

Meyers Landfill: contractor sought, toxic plume moving

By Kathryn Reed



A settlement has not been reached, but resolution to the debacle known at the Meyers Landfill is getting closer.

The El Dorado County Board of Supervisors will accept bids to cap the toxic site until Dec. 15, with the bid expected to be awarded Jan. 12.

The more than 20 acres of U.S. Forest Service land off Pioneer Trail on the outskirts of South Lake Tahoe has sat idle for years after the county stopped using the property as a dump. When the Forest Service figured out gunk from the trash site had decomposed into a toxic mess that was leaching contaminants into the soil, it sued the county and a plethora of other entities.

That lawsuit has for years been mired in a bureaucratic mess. Much of the problem is centered on who is going to pay the clean-up costs.

“The Forest Service engineers’ estimate for the project is \$5.5 million; however, given the current bidding climate, it is highly likely that the bids will come in below that amount,” Supervisor Norma Santiago said. “This does not include ongoing operations and maintenance (O&M) which has been estimated by the USFS as \$1.1 million over a 30-year period. Who will pay for the O&M is still under the ongoing negotiations through the mediation process.”

Meetings with both sides have been taking place on a regular basis lately. Resolution is expected to come before supervisors award the bid in January so it's known where the money is coming from to pay for construction of the cap, installing surface drainage controls, and putting in passive landfill gas extraction and parameter monitor systems.

Part of the funding will be a \$750,000 grant the county received from the California Integrated Waste Management Board for the project.

Additional funding will be coming from settlement agreements that have been finalized during the course of the mediation," Santiago said.

Forest Service officials found out in November that the plume is moving. A series of wells were drilled with the one on Hekpa Drive showing low levels of vinyl chloride and other volatile organic compounds.

"It was about 160 feet down. There is no reason anyone would come in contact with it. No drinking wells or private wells are in the area," Forest Service spokeswoman Cheva Heck said.

Neighbors have been advised of the situation and offered one-on-one meetings with the Forest Service if they have questions.

"Sampling results from Saxon Creek did not detect vinyl chloride or other VOCs, and there is no danger of exposure due to contact with the water in the creek," Heck said.

More drilling will be necessary, most likely this winter, to establish the outer limits of the plume.

Tri coach focuses on whole athlete

By Susan Wood

GARDNERVILLE – Work smarter, not harder may well be the mantra for triathlete coach Marc Evans.

The fitness pioneer who has trained two-time Ironman champion Scott Tinley, an early legend in the endurance sport's circle, has dedicated his life to teaching athletes how to live up to their physical and mental conditioning capacity without giving up other parts of their lives.



Marc Evans

He began doing triathlons at the advent of sport in the early 1980s. But it's through his coaching either in groups or one-on-one that he's found a belief in balance – the kind an athlete practices physically and the type that keeps one's life in order.

“You can do an Ironman training nine hours a week,” Evans said, as he gave a tour of his new 1,600-square-foot studio that is steps from his Carson Valley home that he shares with his chocolate Lab, Edge. Even the 14-year-old canine has the right name for his master's sport and livelihood.

Evans, 56, emphasizes being “a coach, not a trainer.” He focuses on the big picture, like other Ironman greats Tinley,

Dave Scott and Marc Allen. Allen won the event nine times before retiring.

“All these guys had a unique part of them that went beyond their physical talents. But some people become excessive. It becomes too much when it has impact on your life. I tell my people to ski or snowshoe in a prescriptive way,” he said. That’s defined as a workout mixed in with a flair for fun.

Evans has traveled the globe to share his theories and techniques with others who want to thrive in their sport. These include a 1991 excursion to the Himalayas as the fitness and conditioning director for an American Everest expedition. He recalled a heart-warming moment in Kathmandu, the launching pad for climbers in Nepal, in which he discovered a 50-meter pool adequate for Olympic training near the popular Monkey Temple. A line of Nepalese kids watched in awe at seeing a man swimming laps.

