

Elks back out of American Legion deal



By Kathryn Reed

Because the top brass of Elks nixed the local branch's desire to be housed in the same location of the American Legion, it's back to square one.

The American Legion building across from Meek's Lumber in South Tahoe is more than 60 years old. The Elks' building was razed a year ago after the California Tahoe Conservancy bought the land.

American Legion Post 795 was given the land by Stella Van Dyke Johnson, one of the early settlers of Tahoe and whose descendants are still in the area.

Both nonprofits wanted to erect a building that could seat 200 people to be used for community events, wedding receptions and other activities.

Now the American Legion hopes to build a hall behind the current structure. Architects are working on the plans. It's likely to cost about \$120,000 and the Legion has \$40,000 in the building fund.

Once the hall is erected, renovating the current structure will be next on the to-do list.

Currently, the American Legion hosts an open mic night on Mondays. Bands play periodically. The parking lot is used June-October each Tuesday for the farmers market. Crafts fairs are a regular in the lot, too.

The Legion hopes the current recruiting drive will keep the local chapter viable for years to come. It has 120 members. The veterans group does not want the local chapter to be disbanded like the Veterans of Foreign Wars was. That occurred earlier this year because membership had dwindled so significantly.

Legion Cmdr. Blair Clark said one issue with his group is the aging membership. Many are from the World War II generation, some from Korea, a few Vietnam and a recent vet from the Iraq conflict.

Not all veterans qualify for American Legion membership. A service member "current or honorably discharged" needs to have served during a time of conflict.

The American Legion was formed by Congress in 1919, a year after World War I ended. Worldwide there are 3 million men and women in the Legion.

The Legion also has the Auxiliary, which is mostly female spouses of members, and the Sons of the American Legion.

Someone is onsite at the Highway 50 facility starting at 4pm Thursday-Sunday to answer questions about joining the Legion or using the facility. For more information, call (530) 541.8788.

Record highs 2 days ago, record lows coming



Richard Durr of Alpine Chimney Sweep gets a fireplace ready to go in anticipation of winter temps arriving this week.

By Kathryn Reed

Bundle up because Mother Nature is turning the sweat beads of last weekend into icicles.

Record highs dropped throughout the region on Saturday and Sunday. Record lows could be broken later this week.

A cold front is moving into the Lake Tahoe region today. A wind advisory is in effect on the lake until 8 tonight.

“It could be hazardous driving in the higher elevations,” meteorologist Brian O’Hara with the National Weather Service in Reno said of the north, northwest winds.

A dusting of snow is expected in the 8,000 to 9,000 foot

levels.

“We may see some flurries at lake level, but nothing sticking because the ground is pretty warm,” Hara said.

Warm is an understatement after a weekend of hot.

South Lake Tahoe broke records on Saturday and Sunday that had been set in 2003. Saturday’s high of 85 was 3 degrees above the old record, while Sunday’s high of 85 was 4 degrees above the previous record.

Other record highs from Saturday:

Markleeville “ high 90, had been 89 set in 2003;

Truckee “ high 86, tied with 1999;

Reno “ high 93, had been 91 set in 1963;

Virginia City “ high 85, had been 83 set in 1999.

Record highs from Sunday:

Markleeville “ high of 91, had been 87 set in 1933;

Reno “ high of 93, had been 92 set in 2003;

Virginia City “ 83, had been 82 set in 2003.

Record low temps could be broken in Truckee and South Lake Tahoe this week. Hara says Friday morning is the best bet to do so. On Oct. 2, 1950, Truckee hit a low of 20 degrees. On that same day in 1977, South Lake Tahoe recorded a low of 24 degrees.

The forecast is for the mercury to be darn close to those below freezing temps for the next few mornings.

Hara said by the weekend the weather should be close to normal “ highs in the 60s around the lake.

The weather guy said this hot to frigid weather is all because a strong high pressure system had been sitting over the area for a while and now the cold front is blowing in.

\$35,000 grant to study parking in SLT

South Lake Tahoe received word late Friday that the California Department of Housing and Community Development has awarded the city a \$35,000 grant to conduct a comprehensive parking study in the city limits to evaluate needs and solutions. The City Council authorized city staff to submit an application for this competitive grant opportunity on June 2.

This idea to submit this grant application to HCD for an economic development study arose following discussion and input from City Council members when issues of adequate parking in the city limits came up at a City Council meeting.

“The City Council is working to see the development of alternate forms of transportation to the motor vehicle, but we must also be certain that adequate parking is provided to accommodate the needs of locals and visitors who will continue to use their autos,” City Manager Dave Jinkens said in a press release. “City government officials will continue to work to enhance opportunities for public transit, walking and biking trails, needed pedestrian facilities, and air service. We must not forget that many people still use and will continue to use their vehicle to travel, and we must be certain that we have intelligently planned for this use in our community whether in and around the proposed convention center/hotel, in the vicinity of the Ski Run Marina, or in the

emerging Tahoe Valley Community Plan.â€

Proposals for conducting the work will be sought by city staff and brought back to the City Council for approval.

