



The Yuba is one of the Sierra’s key watersheds photo by Pamela Biery

PEOPLE, PLANET, PROFIT

THE SIERRA BUSINESS COUNCIL 1994-2014

BY PAMELA BIERY

“Find your place on the planet. Dig in, and take responsibility from there.” Gary Snyder

Sierra Business Council (SBC) is poised to begin its third decade with new energy, a reinvigorated vision and a focus on the work ahead. SBC’s 20th Anniversary Conference, *Peak Innovation*, will be held at Granlibakken Resort in October, where the very first conference was held over 15 years ago. This conference brings clean energy innovator Van Jones, Lt. Governor Gavin Newsom and award-winning conservation author Terry

Tempest-Williams to Lake Tahoe. Presenters are designing and implementing cutting-edge solutions to the most difficult social and environmental issues of our time.

Founded on the triple bottom line principle of people, planet and profit, SBC remains committed to wealth as our total capital, social, natural and financial. Challenges and actions that will be taking front and center at *Peak Innovation* are the new Small Business Incubator Center that SBC is launching in late 2014 and how this region

may best address mounting water and wildfire issues. SBC functions as a hub for solutions, communication and sustainable development and these functions will extend into a creative, energizing conference with great minds, enthused participants and the mingling of cultures and people that turns powerful, inclusive ideas into realities. This conference intends to “ignite and inspire innovation and action to build and sustain flourishing Sierra communities.”

Discussing *Peak Innovation*, SBC President



SBC board and staff enjoy the scenery at June Mountain following a board meeting photo courtesy of SBC

Steve Frisch notes, “We see today a much more complex demographic than we did in 1994. We have today the rare possibility of taking economic theory and embedding change in the system itself. Everyone sees energy and value as a savings, but what is missed is that these savings can then be applied to elevate and transform the whole nature of profitability and good simultaneously. We are creating an opportunity for entrepreneurs to grow business in the Sierra Nevada.

“SBC has established a regional identity and now we are ready to apply this background work to scaling sustainable solutions that can be replicated with multiple benefits. SBC’s energy services are a good example of this: through the Energy Watch program

over 1400 retrofits have now been done and 200 retro-commissionings, which rebuild the internal energy systems of a business from the core up. This represents over 20 million-kilowatt hours per year, or the equivalent of \$5 million in annual savings. This avoided cost can then be invested in human resources or other company advancements. Not only is the energy saved, the capital is then available.

“We live in a world with finite resources and big problems. Change is possible, and we can make change by creating economic models where we value social and economic benefits. Real prosperity is when we earn more and we improve our environment and community at the same time. SBC is advancing and managing change with a goal

of long-term sustainability.”

SBC approaches the Sierra in terms of assets, jobs, land, money and energy; each of these five areas are intrinsically intertwined, each has an array of initiatives underway for sustainable progress. Whatever the particular project, SBC is all about business development. This is manifested through the constant development of triple bottom line business models, which include small manufacturing, small-scale local energy resources and agricultural tourism.

Growing Sustainable Businesses

SBC’s new Small Business Incubator Center will include a co-working space, networking opportunities and incubator support activities. Qualifying businesses will receive



John Laird, California Secretary for Natural Resources at Deer Creek Tribute Trail Bridge dedication near Nevada City, 2011 Photo courtesy California Office of Natural Resources



Mono Lake in the Eastern Sierra Nevada photo by Pamela Biery



Members of SBC & Feather River Land Trust Boards visit Sierra Valley wetlands photo courtesy of SBC

planning and consulting for capital access as well as HR and fiscal sponsorship. SBC anticipates dedicating 1.5 to 2 million dollars in private-public grants over a three-year initial period, which will seed 30 to 40 new businesses and grow to a staff of 5 full-time employees and numerous part-time consulting contract employees. This Business Center will predominately provide services for the Eastern and Northern Sierra, where scant options are now available.