He also served a stint on an elite performance-testing program at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs. As a two-time head coach for the USA Triathlon Olympic team, his credentials read like a “Who’s Who” in the sport. Ironman involves swimming 2.4 miles, cycling 112 miles and running a marathon of 26.2 miles – always in that order.

Now, he’s hunkering down in an attempt to bring more athletes to him. One client hails from London.

Evans built the studio, about a \$200,000 investment, on his 2.5 acres. Weight machines are in the loft, on the first floor is a treadmill, a running training platform on rollers, and a swimming flume. The 8-foot-by-14-foot pool allows the swimmer to be in movement without swimming an actual lap.

“The value of these versus a swimming pool is the instant feedback,” Evans said. “Most triathletes are not particularly skilled in swimming. Swimming is kind of a nemesis.”

He installed a mirror on the bottom of the pool so swimmers can see their movements. There's also a video camera so evaluations can be conducted later. Videotaping is an essential component of Evans' training regimen. The training centers around assessment.

"I don't think people spend enough time on technique," he said.

Evans set up a dorm with a number of bunk beds behind the studio and recently established one-day to one-week training camps. He feeds the athletes what he makes for himself. The menu is organic, leaning toward vegetarian. The cost starts at \$500 for the day.

The participant signs up for a screening under an extensive matrix to evaluate the athlete's status.

"The big reward is having (clients) discover who they are and trust in our relationship," he said.

More than two-thirds of Evans' client base is women.

"I tend to attract busy people who have time limits because of family and work," he said.

Full-time client Kris Kruse-Elliot, 51, fits the bill. The veterinarian, who works with Evans a few times a year, has been doing triathlons as long as Evans has coached – 25 years. The San Francisco Bay Area resident turned to Evans for Ironman training five years ago when her work schedule often topped 60 hours a week.

She admitted to overtraining and found herself prone to injuries from her heel to her shoulder. As a competitive swimmer in high school, none of her coaches worked on technique.

"I was just killing myself," she said.

But being under Evans' wing, even her husband has noticed the difference.

"He's brilliant with his training. My husband said I'm not so tired," she said.

She's healthier and finds her running shoes last longer than four months.

"I used to land on my heel hard," she said. The duo worked on her foot placement and posture in running drills on a track.

As for results, Kruse-Elliott points to Evans' training as the reason for her Ironman personal best of 13 hours, 28 minutes – one hour less than her previous results.

"And I have fun doing it now," she said.

Evans' training facility can be reached via phone at (775) 783.9294 or (775) 200.3076. The website, www.evanscoaching.com, spells out the details of his business.

Casting a light on the world of trafficking girls, women

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Sending a nude picture of anyone, including yourself, electronically is a sexual offense.

It's a form of pornography – even if you are sending it to your significant other. If caught and you're over 18, you will have to register as a sex offender for the rest of your life.



Alice Wells

Think your boyfriend or girlfriend won't share it? What happens if you break up?

It's called sexting and it's happening in Lake Tahoe.

Alice Wells, immediate past president of Soroptimist of the Americas, gave a presentation to the two South Lake Tahoe chapters on Dec. 9 titled "Tackling Trafficking Today." Also in attendance were young women from South Tahoe High School who are in the S Club.

They admitted to knowing about sexting, but not the consequences.

Those at the lunch at Harrah's seemed taken aback by the statistics that filled slide after slide of Wells' presentation.

• 100 million children are sexually exploited each year, mostly girls

• 100,000 children and young teens are trafficked in the United States each year

• 1 in 3 teens on the streets is lured into prostitution within 48 hours of leaving home

• 1 in 5 pornographic images is of a child

• pornography is a \$3 billion a year industry

• human trafficking is the third largest organized crime in

the world

• most johns are middle class men

• sex tourism is growing • where primarily men travel to other countries to purchase a young boy or girl; with U.S. residents accounting for 25 percent of these tourists

Wells spoke with South Lake Tahoe police Officer Rebecca Inman before giving her talk. Inman relayed that girls being lured into prostitution is not an issue here, now, but that some know they can make quick cash by putting out for some guy.

Sexting is not addressed in the schools.

A fellow Soroptimist put Lake Tahoe Unified School District board President Wendy David on the spot that afternoon.

