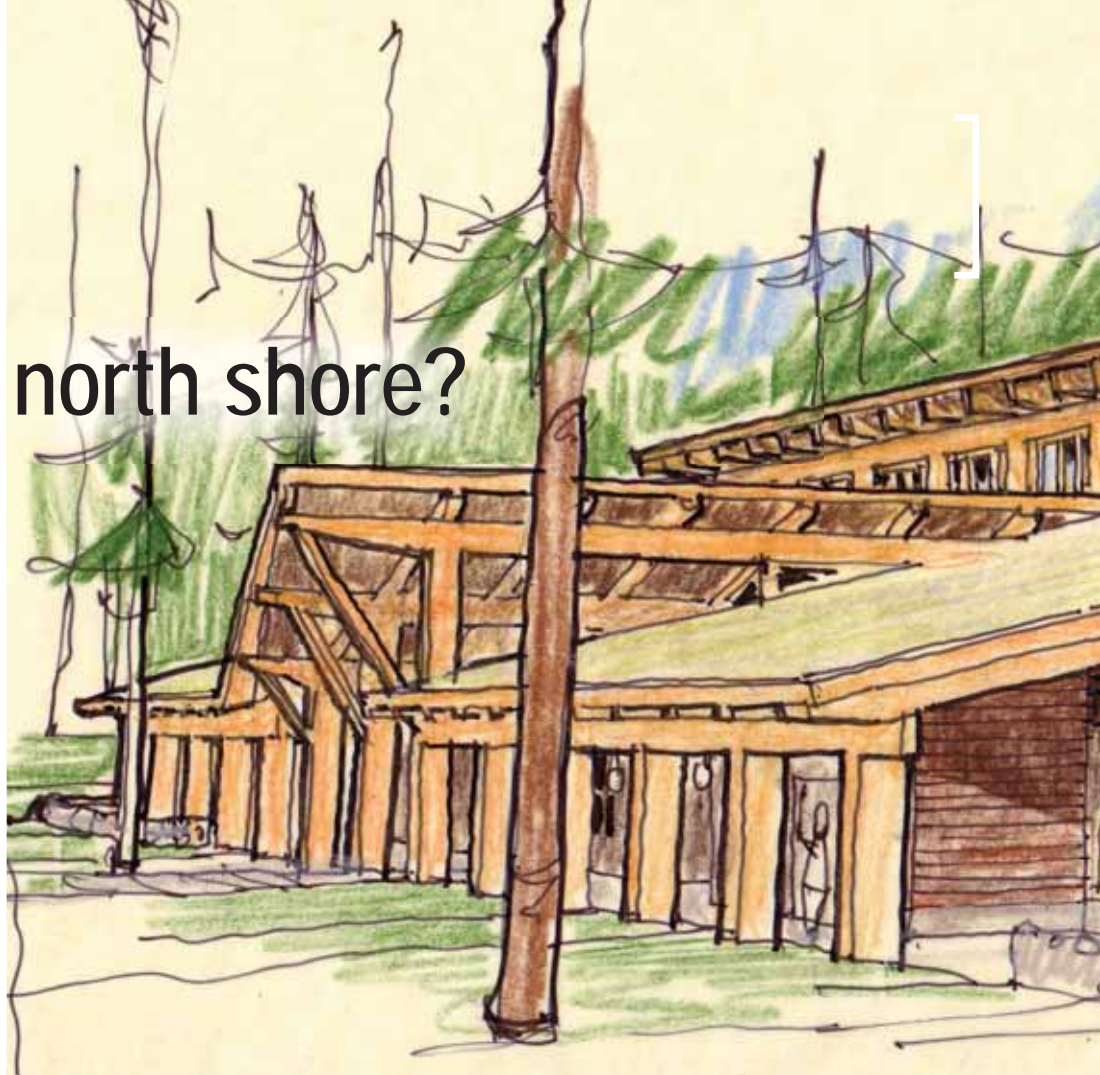
a pool for the north shore?

by KATHLEEN DOLER
Sue Rae Irelan's daughter is now five years old; she was just three months old when Irelan began working to get a recreation center built in North Lake Tahoe. Now the question for Irelan is whether her kids (she also has a seven-year-old son) will be off in college before the rec center is built, or will it be built at all?

