



Mt. Konocti fund provides 'once-in-a-lifetime' opportunity

By Gary Dickson -- Record-Bee Columnist

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It's surprising how often the offbeat quotes of Yogi Berra perfectly fit a situation. For me, "It's Déjà vu all over again." works really well at the moment.

In the spring of last year, while I was the publisher of the Telluride (Colorado) Daily Planet, I approved the first EXTRA edition of my publishing career. Its purpose was to make the historic announcement that Telluride had succeeded in its long suffering efforts to acquire the beloved valley floor which consists of many acres of pristine open space that everyone observes on their drive into the famous box canyon ski town.

The Daily Planet is a Monday through Friday daily paper that serves Telluride and much of San Miguel County. The information about the opportunity to acquire the valley floor occurred late on a Friday afternoon.

So, instead of waiting until the Monday paper, we published an extra edition and many of us staff members excitedly walked the streets of Telluride Saturday morning shouting that famous newspaper line, "Extra, extra, read all about it." It was exhilarating and one of the high points of my career.

You see, the longtime owner of the valley floor, wealthy businessman, Neal Blue, through a corporation called the San Miguel Valley

Corporation (SMVC), for years had agitated Telluride residents with plans to develop hotels, condominiums and shopping centers on the valley floor.

Telluride folks, even the realtors, who would stand to benefit from such development, were always against the valley floor being built up like the entrance to so many other western ski towns. Telluride wanted to remain forever different and after years of effort it achieved its goal.

Fast forward a little more than one year and instead of publishing an extra edition about buying a valley floor; I'm thrilled about the reports of Lake County being able to buy a mountain. It's not just any mountain, though.

It's Mt. Konocti, "Lake County's ancient towering volcano Home to falcons and other raptors, sacred to native Americans, and the subject of legends, the mountain is one of the few landmarks ever-visible from most locations throughout the county." Mt. Konocti is easy to fall in love with because of these reasons and because of its chameleon-like quality of presenting a different appearance from every vantage point.

I believe that many Lake County residents feel much the same about Mt. Konocti as Telluride residents feel about their valley floor. It deserves to be left, as much as possible, in its natural state. Thankfully, the family that has owned a large part of the mountain for generations provided Lake County with the first opportunity to purchase the 1,520 acres of the mountain's land they owned. The family could have tried to woo a major resort company or a wealthy Neal Blue type with plans to develop hotels, condos and mountain top mansions.

Lake County is now faced with meeting the goal of raising \$2.6 million by next September, to finalize

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the purchase. That is doable because the County Supervisors have agreed to allocate geothermal revenues toward the purchase price of the land. But, the County will need additional funds to make preservation to perpetuity a possibility.

The County would like to purchase additional parcels as they become available, plus maintenance costs due to allowing public access for hiking and bird-watching will not be cheap. The long term plan is to "link the county and BLM-owned land with Clear Lake State Park, making it possible to develop hiking trails from Clear Lake to the top of Mt. Konocti."

We can all help with this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity by donating to the Preserve Konocti fund. You can go to www.PreserveKonocti.org to donate or send your donation to: Lake County Department of Public Services, 333 Second Street, Lakeport, CA 95453. Make a donation. It will make you feel good.

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