David said she would discuss the issue with staff and her fellow board members. As the former director of the local Court Appointed Special Advocates office, she also knows when young people leave a foster home at 18 they do not have a support network and that prostitution can be the route they choose.

Anna Richter with the South Lake Tahoe Women's Center said she would look into the curriculum her organization takes into the local schools.

It was two years ago that Wells' club in Phoenix undertook the project to bring awareness about the trafficking of girls and women to the forefront. They have launched an education campaign in Arizona and are spreading the word to other Soroptimist groups.

The other goal, she said, is to provide people with facts and information to enhance personal safety.

Wells said pop culture and movies like "Pretty Woman" glorify prostitution.

She said the men luring girls and women into prostitution are not looking for the prettiest one. They want someone who is vulnerable, who will fall for the attention he offers and the things he can buy her.

Then he turns the tables on her and before she knows it she is turning tricks for \$40 or \$100 an act every 10 to 15 minutes so she can make her quota of a \$1,000 night.

Wells said the three things that are constant in this way of life for women who are trapped in it are rape, beatings and drugs.

“There are no “pretty women” “ this is the message we need to get to young women,” Wells said.

South Tahoe PUD board member faces felony charge

By Kathryn Reed

South Tahoe Public Utility District board member Dale Rise faces up to three years in state prison if he is found guilty of resisting an officer.

The El Dorado County District Attorney’s Office has filed the felony charge against the elected official. Rise was arrested at his home in late September. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Jan. 22 in El Dorado County Superior Court.



Dale Rise

“It’s a felony because of the extent of the resistance to the officer,” said Hans Uthe, assistant district attorney. “He tried to use the Taser on one of the officers.”

Rise, on Thursday, said, “I am not going to make a statement.” He deferred comment to his attorney, Lori London. London did not return a phone call.

Officers were called to Rise’s home the morning of Sept. 28 on a domestic call. Rise was allegedly arguing with his adult daughter.

“He wasn’t very cooperative,” South Lake Tahoe police Lt. Marty Hale said just after the arrest. “He tried to shut the door in the officers’ face. He was pretty belligerent and uncooperative.”

Officers said they tried to use the Taser on Rise, but it wasn’t working correctly. Rise then allegedly grabbed the Taser and tried to use it on officers.

According to Uthe, Rise does not have any priors.

South Tahoe PUD spokesman Dennis Cocking said district policy is if Rise is convicted, he would have to resign from the board. For now, he continues to carry out his duties as a board member.

Rise is not the first STPUD board member to have a run-in with the law. One-time board Chairman Pembroke Gochner was part of the 2001 FBI sting dubbed Operation Clean Sheets. He

resigned shortly after his arrest.

Stateline casino turmoil: Bill's closing, MontBleu staff cuts

Publisher's note: *Updated as of 8:19pm Dec. 14.*

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Bill's Casino in Stateline will cease to exist as of Jan. 4 when the world's largest casino company closes one of its smallest gaming venues.

Letty Garay, who has been a slot host for 19 years at the casino, said the nine employees were told about the closing on Monday. Seven work part time and two are supervisors.

The casino, which opened in 1987, once employed about 200 people. Before it was Bill's, it was Barneys Casino.



Bill's Casino
in Stateline
is empty Dec.
9. It will
close Jan. 4.

Photo/Kathryn

Reed

On Wednesday, it was hard to find an employee or patron to speak with.

Walking the casino floor, Garay appeared to be the only employee on duty. The bar was closed. A sign said go next door to Harrah's if you need change or to cash a check.

Garay, who lives in South Lake Tahoe, doesn't know what she will do next. She plans to take the severance pay.

Bill's officials said employees have the choice to be relocated or take the money.

Garay wasn't surprised about the closing. "I understand with the economy," she said.

It has been the Y in South Lake Tahoe with its boarded up buildings that was the eyesore of the South Shore. Now the east end of the South Shore may look no better with a vacant casino joining the bankrupt concrete-rebar site known locally as the "hole in the ground" (one day it might be a convention center-hotel-retail complex).