Voters will help decide those questions this November during the California special election, when a measure will appear on the ballot asking residents of the Tahoe City and North Lake Tahoe Public Utility Districts to raise property taxes to pay for the construction and operation of a rec center. Irelan collected 850 valid voter signatures this past spring to bring the measure to the ballot. If it passes, construction could begin on the center in 2008 and open in late 2009.

It would be a sweet victory for Irelan, the chairwoman of the Recreation Center Communities Committee (RC3), the community action group that has worked to bring such a center to the California side of The Lake (Incline Village has its own public recreation center). Irelan and her group researched the design and operation of rec centers in other mountain resort communities and, perhaps most impressively, kept the community involved in the process through multiple public meetings. Irelan and her team's professional approach convinced the boards of the two PUDs, which have not always enjoyed amicable relations, to work together to create the center.

"Every step of this has been hard," says Irelan, "But getting the PUDs together – that was huge." Irelan has a degree in landscape architecture and,



Architect's rendering of a possible recreation center on Dollar Hill. Courtesy photo

prior to becoming a full-time mom, was a recreation and land-use planner. Her skills at navigating bureaucracies and government regulations have been invaluable. The rec center effort includes the creation of special fundraising and management structures that insulate the utilities from financial and legal liabilities.

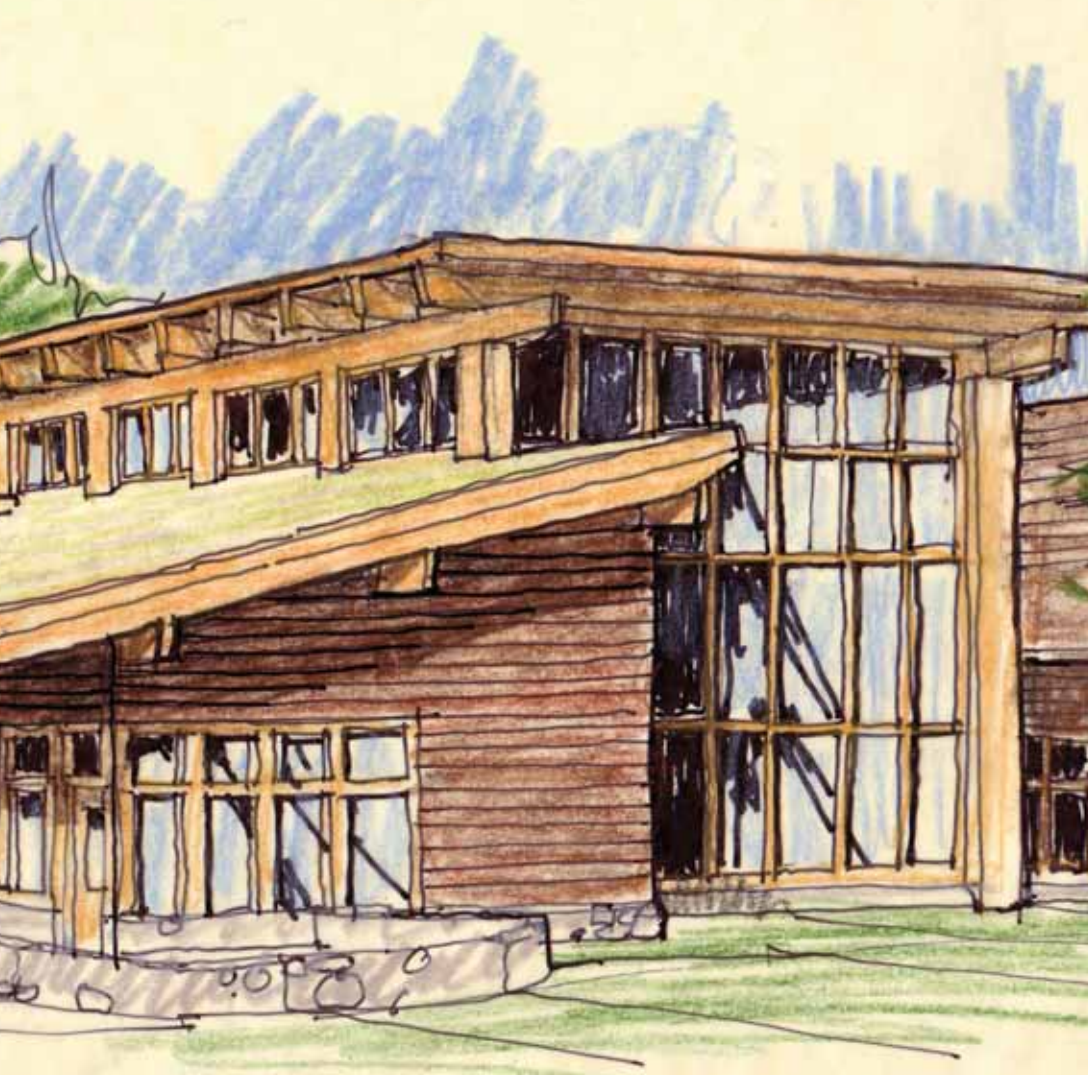
Support for a rec center in North Tahoe has been publicly voiced for at least 40 years. Yet even with seemingly widespread support, it is only now that voters will have the option put before them. The proposed \$98 annual tax would build and fund the initial operation of a 26,000 square foot structure housing a six-lane pool and fitness, multi-purpose and locker rooms.