The Small Business Incubator exemplifies change that is destined to be embedded into the culture, not a superficial solution or green washing of the same systematic approaches already played out. SBC is unabashed in its efforts to bring about good that represents everyone at the table, not just the head of the table.

Mowing the Lawn

The elephant in the room that no one sees may well be the vast resource that is the Sierra Nevada, which gets less than proportional fiscal and policy-making attention. As described by Frisch, "The Sierra has 50 million visitors a year, is the origin of 60% of the water for the entire state, and contains 50% of the natural biodiversity, yet is only represented with 2% of the state's annual natural resources budget. We are like the backyard that everyone in the neighborhood uses, but no one shows up to mow the lawn." *Peak Innovation* seeks to bring leadership, awareness and planning capacity into a single location for a few days of great collaboration, visioning and problem-solving with lasting impacts.

California is facing a drought. How the next months are managed at the state, regional and local levels have potentially huge outcomes in terms of essential resources and catastrophic fire avoidance. For instance, the recent Rim Fire produced more CO² than the city of Los Angeles does in routine traffic patterns over 4 years. SBC as an organization represents the region to the State in lobbying for appropriate planning and resource conservation measures. Expect meaningful discussion at *Peak Innovation* of these critical issues and the advancement of policies to ensure quality of life in Sierra urban and rural communities.

Practical Method, Expansive Vision

Sierra Business Council is key in establishing a structure and methodology for bringing these larger entities and government agencies to the table, crafting laws and attracting funds. Powerful partners like National Geographic, the Audubon Society, The Trust for Public Lands and The Nature Conservancy now work closely with regional concerns for informed, integrated and comprehensive solutions. SBC often acts as a convener and collaborator, linking local governments and assisting private and public relationships through complex permitting and licensing administration processes.

When asked about the importance of SBC, Sierra Nevada Conservancy Director Jim Branham commented on Frisch's influence and range of effectiveness, which can be felt throughout the region, from National Geographic's Geotourism Project to providing important leadership in the Northern Sierra Partnership, an innovative approach to addressing conservation and community needs.

A Backward Glance

So how did Sierra Business Council get to where it is today? When you have people who almost religiously avoid the spotlight, manage from the back-room or seamlessly lead with grace from the middle, it seems easy to assume SBC sprouted wholly formed as a think tank somewhere in the midst of a stunning Sierra postcard scene. But that really is not the case. Lucy Blake thought she knew what she was doing when she and Janice Forbes (founding publisher of *Sierra Heritage Magazine*) joined Lucy's vision and Janice's leadership to form Sierra Business Council in 1994. Turns out, they did and didn't know what they were doing; they actually did far more than they imagined. Sierra Business Council is known today as a convener, collaborator and innovator, collecting advocates, partners and affiliations far and wide to support the Sierra Nevada. It has worked tirelessly on complex, strategic alliances to gather political will, capital and grass roots support in the most real of ways. It was an early adopter of triple bottom line principles, uniting good for people, profit and planet.

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Steve Frisch talks with ranchers in Bridgeport Valley about the Sierra Nevada Geotourism Project
photo courtesy of SBC

The Sierra in 1994 had a few non-profit groups, alliances and loosely-held organizations. The Sierra was then and is today arguably under-represented. Blake and Forbes understood that if business leaders came together, networking and collaborating, they could be more effective and create opportunities in the Sierra. SBC was founded with the vision of coordinating limited resources for better outcomes.

In the early 1990s, polarization between ranchers, environmentalists and business was mounting. This polarization had vast, unspoiled lands and critical resources in the crosshairs. There had to be better way. Blake drew up a list of leaders from different fields in the Sierra and invited them to meet. From these meetings came the grants and seed money for basic economic research, studies on land use and

sustainable economic development.