Tourism officials don't believe plywood will be used to shutter Bill's – realizing the image it provokes and how nasty it looks in South Lake Tahoe.

The one good thing about the would-be convention center is it looks like a construction site and doesn't scream economic strife like empty buildings do.

Casino officials are optimistic the closure will be good in the long run.

"One of the key things I think is between Harrah's and Harveys we can work more on positioning to make them stronger as we move through and get through the current recessionary

problems," casino spokesman John Packer told *Lake Tahoe News*. "When we get out of the recession, it will be key to be in the right position."

Only three people were playing slots Wednesday afternoon at Bill's. TVs and the one-armed bandits made noise, but it still had the feel of a ghost town. It was almost sad. This casino that has operated for than 20 years has been slowly dying, much like all of Nevada gaming.

Harrah's Entertainment owns Bill's, Harrah's and Harveys at Stateline. Harveys was acquired in 2001.

Bill Harrah started the company in Reno 70 years ago. On Jan. 28, 2008, Harrah's Entertainment was acquired by affiliates of private-equity firms TPG Capital and Apollo Global Management.

Bill's Casino had been completely remodeled in 2006 and went smokeless in December of that year.

In July 2008, the casino eliminated all of its table games and with it, 28 employees.

The corporate website says, "Harrah's Entertainment is focused on building loyalty and value with its customers through a unique combination of great service, excellent products, unsurpassed distribution, operational excellence and technology leadership. We concentrate on building loyalty and value for our customers, employees, business partners, and communities by being the most service-oriented, technology-driven, geographically-diversified company in gaming."

It might need to rewrite that statement.

Lake Monster Tattoo has one of its shops inside Bill's. Owners Reed and Nerissa Murin had planned to consolidate into their store at the Y in South Lake Tahoe before getting the official word from management at Bill's about the closure.

They have had the casino shop for four years.

“We’ve seen it coming for a long time,” Reed Murin said.

The couple said that while the casino floor has lacked patrons, their shop and Bar 24 have stayed busy in these lean times.

The phone at Bar 24 has been ringing off the hook for more than a week. It is not known how many employees lost their job there.

Bill’s used to be the spot where locals would hang out. It had a more laid back feel than the big four.

Like all the casinos at Stateline, Bill’s used to be packed. It would be wall-to-wall people on weekend nights. When other casinos had \$5 blackjack tables, people were hovering at Bill’s \$2 tables waiting for a seat.

There was a time when Bill’s didn’t have doors. The entrance – on both ends of the casino corridor were open 24 hours day. It wasn’t quite gaming al fresco, but it had that funky, Tahoe feel.

Packer remembers in the early days of the casino when people filled the sidewalks outside of Bill’s and the other casinos. He also acknowledges in recent times it has seemed like employees have outnumbered customers at the small facility.

Bill’s clients are considered “retail customers” – ones who just show up. No player cards were issued, which in turn meant not knowing the players by name or address. This meant they could not be marketed to to lure them to Lake Tahoe with specials.

In the late 1980s the upstairs McDonald’s was popular with locals and tourists craving junk food. Various restaurants have come and gone from what was Bar 24.

What will happen to the property is not known. Harrah’s Entertainment owns the building and land.

“Once it is closed, we will look at our options,” Packer said. “We will button it down. The parking lot will be used as overflow for Harrah’s. The building itself will be closed.”

MontBleu layoffs

The Tuesday before Thanksgiving 27 people were laid off from MontBleu casino in Stateline. The casino still has more than 600 employees.

The pit is closed during the graveyard shift because the casino floor looks like a cemetery at that time of night “no one walking around.

The reservations desk is open only from 11am-7pm

Many of the lost jobs are people who earned \$7 or \$8 an hour. But also out of work is the director of casino operations. The director of food and beverage has been replaced.

Tropicana Entertainment out of Las Vegas owns MontBleu. It renegotiated its lease with Edgewood Companies (formerly Park Cattle) earlier this year. It now expires in 2028.