El Dorado County woman stricken with West Nile Virus

A 51-year-old El Dorado County woman has tested positive for West Nile virus. According to health officials, she is the first human case of West Nile Virus in El Dorado County this year.

Health officials have conducted a case investigation and it appears the woman may have acquired the virus outside of the state. As of Sept. 24, West Nile virus activity in El Dorado County includes one human case and eight West Nile virus positive birds. No West Nile virus positive horses or mosquito pools have been reported in El Dorado County so far this year.

Statewide, there have been 52 confirmed human cases of West Nile virus and 41 counties have reported West Nile virus activity in 2009.

Effective strategies for preventing mosquito bites include taking extra precautions during dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active, wearing long sleeved pants and shirts, and using mosquito repellent containing DEET or picardin. It is also important to remove standing water sources around homes to discourage mosquito breeding.

People with symptoms such as high fever, confusion, a stiff neck or muscle weakness should seek immediate medical

attention.

Local information about West Nile virus activity can be found at the El Dorado County West Nile virus hotlines – (530) 573.3405 and (530) 642.4968. Additional information about West Nile virus is available at www.westnile.ca.gov and www.edcgov.us/emd.

Super Walmart in Gardnerville?

The design review of a 151,495-square-foot Super Walmart will be before Gardnerville's Town Board Oct. 6 at 4:30pm.

Dozen of people protested the plans at the board's Sept. 1 meeting.

The store would occupy about 20 acres on Highway 395 in the Carson Valley of Nevada.

After the Gardnerville board takes up the matter, the Douglas County Community Development board is expected to make a decision by makes a decision Oct. 21.

Building parks in South Tahoe

gaining traction



By Kathryn Reed

Neighborhood parks. They are a priority of South Lake Tahoe's Parks Department.

Called pocket parks " they are usually between two-thirds and 2 acres in size. The amenities ideally cater to the people living in the area who would use it. A half-court basketball facility, dog park, picnic tables, grass, pad for skateboarding, bicycle racks or a combination of those and other things could be included.

Talk of developing these facilities was an agenda item at a parks commission meeting this summer.

Gary Moore, parks director, said his department has been discussing with Safeway Corp. about the L shape piece of property it owns on Ski Run Boulevard as a possible park.

"I said we want you to give it to us. We'll call it Safeway Park," Moore said at the meeting.

His department calls the Y area of South Lake Tahoe "park deprived" except for Tahoe Valley Elementary School. Part of the Tahoe Valley Community Plan could include a park. Another possibility is using the parcel owned by the California Tahoe Conservancy near the overflow parking lot for the old City Council chambers as a park.

Sierra Tract is another area being talked about to have a pocket park. Commissioners talked about acquiring some of houses that have been foreclosed and turning the property into a park.

Another consideration is to have a park tie into the stalled

Meyers to Stateline bike path. This would have the South Shore resemble the American River Bike Trail that has one park after another along it.

Other areas of town have also been identified as needing a pocket park.

Parks and rec realizes the way to make the pocket parks come to fruition is public-private partnerships â€” something it is working on.

Residents likely to feel financial burden of water meters



Sprinklers may be a thing of the past if water bills go up with meters.

By Kathryn Reed

The 163 water meters to be installed this year is a drop in

the bucket considering South Tahoe Public Utility District needs to put in 10,000 in the next 16 years.

Federal stimulus money (\$4.5 million) is paying for 1,500 meters. Based on the strings attached to the cash, the district had to show progress on the project by this fall. That is why STPUD is seeking bids until 2pm Sept. 29.

Another component of the grant is that it's for low income segments of the community – all but the Tahoe Keys qualifies. The district is going to put in meters where it is doing water line work – Ski Run, Al Tahoe and parts of Gardner Mountain are targeted in the first round.

Metered water systems are in the future for all Californians because of legislation passed in 2004. By 2025 every urban water supplier, which is defined as a district with more than 3,000 connections, must have meters installed.

“We are still seeking through the state Legislature a little bit of flexibility with the 2025 deadline because there is only X number of dollars we can raise from 14,000 customers,” said Dennis Cocking, STPUD spokesman. “Our challenge is we don't disagree meters are important. We said the primary threat in the basin is fire and we are not going to take money away from replacing water lines to put in meters. That is not responsible to our community.”

The board formed an ad hoc committee at its Aug. 20 meeting. Their job is to figure out how to pay for the meters. Grants are being sought, but ratepayers are likely to foot part of the bill.

South Tahoe PUD tried to get out of the regulations altogether by explaining to Sacramento that the district is not part of the California watershed – it is part of Nevada's. This is because Lake Tahoe flows into the Truckee River toward Nevada, which flows into Pyramid Lake in the Silver State.

