

Reno conventions hope to spur economy

By Susan Voyles, Reno Gazette-Journal

With Northern Nevada still reeling from the national recession, the region will get a rare opportunity this fall to sell itself when industry leaders in tourism, economic development and geothermal energy gather in Reno for three national and international conventions.

The National Tour Association is expected to draw more than 400 group tour and travel companies from across the continent at its annual convention Nov. 14-18. As part of the event, its members will tour hot spots in Reno, Tahoe, Virginia City and Carson City.

[Read the whole story](#)

West Slope schools open today

El Dorado County health and school officials have reopened the Oak Ridge High, Rolling Hills Middle, and Silva Valley Elementary school campuses and El Dorado Hills Community Services District following a precautionary closure due to a noxious odor.

Officials received word from the Federal Environmental Protection Agency that air-monitoring results from the Oak Ridge High School track and in some classrooms on Sept. 19 indicate that the impact from the incident appears to have passed. Air monitoring levels detected did not pose a risk to

health and safety.

Health officials believe the incident was localized to the Oak Ridge High School track and additional air monitoring by the EPA on Saturday have confirmed this.

Aside from persons experiencing initial symptoms, there were no reports of medical attention sought by teachers or students due to this incident. Schools have notified parents that the schools have been opened and school and activities on school campuses will resume as normal today. For additional information, visit www.edcgov.us.

Budget, personnel issues dominate Happy Homestead Cemetery agenda



Linda
Mendizabal,
John
McChesney, Del
Laine

By Kathryn Reed

The Happy Homestead Cemetery board approved a budget last week without having final numbers tabulated. As of Saturday not all board members knew what the exact figures are for revenues and expenses for the fiscal year that starts Oct. 1.

The board agreed to slash the estimated interest to be accrued from \$50,000 to \$20,000. Then the three members (John McChesney, Del Laine and Linda Mendizabal) started cutting expenses.

The end result is a difference of about \$7,000 that the board expects to put into reserves.

When board clerk and bookkeeper Coco Kelly left the Sept. 16 meeting to borrow a calculator she came back with a reserve of \$90,000, but said the calculator was too small to get accurate numbers and that she did the calculations three times, with three different results.

The total budget for the South Lake Tahoe cemetery is close to a half million dollars.

Confusion reigned between the board members toward the end of meeting about how to pay Kelly for expenses she incurred while the county withheld payment for services rendered.

Kelly owns Substitute Personnel & Business Services and works at the discretion of the board to do clerk and bookkeeping duties. The job of clerk-bookkeeper has been in her family for about 30 years. Things started to get sticky in the last year when the county auditor-controller said Kelly could not work for the board while her husband, David, was a board member.

David Kelly chose to resign even though he had been on the board since 2003 without any alarms going off in Placerville.

Joe Harn, El Dorado County auditor, said in a letter dated Sept. 2 he was not going to pay a \$2,411.50 bill submitted by Coco Kelly until county counsel reviewed it.

Cemetery legal counsel Dennis Crabb said after the meeting that Kelly has since withdrawn her request to be paid for the work. Still, he said she would be getting paid for the expenses incurred because she had to borrow money to keep her finances in order.

At last week's meeting there were questions whether Kelly had been paid the \$3,000 for expenses related to the matter. McChesney said he didn't know how to get a check out of the endowment fund for this. Laine was adamant that Kelly gets reimbursed.

Because of a 3-0 vote by the board to combine what Kelly does with that of the cemetery's receptionist, it is possible Kelly will be out of a job unless she wants to give up her business and become staff at the cemetery.

The board also agreed to expand to become a five-member board. That could be in place by the end of the year.

The Board of Supervisors, which oversees special districts like this, will make the ultimate decision at a public hearing. Appointments would be made that day after the hearing. So far John Poell has applied to be on the board. He was at last week's meeting.

Chemical smell keeps West Slope schools closed

El Dorado County health and school officials have extended the closure of Oak Ridge High, Rolling Hills Middle, and Silva Valley Elementary school campuses as a precautionary measure until additional air sampling can be conducted on Oak Ridge

High school's track, at all three schools and in some classrooms. The schools were closed Sept. 18, and students evacuated following a strong chemical odor.

"We recommended the continued closure of the schools as a precaution until additional air monitoring data can be collected and analyzed to confirm that there are no potential health hazards," said county health director Olivia Kasirye, in a statement. "All testing done to date indicates that there is no actionable cause for concern for the materials that we have been able to monitor; however, we are erring on the side of caution."