Indian gaming’s role

Indian casinos have increasingly been the nemesis of Stateline and Reno gaming halls. But even they are having to layoff workers. Red Hawk in Shingle Springs just laid off more people.

Tom Davis, who last month was laid off from MontBleu and is a former mayor of South Lake Tahoe, said at the Dec. 8 City Council meeting, “It’s the Indian wars now.”

Billboards throughout the Central Valley are for the Indian casinos in Jackson, Shingle Springs and Roseville. On Highway 99 between Sacramento and Turlock not a single Tahoe or Reno casino is advertised. Interstate 80 and Highway 50 west of Sacramento have limited advertising for Nevada casinos.

Workers at Thunder Valley in Roseville agreed this week to join the Teamsters union. But unions are no guarantee of a job.

Mandatory commercial garbage service for South Tahoe



By Kathryn Reed

Mandatory commercial trash pick up in South Lake Tahoe is closer to becoming a reality.

The City Council on Dec. 8 voted 5-0 to direct staff to come up with an ordinance that would require every business in town pay for garbage service. Right now it is voluntary.

South Tahoe Refuse has 610 collection accounts and more than 400 customers who haul the trash themselves to the transfer station.

Residences already have mandatory garbage pick up in the city limits. That bill includes being able to put out an unlimited number of cans or bags on a weekly basis.

Commercial customers are not expected to be offered the same deal.

As it is now, commercial businesses pay based on the size of the dumpster and how many times STR empties it, or by how much

is dumped at the station.

Some businesses are notorious for having overflowing trash containers. The ones behind Ross are often full, with debris flowing into open space.

Bad business operators are the impetus for the change.

Enforcement is an issue Assistant City Manager Rick Angelocci said would need to be worked out as the ordinance is written.

With mandatory garbage service, Angelocci said the city would then have the power to tell businesses that let garbage spill out that they must use the next size container to hold everything.

The nuisance abatement program South Tahoe has now is a bit cumbersome and with the city losing a community service officer, enforcement is a huge issue.

With residential customers who don't pay their bill, a lien can be put on the property. If commercial service becomes mandatory, liens often are not an option because so many business owners are leasing the space and there is nothing to put a lien on.

One reason South Tahoe Refuse likes the idea is being able to recycle more waste from commercial businesses.

Without knowing the fee structure, it's hard to know how this is going to affect STR's bottom line.

City staff will also have to work out how this will be equitable for businesses. A small massage business does not produce much waste, while a restaurant is one of the biggest producers of garbage.

Another issue is that many landlords combine garbage " and water " into the rent. Whether mandatory commercial service will increase what a landlord pays is not known. Therefore it

is not known if this will be another financial burden on small business owners or just a means to keep the town clean, with more waste being recycled.

How the fee structure will work for a standalone entity vs. a strip mall that may have one dumpster for multiple businesses is not known.

The ordinance will be brought to the council in early 2010.

Lake Tahoe = white and cold

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County workers can sleep in – start time is 10am today. Backcountry skiers better think twice about strapping on skis or a board. All resorts are giddy about the snow accumulations. And the storms have only just begun.

County Supervisor Norma Santiago told *Lake Tahoe News* on Monday night that staff will meet to “assess how we are with power and computers. If it doesn’t look good, we may close the offices again.”



Highway 50 in
South Lake
Tahoe about
3:30pm Dec. 7.

Photo/Kathryn

Reed

County offices were closed all day Monday.

Not much was going on in Placerville Monday afternoon when a *Lake Tahoe News* reporter drove through. Power was out – meaning no gas was available, no coffee, nothing.

The Board of Supervisors has moved today's regular meeting to Thursday. Closed session will still begin at 8am, with open session at 9am in Placerville.

Santiago said parts of rural El Dorado County on the West Slope received 1.5 feet of snow. This brought everything to a halt.

Trees along Highway 50 west of the county seat were bent in ways that would make a contortionist proud.

But the reality is the winds with the storm, and the snowload on trees and power lines meant the town was dark. Pacific Gas & Electric officials expected electricity to be restored Monday night.

"It's really hard on the rural roads. Some parts of (Highway) 49 have only one lane plowed. It's hard to get into the deeper county roads," Santiago said.

