

South Tahoe man accused of arson, robbery



Eric Almdale

A South Lake Tahoe man was arrested this week after allegedly starting several fires and robbing someone in his family.

Eric Almdale, 43, was arrested on charges of arson of an inhabited dwelling and robbery.

Police arrested Almdale after he was allegedly using a knife to tear up the waiting room at Barton Memorial Hospital.

Over the course of a few days he went on a crime spree that involved arson, robbery and vandalism.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

No toxins detected at Wright's Lake

By Mountain Democrat

On July 9 staff from the Central Valley Regional Water Control Board were at Wright's Lake collecting water samples after an

unusual algal bloom that was reported at the lake. The algal bloom was suspected of being benthic cyanobacteria, a blue-green algae that produces a toxin that can be deadly to humans and animals. The initial lab results were negative for cyanobacteria. Further chemical tests were conducted to be on the safe side and those also came back negative.

According to the board, the algal toxins microcystin and cylindrospermopsin that are produced by cyanobacteria and are toxic to most vertebrates were not detected.

Read the whole story

Court removes from ballot measure to split Calif.

By Maura Dolan, Los Angeles Times

The California Supreme Court decided unanimously Wednesday to remove from the November ballot a measure aimed at dividing California into three states.

The decision was a defeat for Tim Draper, a Silicon Valley venture capitalist considered an eccentric entrepreneur who spent \$1.2 million on the measure.

Four years ago, the wealthy Atherton resident spent \$5.2 million promoting a measure that would have split California into six states. It did not qualify for the ballot.

Read the whole story

South Lake Tahoe cops: Phish fans filthy



SLTPD officers say Phish fans left this garbage July 17. Photo/Provided

Phish started its summer concert tour in Stateline on July 17 by leaving a foul smell next door in California.

The South Lake Tahoe Police Department sent out this tweet the next day, “@phish Please help spread the word to your following to help protect our National Treasure and respect our residents/visitors. We will be out issuing citations.”

Officers were issuing citations on Tuesday night, but couldn't keep with all the debris. Empty alcohol bottles and other trash were found throughout the streets near the outdoor venue at Harveys across the state line.

The group that is hard to pigeonhole into a genre will be back

Wednesday night. They are practically becoming regulars at the Summer Outdoor Concert Series.

One *LTN* reader who witnessed the pre-concert festivities in the casino corridor on Tuesday said it was more reminiscent of New Year's Eve.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Hwy. 50 improvements made in Zephyr Cove

Nevada Department of Transportation crews on July 17 completed the installation of pedestrian safety improvements on Highway 50 in Zephyr Cove.

Previously, there was one constantly-flashing pedestrian crossing light at the intersection of Highway 50 and Lake Shore Boulevard.

NDOT has enhanced the pedestrian crossing with the following pedestrian safety improvements:

- The previous signal was replaced with two electronic flashing pedestrian crossing beacons, known as rectangular rapid flashing beacons, allowing pedestrians to activate the signs to help stop traffic as they cross the street. Signals have also been placed in advance of the signal, giving drivers advance notice to stop for any pedestrians crossing ahead.
- Sidewalks were improved for safer and easier pedestrian travel.
- Overhead street lighting has been installed for enhanced

visibility of pedestrians in the crosswalk.

The approximately \$294,000 in improvements by Par Electrical Contractors Inc. began in early June and are aimed at enhancing safety for pedestrians crossing the highway, as well as for the as many as 20,000 drivers traveling the highway daily.

SLT outlines financial impact from VHR ban

By Kathryn Reed

It's official – the voters of South Lake Tahoe will decide in November the future of vacation home rentals outside the tourist core area.

Per the city staff report on July 17, “The initiative would ban VHR rentals in residential zones following a three-year amortization period, with exception of qualified VHR rentals totaling less than 30 days per calendar year. The initiative has no effect on vacation rentals in commercial zones and the tourist core area.”

There are roughly 1,300 VHRs outside the tourist area and another 450 in the tourist area. The tourist area includes much of the area from Ski Run Boulevard to the state line. The Gondola Vista condos being built by Van Sickle Bi-State Park would be considered tourist core VHRs, as are units in the Marriott properties, and residences scattered in the neighborhoods.