Janice Forbes was one the first people Lucy Blake interviewed. Blake's vision found a deep networker, a thoughtful risk-taker and a hard-working ally in Forbes. Janice Forbes was a well-known publisher, business advocate, philanthropist and life-long resident of Placer County. While very pro-business, Forbes always had an eye for the environment. Blake and Forbes solidified the working group that became Sierra Business Council. This lasting and durable core of leaders joined forces for the good of their place of business, home and irreplaceable California resources.

When people in the Sierra were surveyed, they consistently recognized that the good of their business was interdependent with the good of the environment and the overall preservation of the rural character of their

communities. Simply put, there was no reason to choose between economic well-being and environmental quality. If more people could see this, there was real hope to avoid polarization and craft inclusive solutions.

Quantifying the Sierra Nevada

When you came right down to it, just what was the Sierra Nevada anyway? Initial effort was quantified and defined this complex, diverse region that had so many hats and notions hanging off it, it could be a milliner's shop. The first ever *Sierra Nevada Wealth Index*, compiled in 1996, used a broad, inclusive approach that has become the model for planning agencies nationwide: "Our wealth is our total capital, social, natural and financial. We must not make decisions based on narrow measurements. Instead, we must understand and track our total capital, adopt an integrated, long-term view of our region's wealth, and keep the whole picture in focus."

In 1997, SBC published *Planning for Prosperity*, a landmark booklet, which pulled together the resources, tools and objectives needed for sustainable practices, recognizing that true wealth and community good are respectful of the environment and the social fabric of healthy business. Now these terms are bandied about pretty routinely, but few were taking this progressive approach in the Sierra at the time. Good solutions are good for the whole. While there were many regionally-based organizations, SBC was and is unique in that it addresses the entire Sierra and includes the business community, which is key to meaningful conversations.

SBC was running with a ball no one had carried before and the field was growing. People noticed. *Planning for Prosperity* received the American Planning Association's prestigious Daniel Burnham Award. Lucy Blake was named as a MacArthur Fellow in 2000 and received an Albright Scholarship in 2001 in recognition for her work with SBC.

A State Agency for the Sierra

SBC and other activists saw the need for a new State agency, specifically for the Sierra Nevada. SBC and key allies compiled *A Report of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Working*







Janice Forbes

Group, Establishing a State Conservancy in the Sierra Nevada in 2002. This report resulted in Assembly Bill 2600 in 2004, which when voted into place, gave the Sierra a new agency to specifically address the complex needs of a vast and unique region. The formation of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy in 2006 identified a 22-county, 25 million-acre region with sub-regions, complex economies and diverse natural resources. It is the largest state conservation agency of its kind in the nation. The creation of this agency is a tremendous achievement for our region and state. Steve Frisch recalls, "Many agencies and individuals worked tirelessly on the creation of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. SBC was there at the beginning, through two administrations, and was there to see it put into place. That's how we do things, we stay the course."


Leadership Institute

As events progressed at SBC, it was obvious that there was a gap in leadership in many Sierra communities. "We need not only good ideas, but good leaders to realize ideas," observes Frisch. The scale and scope of the problems and issues being brought to the table required new thinking, solid science and an understanding of planning not necessarily innate in local business and government leaders. Early on, SBC founded the Sierra Leadership Institute to provide a place for Sierra residents to hone leadership skills.