Health officials believe the incident is localized to the Oak Ridge High School track and additional air sampling was expected to take place by the federal Environmental Protection Agency on Saturday. At this time, all school and non-school activities have been suspended and health officials are advising members of the public to avoid the immediate area pending sampling results.

Aside from experiencing initial symptoms, there have been no reports of medical attention sought by teachers or students due to this incident. Health officials continue to monitor the situation and will provide updates as they become available. Parents will be notified when the schools have been cleared to reopen.

Minuscule clams threaten Lake Tahoe



Sen. Dianne Feinstein shows off a pair of earrings made from invasive clam shells found in Lake Tahoe.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Amy Littlefield, Los Angeles Times

Lake Tahoe is under siege by clams the size of your thumbnail.

The population of the coffee-colored Asian clams has soared in the southeast portion of the lake, threatening to hog food sources and excrete nutrients that foster algae growth, according to an annual Lake Tahoe report by UC Davis researchers.

Scientists worry that calcium in the clams' shells could make the lake more hospitable to invasion by quagga or zebra mussels, which cluster onto boats and anything else that rests in the water. Although the mussels have not been sighted at Tahoe, authorities at other lakes have spent millions of dollars trying to control them.

[Read the whole story](#)

Both sides claim victory in shorezone ruling

By Kathryn Reed

A federal judge on Friday gave the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency what it wanted – the ability to continue the permitting process for buoys and piers at Lake Tahoe, but not allowing construction to continue.

U.S. District Judge Lawrence Karlton listened to arguments Sept. 14 in Sacramento before making his ruling four days later.

Sierra Club and League to Save Lake Tahoe have sued the bi-state regulatory agency over its shorezone regulations. The number of new buoys and piers is a large part of the controversy.

Today there are about 800 piers and 4,000 buoys on Lake Tahoe. TRPA's plan is to allow an additional 128 private piers and 1,822 buoys.

"Not one new buoy will be added to the lake until every buoy is permitted and the illegal ones are removed," TRPA spokesman Dennis Oliver said late Friday night.

He further stated, "At the hearing we argued in favor of a partial injunction."

The shorezone issue has been contentious for 22 years and even more so after the Governing Board of the TRPA adopted a shorezone plan in October 2008.

In the original complaint filed by the League and Sierra Club with Earth Justice attorneys representing the environmental groups, it says, "By enacting the Amendments, TRPA not only violated its duty to protect the Lake from environmental degradation but also its fundamental charter to restore and maintain the health and natural beauty of one of the deepest and clearest lakes in the world."

According to Associated Press reports, the environmental groups are claiming victory after Friday's ruling.

However, in court what Earth Justice wanted was a full injunction – something the judge said no to.

The entire matter should be resolved next year. The trial is scheduled to begin March 16.

Suspects arrested in Katrina fraud tied to Angora Fire

By Jason Felch, Los Angeles Times

Louisiana State Police arrested the head of a Palos Verdes-based disaster recovery company Thursday on suspicion of stealing more than \$320,000 from victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Steve Slepcevic, the 41-year old founder and chief executive officer of Paramount Disaster Recovery Inc., evaded authorities for days before arriving at St. Tammany Parish courthouse in a white 7 Series BMW to turn himself in, said Eric Adams, senior trooper with the Louisiana State Police.

His former business partner and Paramount attorney Matthew Todd was arrested in California early Monday morning and is in

a Los Angeles County jail awaiting extradition to Louisiana. Another former Paramount employee, Michael Mekeel, 38, has agreed to turn himself in to authorities in the coming days, Adams said.

[Read whole story](#)

El Dorado County cuts hours to save money

As a result of budget constraints and employee furloughs, the El Dorado County chief administrative office has announced cutbacks in hours for most county offices.

County office closures are subject to change. Up-to-date operating hour information is available at www.edcgov.us.

The following office closures are now in effect:

Agriculture, noon-1pm daily, through June 30, 2010;

CAO, noon-1pm daily, through June 30, 2010;

County counsel, noon 1-pm daily, through June 30, 2010;

Developmental Services, Sept. 25, Oct. 9, Oct. 23, Nov. 6, Nov. 20, Dec. 4, and Dec. 18

Human resources, 12:30-1:30pm daily, and every Friday at 3:30pm, through June 30, 2010.

Library, Nov. 24, 25 and 28, Dec. 22, 23 and 26, April 2, April 3 and May 28.

Museum, Nov. 24, 25 and 28, and December 22, 23, and 26.