While backers of the initiative are seeking to get the rentals out of neighborhoods, they have ignored the residents near the

state line. Through their ballot question they are essentially allowing unlimited units to go in this area. There are many who believe that limiting the land available for VHRs will in fact impact an area with lower income people who don't always have a voice in city politics.

The tourist area is also seen as town centers; therefore, more developed and commercial.

This approach to putting VHRs in these areas is the opposite to what Douglas County is doing. As that jurisdiction looks to revamp its ordinance, the goal is to keep VHRs in residential areas and out of town centers. This is because their definition is the buildings are residences, not commercial entities.

The South Lake Tahoe City Council on Tuesday was faced with the decision whether to put the initiative that would ban short-term rentals over the course of three years or to implement it immediately. The electeds opted to send it to the voters; with Councilman Tom Davis recusing himself because of his business.

Prior to the vote the council heard a report from Hilary Roverud of the Development Services Department about what some of the impacts of the ordinance could be. With there being so many unknowns, like what people would do with their property if a VHR is no longer an allowed use, the actual ramifications are unknown.

Roverud said it's estimated the city will lose more than \$2.4 million a year in transient occupancy tax. This is one of the three main revenue sources for the city. TOT that was going to be dedicated to recreation could be cut by more than \$450,000 a year. The Tourism Improvement District, which is made up of hotels within the city, could lose about \$360,000 a year. Today that money is used for marketing this area. Vacation home rental permit fee collections could drop by close to

\$800,000.

If the ordinance passes in November and the city were to ignore the will of the voters “the city could be faced with a writ or injunction compelling it to implement and enforce the ordinance,” according to interim City Attorney Nira Doherty. She explained to *Lake Tahoe News* this would be done by “a citizen lawsuit to compel the city.”

The ballot language states that if someone were to operate a VHR after Dec. 31, 2021, the city could fine the property owner up to \$1,000.

What remains to be seen is if the ballot question passes is if those who use VHRs will instead choose to stay in a hotel. It's unknown if property owners will sell, operate illegally, keep the dwelling as a second home, rent it out full time or some other scenario.

There is one theory that the VHRs will be filled with full time residents, which will fill schools. On the flip side is the belief the schools will be hurt by this initiative as will businesses tied to VHRs because there won't be jobs.

If people want to unload the VHR because they can no longer use the house as they desire, this could detrimentally impact the housing market by flooding it. The resulting impact to the property tax, another key revenue source, is unknown.

The initiative says that after 2021 VHRs will not be allowed on multi-family properties.

The staff report says, “There are currently 119 single-family residential units in the commercial zones and 371 condominiums and 37 single-family residential units in the tourist core area, a total of 527 units, which would have the ability to become VHRs if permitting requirements are met.”

Assuming voters want to ban VHRs, there is nothing to stop

other people from coming back with a different ballot proposal to undo all of this – with the voters backing.

Morse raises more than three times as much as McClintock

By Emily Cadei, Sacramento Bee

Democratic challenger Jessica Morse outraised Republican Rep. Tom McClintock by a more than three-to-one margin as the two geared up for a general election clash in the 4th District congressional race.

McClintock, however, started July with slightly more money in the bank.

The five-term incumbent raised \$112,000 in the six-week span between May 17 and June 30, a fraction of the \$392,000 that Morse, a first-time candidate, raised. It's the fourth quarter in a row that Morse has outraised McClintock, who has not faced a competitive challenge since being elected to Congress in 2008.

Read the whole story

2 dead, 1 hurt in Truckee

airplane crash



Two people died July 17 in a plane crash outside of Truckee airport.
Photo/Provided

Update 7:38pm:

By Jordan Cutler-Tietjen, Sacramento Bee

Two victims have died and another was transported to a hospital after a small private plane crashed in a meadow south of Truckee, the Placer County Sheriff's Office tweeted.

Pilot Kenneth Whitall-Scherfee, 60, of Carmichael was identified as one of the dead by the sheriff's office Tuesday afternoon.