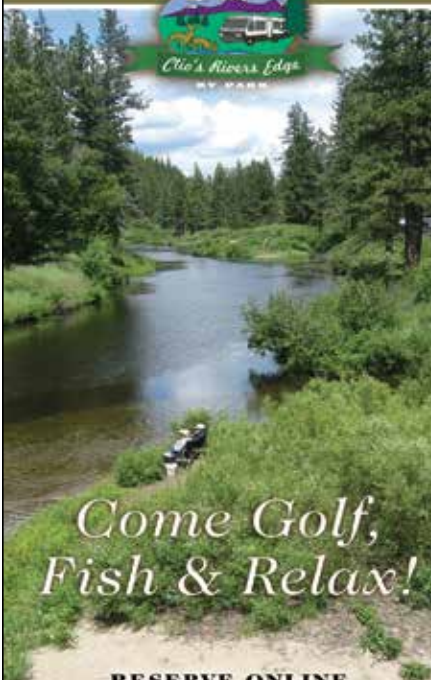
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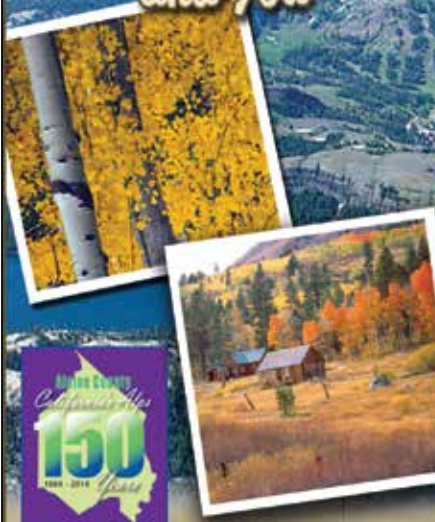
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SBC President Steve Frisch presents a Lifetime Achievement Award honoring the work of John Olmsted to Alden Olmsted, May 2012 photo courtesy of SBC

Over 400 individuals have graduated from the Sierra Leadership Institute in the last 15 years. An apropos example of retaining and cultivating talented Sierra professionals, SBC's current president, Steve Frisch, was in the first class. "Janice Forbes initiated the Leadership Institute. She was indispensable to creating SBC's range and scope. Forbes consistently led from the middle with great grace. Her desire to instill a method for schooling ongoing leaders exemplifies the depth of her understanding, core, not superficial, solutions."

Steve Frisch was a Truckee merchant involved in regional planning when he joined SBC as a business member. His bright mind found any number of projects in the wings at SBC, and within the first year of membership, he was serving on the Board and within 2 years, he became the Executive Director. He became President in 2007.

Building a Real Future

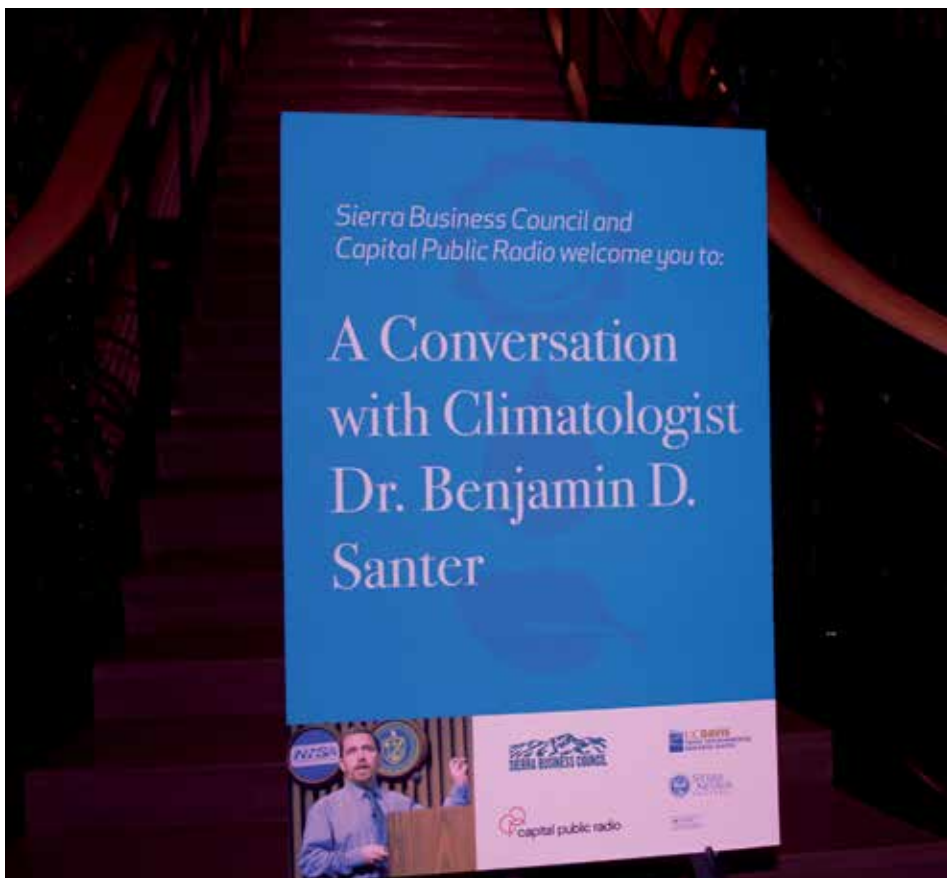
The Sierra has a storybook quality for both visitors and residents. We play out some of the most meaningful chapters of our lives here, memorable vacations, adventures and even marriages. The future that lies ahead encompasses serious issues that need adaptive, even imaginative, solutions. SBC with *Peak Innovation* is creating the atmosphere for great invention, broad, expansive solutions and the key links to bind urban and rural communities in the significant steps to sustain a vital future.