Probation, noon-1pm daily, and all day Oct. 12, Feb. 12, and March 31.

Sheriff (fiscal, civil and public administrator only), Sept. 21, Oct. 19, Nov. 30, Jan. 11, Feb. 1, March 15, April 12, and May 3.

Sheriff (records), 11-noon daily, through June 30, 2010.

Transportation, 12:30-1:30pm, daily, through June 30, 2010.

Treasurer tax collector, Oct. 9, Nov. 25, Dec. 23, Jan. 15, Feb. 12, March 19, April 23, May 28, and June 25.

UCCE, every day, through June 30, 2010.

Veterans, third Friday of every month, through June 30, 2010.

Lake Tahoe drowning victim from Stateline

The body recovered from the bottom of Lake Tahoe Thursday has been identified as Roy Ricord, 31, of Stateline.

“Foul play has not been completely ruled out because we don’t have all the facts,” Lt. Marty Hale of the South Lake Tahoe Police Department said.

An autopsy was performed today with no ruling other than drowning. Toxicology reports will take at least six weeks to identify if any alcohol or drugs were in Ricord’s system.

Hale did not know where Ricord worked, but said he has friends on the South Shore and family in the Reno area.

Investigators are still trying to find out Ricordâ€™s whereabouts the night of Sept. 16. He was found early the next morning face down in about 7 feet of water by a captain of a fishing boat.

State of roads dig deep hole in South Tahoe



Even though some roads in South Lake got repaired this summer, most make for a bumpy ride.Â
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

Forget that time heals all wounds. With respect to South Lake Tahoe roads, time is the enemy â€” one the City Council has grappled with for more than eight years.

While the debate over how to fund street repair continued in

council chambers last month, the network of 130 miles of roads has disintegrated to a level where city engineers believe 65 percent of the streets will need to be reconstructed by 2024. City staff is basing its estimate on a pavement management study conducted by a consultant two years ago that painted anything but a rosy picture of the public works program.

By next year, almost 40 percent of the roads are projected to be rated in "poor" condition. Airport Road is one of those. Under an elaborate rating system, the consultant estimated the network would bump two-thirds of the roads in the "very poor" category in the next 14 years.

Less than a quarter of city streets are considered "fair," "good" or "very good."

Even though most city officials agree the streets need to be overlaid or patched, the amount of money earmarked for the program remains in jeopardy every year.

The \$1 million allocated for street overlay in this budget year was slashed by more than half as a result of an unprecedented economic downturn. This wasn't the only year the roads took a back seat in the budget. No budget was allocated in 2001, 2004 and 2005.

According to a staff report, the cost of asphalt has skyrocketed by 130 percent from \$37 per ton to \$85. Asphalt is oil-based, contingent on the volatile price of a barrel of oil in world markets.

City Engineer Jim Marino said staff is looking into using a new rubberized chip seal next year. The seal is a mix of oil and crushed rock. Crews would cover the surface twice with the hope ultraviolet exposure and snow removal equipment don't break down the double layer.

"With limited funding, we should be focusing on keeping our good roads in good shape in order to extend lifespan,"

Marino said.

Adding to the problem is Sacramento. The state temporarily crawled out of its budget quagmire to patch its funding holes. In doing so, it is still considering taking back California's gas tax money of 18 cents a gallon local governments have come to rely on.

Public Works Director John Greenhut has called his task of developing a budget for his department "challenging." The city's fiscal year begins Oct. 1.

But the cry of being poor doesn't sit well with locals. Motorists and residents like Evan Williams have complained to the city in recent years about the state of Venice Drive. The popular Tahoe Keys thoroughfare where Williams lives delivers a bone-jarring experience in a vehicle and bicycle trying to negotiate 3- to 5-inch-wide cracks that cover the Keys water lines.

"Every time any vehicle of weight goes by (over the cracks) the whole house shakes," Williams said. "The city has some culpability of maintaining our roads."

But Public Works contends simply patching these cracks won't work because the original asphalt failed to bind adequately enough to handle the wide temperature variances this region experiences. To fix the expanding and contracting of cracks on Venice the city would need to go in and grind out the problem areas before filling in.

Mayor Jerry Birdwell has asked the Public Works department for a list of streets in need of repair. He wants to find one-time funds to fill the holes that pop up every year.

At an August council meeting, Councilman Bill Crawford suggested the city Budget and Finance Committee reduce the general fund reserve earmarked for emergencies be reduced from 25 percent to 15 to help "get serious about public works."

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