A Red Cross trailer was being hauled into Placerville about 1pm Monday. The county set up a shelter Monday at the town hall so people would have a warm place to spend the night. It's at 549 Main St. in Placerville.

For more information about what's going on in El Dorado County, go to www.edcgov.us (though the website has been down) or call 866.934.8771.

Other storm issues

In Nevada, Gov. Jim Gibbons shut down all non-essential government offices in Northern Nevada on Monday. Carson City, the state capital, received more than 18 inches of snow. That amount essentially cripples this part of the Sierra.

Slick roads are being blamed for Sunday's accident on Interstate 80 near Donner Summit that claimed the life of a 14-year-old boy from Orangevale.

All regional offices of AAA were closed Monday, though they are expected to be open today.

Schools are also set to open their doors after most called it a snow day Monday.

The Sierra Avalanche Center reports the danger is high above the treeline and moderate below it. It's always risky when light fluffy snow like what dumped in the last couple of days sits on top of a hard, deep slab. This is often prime condition for an avalanche.

"This one wasn't so much the water content. It was so dry to start with we piled up the snow efficiently," Mark Faucette, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Reno, said late Monday night. "It maybe was a little underforecast. We got a couple feet of snow at lake level."

Less water content makes for better skiing; more water content eventually fills parched reservoirs.

It's too soon to tell how freezing temperatures will affect crops. Citrus is the big concern this time of year. It can handle temps just below freezing.

What's next?

Some forecasts show snow for six of the next nine days for the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Even though the winter storm warning was canceled by the

National Weather Service on Monday at 6:14pm, the snow was still falling for several hours afterward, especially in the South Lake area.

The overnight low for the basin was expected to be in negatives digits. This means roads this morning are likely to like an ice rink.

Several residential streets throughout the region never saw a plow on Monday

Highways in the area were closed at various times because of periods of heavy snowfall and spinouts.

Remember, four-wheel drive does not mean drive the speed limit or faster in winter conditions, nor does four-wheel drive allow you to brake faster.

“(Tuesday) won’t warm up much at all. We are still mainly going to be below freezing as a high for a big chunk of the week,” Faucette said.

He said the storm moving in Thursday night into Friday will bring snow, but not the accumulations originally forecast.

It’s more likely a foot or two will arrive at lake level Saturday night into Sunday. More moisture will come with this storm – which means temperatures will be rising. Snow levels are expected to be below 6,000 feet.

An even warmer storm is farther out. Mid-next week snow levels may not drop below 8,000 feet.

Ski resort update

Resorts in and around the Lake Tahoe Basin received more than 2 feet of snow in 24 hours.

Kirkwood Mountain Resort, which is notorious for recording more snow than anyone else, boasted of 3 feet of fresh powder

by noon Dec. 7. This means more terrain will open today.

With the storms rolling in all week, the resort that is about 45 minutes south of South Lake Tahoe, expects to have eight chairs operating this weekend, including the Timber Creek area, several other resort restaurants and amenities.

Prices today will be \$48 for adults.

Most all of the resorts will be open within 10 days. Opening dates: Dec. 12, Donner Ski Ranch; Dec. 17, Diamond Peak; Dec. 18, Granlibakken Resort, Homewood Mountain Resort and Tahoe Donner.

“This is the type of storm that sets us up for the winter season,” Andy Chapman, tourism director for North Lake Tahoe Resort Association, said in a press release. “Resorts are open and the lifts are cranking, and with an abundance of deals and packages, there has never been a better time to ski and board North Lake Tahoe.”

The same can easily be said for all the shores of Lake Tahoe.



Placerville is full of snow on Monday. Photos/Kathryn Reed



Red Cross
helps out in
Placerville.



No last name
Mike checks
for 4-wheel
drive/chains
just outside
of Placerville
on Highway 50.

Ritz-Carlton – the first 5 star resort in Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed, San Francisco Chronicle

Recession was not a household word when the Ritz-Carlton Highlands, Lake Tahoe broke ground in July 2006. But the \$300 million resort opens this week in an economic climate that is

less than ideal – especially in the greater Lake Tahoe area.