"The Sierra Nevada region is not only the origin of approximately two-thirds of the state's water, providing habitat for fish and wildlife, and serving cities, farms and industries throughout the state. It is the cultural, economic and social hub of rural California," said California Secretary for Natural Resources John Laird. "I applaud the Sierra Business Council on 20 years of hard work to sustainably develop the region's economic potential, while protecting the Sierra Nevada as one of California's most treasured natural resources. The Sierra is a better place to live, work and visit thanks to their dedication." *John Laird, California Secretary for Natural Resources*

SH



Joe Barron of Northstar Fire Department, Eric Taxer of Lahontan WQCD, and SBC Senior Program Director Nicole DeJonghe collaborate on a site visit, reviewing the forest management work under the Northstar Supplemental Environmental Project photo courtesy of SBC



SBC sponsors conversations with leaders like Lawrence Livermore Climatologist Ben Santer photo courtesy of SBC



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SBC board meeting 2009 photo courtesy of SBC

Rare Partnerships

The early exchange of ideas between Lucy Blake and Janice Forbes has been exceeded on every level. Sadly, Janice lost her battle to leukemia in 2013. Lucy Blake reflects, “Janice was an entrepreneur at heart, someone who was willing to take risks and attend to all of the details necessary for real success. She immediately recognized the role the Sierra Business Council could play in encouraging a new generation of community leaders around the Sierra. She knew it would be hard work, but notwithstanding everything else she had on her plate, she jumped in with both feet and helped make it happen. Over time, I discovered that Janice had an uncanny ability to figure out exactly the right thing to do in a challenging moment. Her intellectual and moral compass was so reliable you could use it to chart true north. She believed in the Sierra and genuinely wanted the best for all of our communities. We couldn’t have had a better leader.”

Steve Frisch recalls, “To SBC, Janice was our founding board chair; served on our board for almost all of our 20 years; was a leader in the Placer Legacy effort; was the person who came up with the idea of Investing for Prosperity; and provided some of the best advice and counsel we have ever received. She was always incredibly young at heart, embracing new ideas, technologies and media seamlessly. She once told me that the most fun she ever had in her life was sitting in a smoky subterranean bar in Oakland ‘with a beat crowd’ listening to Dave Brubeck play “Take Five.” She introduced me to Gary Snyder and asked me, “Where will you dig in, Mr. Frisch?”

