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New Road Monuments



(from left) Beach Boy and Incline Village resident Mike Love (left) and sculptor June Towill Brown (right) pose next to Brown's sculpture of a black bear inside the new roundabout on the west end of Incline Village; Surrounding the bear are sculptures of other local native animals, such as a bobcat.

Two additions are changing the driving landscape around North Tahoe this winter—a transportation center in Tahoe City that hopes to take cars off the road and a new roundabout featuring public art in Incline Village.

The end of the 2012 construction season saw the completion of the \$7.8 million Tahoe City Transit Center—a sleek, 640 square foot bus stop surrounded by 130 parking spots at Tahoe City's 64-Acres Park just south of the "Wye" intersection. The center has indoor and outdoor seating, a bus-tracking screen and automated bike lockers.

"We've been getting a lot of positive feedback on the project," says Will Garner, Placer County's transit manager. "It also serves as a very convenient area to park and walk into town."

The Transit Center was years in the making, dating back to the 1990s, says Garner. In the mid-2000s, the project went through permitting and environmental review, receiving a mix of both public support and strong opposition. Plans for the center were approved in 2008 and it broke ground in 2010. It's designed to function as a hub for Tahoe Area Regional Transit

buses, which now arrive on the half hour, and will serve resort shuttles, Garner says.

While calling the project "beautiful," Granlibakken Resort general manager Ron Parsons did express some concerns.

"I really hope it works," Parsons says. "But I haven't seen a concept of operations. I'm not sure how it fits into the bigger transportation picture."

Meanwhile, improvements to both traffic flow and aesthetics arrived at the bottom of Mt. Rose Highway (431) in the form of Incline Village's \$2.4 million roundabout. The new west gateway to the community, the roundabout features artwork by Incline sculptor June Towill Brown, the highlight of which is a large bronze black bear. Previously, the intersection—a three-way stop at Highway 431's terminus into Highway 28—was the site of numerous backups. The roundabout now serves a dual function by improving traffic flow and safety as well as visually upgrading what was a fairly utilitarian intersection, says Scott Magruder, a representative with the Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT).

"The original thought was to put a stoplight in there, but then you get the cost of maintenance," says Magruder. "The roundabout keeps traffic flowing and if you get up to it and nobody is going through, you don't get stopped."

Compared to the Transit Center, Incline's roundabout experienced an accelerated plans-to-pavement realization, going from concept to completion in about five and a half years. The idea was originally voiced by local realtor Don Kanare, who was sitting in traffic at the intersection when he realized there had to be a better way to flow cars through the area. An "Incline Gateway Committee" formed and advanced a plan to NDOT, which was receptive.

Workers from Q&D Construction, based in Sparks, broke ground on the project in spring 2012 and finished ahead of schedule in September. While the project was in planning, Kanare and Incline residents Jim Clark and Jim Nowlin formed a nonprofit to raise funds for public art in the center of the roundabout.

The art creates an aesthetically pleasing structure while blocking motorists' vision across the roundabout, forcing them to look left—the direction of oncoming traffic. Brown submitted her plans for the intersection—a bronze bear surrounded by smaller sculptures of a bobcat, squirrels, raccoon and coyote (a mule deer is slated to be added, as well as a golden eagle, commissioned by Beach Boy and Incline resident Mike Love)—and offered to donate more than \$250,000 of her time to create the artwork.

"I absolutely love the sculptures," says Kanare. "June did a fabulous job of designing them and Q&D did a fabulous job of building the roundabout." TQ



PHOTO BY DAVID CALVERT/RENO ACES

The Reno Aces' stadium, built in 2009, is running into financial troubles, leaving the team's future in the Biggest Little City in doubt.

Aces in the Hole?

by Kyle Magin

To help pay for the Reno Aces baseball stadium, taxes on rental cars at Reno-Tahoe International Airport may be on the way up. That has some Tahoe and Reno-area tourism officials uneasy about the impacts of increased costs on travelers.

A two to four percent increase in vehicle rental taxes could be considered for approval by Nevada's legislature in the 2013 session to help refinance a \$55 million loan taken out to build the AAA Reno Aces baseball stadium, which opened in 2009. The loan, which comes due late in 2013, was originally set to be paid down with public funds from the city of Reno and Washoe County. However, as the region struggled financially over the past few years, revenues did not come in as expected and the city and county have been unable to meet the financial commitments.

As a result, the Aces ownership group—SK Baseball, LLC, owned in part by billionaire Herb Simon—took a refinancing proposal before the governance boards of Reno and Washoe County late in 2012. Without the public money, ownership says it would need to find a new home for the team. One facet of the deal would be to increase vehicle rental taxes in Washoe County, home to the airport.

The proposal drew a negative response from the Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority, which says about a quarter of travelers flying into the airport are visiting the Tahoe/Truckee area. Officials cite a report from San Mateo County, which states that a hike in vehicle rental taxes in the county, to include at the San Francisco International Airport, would most likely depress the amount of vehicle rentals, duration of rentals and total trip spending; the airport authority predicted a similar consequence locally.

"Any reduction of visitors to our region and lower spending on ancillary goods and services will negatively impact local businesses," an October 3 internal memo from the airport

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