The Ritz-Carlton at Northstar opens Dec. 9.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

The past couple of winters have not been great snow years. In fact, 2009 is the third drought year. Skier visits were down 10 percent in the 2008-09 season compared with the prior season, according to the National Ski Area Association.

Still, Ritz-Carlton officials are optimistic that their arrival on the scene is just what's needed to stimulate the local economy. This is the first five-star resort in the area. It's also the first resort to be built in decades.

Read the whole story

Festival shines light on holiday merriment

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Barton employees are best known for not spreading

things that are contagious, but today will be their fourth day of making sure everyone catches the holiday spirit.

Laughter filled the air and smiles seemed to be everywhere on Saturday during the Teddy Bear Breakfast.



Plenty of room
in this
mailbox for
letters to
Santa.

Photo/Kathryn
Reed

For those who brought their stuffed animals, the Barton elves took them to the workshop to have them decorated. One monkey dressed in Harley-Davidson gear game back with pink earrings to go with the pink skirt and black leather jacket.

This is the first year of the Festival of Trees and Lights at MontBleu. The money raised will go to the community clinic that Barton Healthcare runs.

“It benefits the community clinic because we’ve had an overrun of patients without insurance,” Barton spokeswoman Denise Sloan said in her best elf accent. “The clinic has had to increase its hours to include Saturdays.”

The showroom has been transformed into a winter wonderland with trees decorated in more ways than one can imagine. One section it devoted to what kids at the schools on the South Shore came up with. Others are the work of several Barton

employee groups. Still more are the work of professional designers in the area.

All the trees can be bid on – with the winner taking possession of the tree and everything beneath it.

Santa is perched on a throne of sorts, eager for kids to have their picture taken with him and to hear what they want for Christmas.

A station is set up to write letters to Santa – which Rebekah Miller, 10, and Dayna Genna, 8, were eager to do. But they wouldn't reveal what was in those letters that were eventually stuffed into a huge mailbox.

A stage is set up with rotating acts.

Today's fun begins at 9:30am with Colleen Klym leading Christmas carols; 10am is the music duo of Skiff's Project; 11:30am is Raina Silva's Hula Kids; noon Forever Dance takes to the floor; 1pm is the Fratella Marionettes' North Pole Review; 2pm the Sierra Ballet Theater Company performs; 3pm is a demonstration by Halau Hula – O Leilani.

In Gingerbread Junction in the showroom at 10am Kerri Russell will read and sing from "In the Meadow Don't feed our Bears."

From 2-4pm everyone can make holiday crafts

To get into the Festival of Trees and Lights it costs \$5 for adults, \$3 for ages 2-12 and those older than 55.

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South Tahoe kicks off holiday season

By Kathryn Reed

Even the body heat of hundreds of holiday revelers could not keep teeth from chattering. The cold night air didn't seem to matter to the children who awaited Santa's arrival and the lighting of South Lake Tahoe's Christmas tree.

For more than 20 years, Santa arriving via a Borges horse-drawn sleigh has been a tradition in this ski town.



Jenny Arias, 4, tells Santa what she wants for Christmas. Photos/Kathryn Reed

The Tahoe Schools Choirs sang famous carols that the audience joined in on. This started Friday evening's festivities outside the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority center in the heart of South Lake Tahoe.

Mayor Jerry Birdwell was on hand to say a few words. One little kid thought he was Santa.

Once the real Santa arrived, sleigh rides were provided for free, Santa's lap was available to all the good boys and

girls, Dianna Maria De Borges was signing copies of "Sleigh Rides in Lake Tahoe: Memoirs of Sam Borges," and hot cocoa and cookies warmed people up.

The tree, with its big balls, bows and candy canes, magically became aglow at the hands of Santa. A menorah was also lighted in honor of Hanukkah, which begins the night of Dec. 12.



Tahoe Schools
Choir sings
carols.



People stood
in line for a
sleigh ride.



South Lake

Tahoe Mayor
Jerry Birdwell