Around 7:35a , a single-engine, four-passenger Navion-B plane crashed less than a mile from the Truckee-Tahoe Airport, said Sgt. Dave Hunt of the Placer County Sheriff's Office. The debris field is located in the west of Highway 267 near Mercer Flats, said Ian Gregor, a spokesman for the Federal Aviation Administration's Pacific Division.

Read the whole story

Bus system on South Shore limping along

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – While the word “bankruptcy” has not been floated publicly among the Tahoe Transportation District staff and board, the bus system it runs on the South Shore is sputtering to stay solvent.

Interestingly, Carl Hasty, who manages the bi-state transit agency, mentioned at the July 13 meeting that it was eight years ago this month that TTD took over for the now defunct South Tahoe Area Transit Authority, or STATA. That nonprofit ended up in bankruptcy court and collectively costing local member agencies hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Many of the same complaints that were heard eight years ago and longer are still being voiced today – from all sides. Money still is at the crux of most of what ails the bus system, which then impacts routes and frequency.

How funding works it is not just a free handout from the states or feds, so to speak. George Fink, who manages the buses, said \$687,000 more in fare box revenue is needed to meet the requirements.

TTD realizes it needs to figure out a better revenue stream. That is why the board has agreed to hire a consultant, maybe more than one, to provide a suite of options.

While the ski shuttles are a huge draw, with about 358,000 rides in a good winter, no fare box is collected from them. There were people at the meeting wondering why the tourists

are not charged.

Heavenly Mountain Resort has been subsidizing this amenity for years.

Andrew Strain who works for the ski resort in government affairs is also on the TTD board. He did not participate in the board discussion, but instead spoke during public comment. He said given the planned cutbacks to the winter buses, Heavenly is looking at how it can provide service to its customers and to coordinate with TTD. He admitted the resort doesn't have firm plans right now.

Heavenly doesn't have enough parking if everyone were to drive themselves. There is also the fact many people would not be comfortable driving up Kingsbury Grade to Boulder or Stagecoach lodges. Plus, many who travel on ski vacations are used to excellent bus service in other locales, which is also often free.

Tahoe's problems are confounded by not being able to hire enough drivers for the routes. They either can't pass a drug test or can't afford to live here. Housing, though, is an issue for nearly every employer in the basin.

At last week's meeting the board put off final decisions on revamping the system for another month, with comments being taken into August as well. As of July 8 the district has received 95 comments since May 11, with them divided into those supporting specific services or making general comments about TTD or transit.

Early last week the district was surprised with good news. It received \$1.6 million from the Nevada Department of Transportation for the 19X route, which goes between the lake and the valley. This is huge for commuters to the lake as well as those who take transit to the valley for medical appointments.

The plan is for staff to come back to the board at the August meeting with a modified action plan for routes 23 and 20 that include 19, continue to work with the Ridge and Heavenly, and to relook at how it is dealing with CEQA based on comments from the League to Save Lake Tahoe and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Exactly how the changes will impact door-to-door bus service still remain to be seen. As it stands now about 16 riders in the North Upper Truckee and Christmas Valley areas could be out cut off.

“I’m here to be the voice for the disabled and the elderly who live in North Upper Truckee. I have a son with disabilities,” a mom said. “This transportation is critical to his life.”

The West can learn about forest fires from Fla.

By Kyle Dickman, Outside

Fire has always been a part of the landscape. The mistake we made was trying to stop it—something Florida never did.

Joe O’Brien, a research ecologist with the U.S. Forest Service, tucks his helmet into his chest, steals a breath of clean air, and steps closer to the fire now engulfing a \$23,000 camera. Overhead, a drone that sounds like angry bees is darting in and out of the smoke column. A flock of nearby scientists are radioing to each other as they drag a boxy gadget on a pulley through dancing flames.

O’Brien is one of several dozen scientists who traveled from

around the country to a half-acre plot of longleaf pine forest north of Tallahassee, Florida, for the privilege of burning it all. He and all the scientists here are trying to answer the complex and poorly understood question of how fire burns. If they succeed, they hope to set more of America ablaze.

Read the whole story