California denied STPUD that exemption. The district is still waiting to see if the 2025 deadline can be extended.

“What is driving this is water is becoming a more and more contentious issue in this state,” Cocking said.

That’s why desalinization projects are being talked about again, as well as conservation and recycled water.

Recycled water is not allowed in the Lake Tahoe Basin because of the Porter Cologne Water Quality Control Act. It wasn’t until this year that California had a formal recycled water policy.

“I think the fact of the matter is at some point in time recycled water within certain parameters might be acceptable in the Tahoe basin. It might be a decade or more. It will have to be tightly monitored,” Cocking said.

Of the nearly 650 commercial connections STPUD has, all have been metered for a couple decades. About 3,000 of the 14,000 residential customers are metered. However, the residential ones have not been read – instead customers are charged a flat rate like everyone else.

Starting in 2011 those metered customers along with the ones being put in via the federal stimulus money, will be billed based on the meter reading.

“The trick is to try to develop a rate so the average customer on metered rate or flat is very similar. That will be the real challenge,” Cocking said.

The district is using 2010 to gather information from the meters to gauge water use; and to educate those with meters.

The cost of water is in the infrastructure – extracting water, purifying it, delivering it. That accounts for about 85 percent of a bill, while the other 15 percent is consumption, according to Cocking.

The impetus behind meters is when people have control over how much they spend on a commodity; they'll do what they can to reduce the cost – in this case, using less water.

With second homeowners currently paying what full-time residents pay, they are in affect subsidizing those who live here. It would seem inevitable that water bills will spike dramatically when the metered system is in place.

The district hopes to install 600-800 meters a year. The total cost is estimated at \$20 million.

Meters are read by driving down a street using a radio signal that emits information. This beats the old days of having to locate the meter through mounds of snow or overgrown brush. Technology is being developed where in the future water use might be transmitted electronically to a computer without anyone driving by a house.

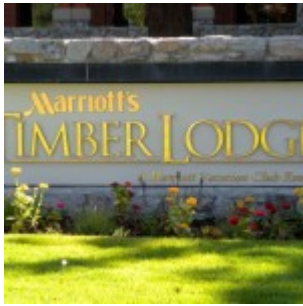
Most likely residents in the city limits of South Lake Tahoe will have meters first. This is because that is where the oldest water lines are – some as small as 2 inches. Much of El Dorado County has 6-inch lines or larger.

This is the third construction season that STPUD has put in meter vaults as it replaces water lines.

Many of the water line projects have been funded through the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, which is expected to be introduced this session for re-authorization by Congress.

Marriott cuts Tahoe sales

staff



Marriott, which has two properties in the Heavenly Village, laid off most of its sales staff and terminated an agreement with the city that will put a \$55,000 red line in South Lake Tahoe's next budget.

Jan Vandermade, the local Marriott general manager, deferred comment to corporate offices in Florida. Those folks didn't return phone calls.

An employee of the Marriott Grand Residence Club confirmed the sales department has been closed, but added that a couple sales associates are still on-site.

The Grand Residence and Timber Lodge are both time-share operations with ownership available in different increments.

About four years ago Marriott and South Lake Tahoe signed a deal where the lodging facility could operate an informational cart near the fountain in the village. The city owns all of the open space and can charge money for anyone using the area. At one time Marriott had two booths.

Vandermade sent the city a letter saying it would not be renewing the lease after it expired in August. Marriott had already stopped providing sales material and other information about Heavenly Village via the cart.

The city used the \$55,000 to help pay the annual Park Avenue Development Maintenance Association fee that runs about \$120,000/year. Redevelopment agencies per state law cannot use their revenue sources to pay ongoing fees like that. This is why the \$55,000 will likely come out of an already shrinking general fund when the 2009-10 budget is approved in the next few days.

Governor: State parks will not close

Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

A new scheme to save money at state parks means none of them will have to close completely, according to an announcement today by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The plan reduces ongoing maintenance and eliminates all major equipment purchases for the balance of the current fiscal year, saving \$12.1 million. Another \$2.1 million will be saved by opening some parks only on weekends and holidays, by closing physical areas in some parks, and by extending seasonal closures at some parks that are already closed for part of each year.

“This is fantastic news for all Californians,” the governor said in a statement.

No specifics were provided on which parks will see schedule reductions, or what maintenance projects will be put off.

For the complete story

Tahoe death ruled accidental

Nevada Appeal

A Stateline man who was found dead at Ski Run Marina last week

likely accidentally drowned, El Dorado County Deputy Coroner Larry Olsen said Thursday.

An autopsy on the body of Roy Ricord, 31, did not reveal any signs of trauma, and foul play has been ruled out as a cause of death, Olsen said.

Ricord's death was not witnessed, and exactly how Ricord came to be in the water is unknown, Olsen said.

For more of the story