Peak Innovation: Sierra Business Council 2014 Conference

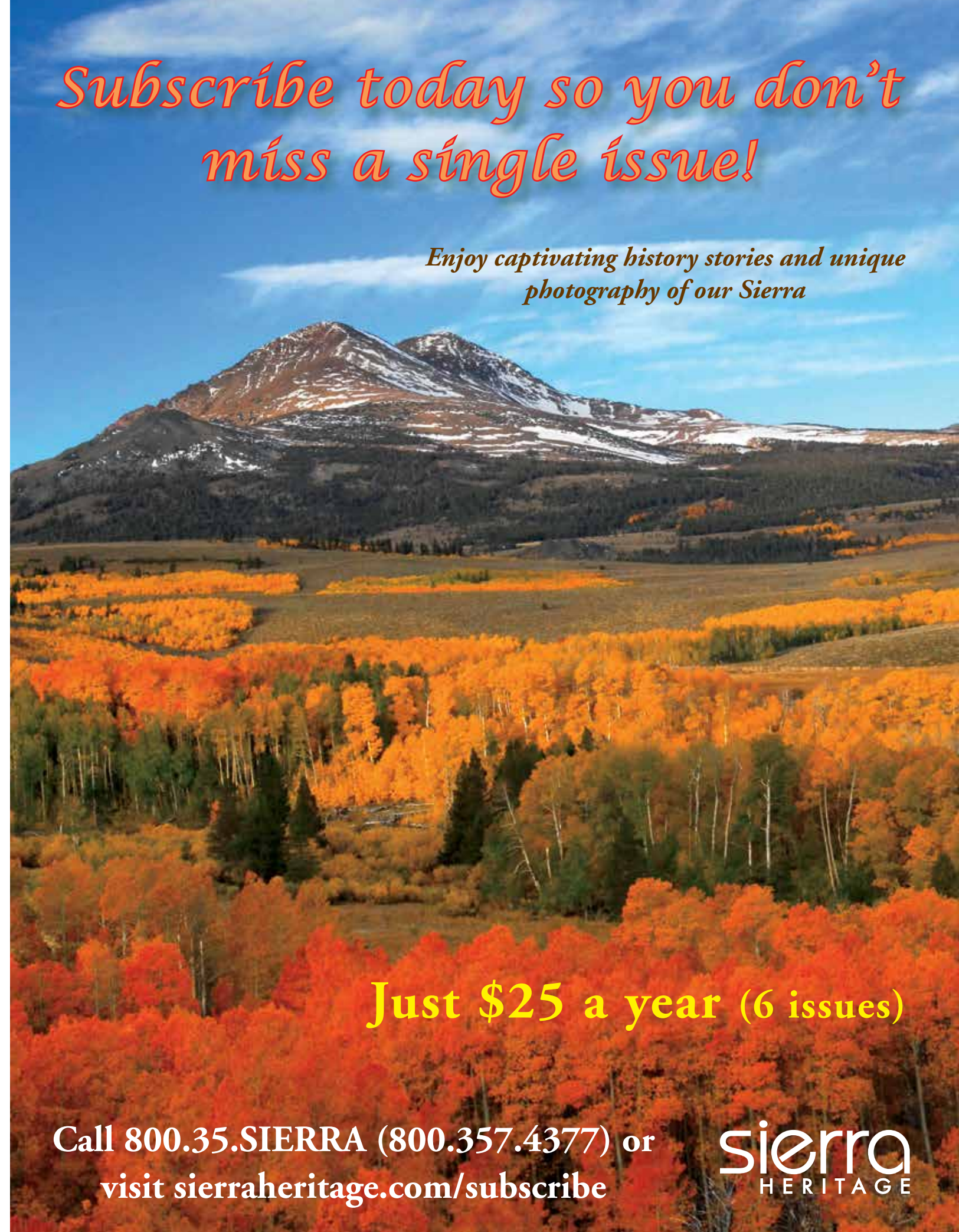
Wednesday, October 08, 2014 @ 4:00PM - Friday, October 10, 2014 @ 12:00PM

Hosted by Sierra Business Council @ Granlibakken Resort

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