If the measure is approved, Irelan's team will seek private funding to expand the project to include a warm-water

therapy pool, a gym with a track and additional multi-purpose space for seniors, youth and toddlers. At this size, the project begins to resemble the "community center" whose absence many locals lament. "The closest thing we have to a community center is Pete and Peter's bar," is an oft-heard comment around Tahoe City.

The rec center would be located at the top of Dollar Hill on land donated to the public for recreational purposes. The site is on the boundary between the two PUDs, roughly equidistant from the West Shore and Kings Beach. The rec center's parking lot would also serve the bike path slated to run behind North Tahoe neighborhoods to Tahoe Vista.

Irelan and RC3 are committed to building a facility that supports families and the community. "If we want a resident community here, we have to



master classes



Aspen, by T.M. Nicholas

“We don’t have to lie down in the face of change and have no influence over it.”

— Sue Rae Irelan


provide services to residents,” she says.

Construction costs have gone up considerably in recent years, one reason the RC3 scaled back the size of its proposal to the swimming pool-centric design on the ballot. Estimates now put the cost of the project at \$14.5 million. Annual operating costs are pegged at \$1.5 million, \$350,000 to be paid each year with tax money and the remainder coming from a combination of user fees and other revenue.

Critics of the ballot proposal fall into two camps: skeptics of the financial projections and those who protest the loss of any open space in the region.

The proposed site is just off Highway 28, with its own access road, and would be largely hidden from view in the forested parcel.

If two-thirds of the voters approve the plan, it’s hard to guess whether Irelan’s first response will be a celebratory scream or a big sigh of relief.

“Because of this project, there have been times when my kids have been in full-time daycare,” says Irelan, age 45. “This was supposed to be a part-time project, but it didn’t work out that way. One of these days, I would really like to go back to work and get paid to do something.” 

Pogan Art Workshops feature outdoor instruction by masterful *plein air* painters Craig Mitchell, Dale Laitinen, T.M. Nicholas and Jean LeGassick. The five-day workshops are based in South Lake Tahoe from September 12 to 30, with fall, winter and spring workshops in Tahoe, Big Sur, Hawaii and Cinque Terra, Italy. Call Patti Pogan at (530) 546-7846 for more information. 



January on the Truckee, by Craig Mitchell