

Opinion: Kids need delightfully dangerous playgrounds

By Joe Mathews

California doesn't make playgrounds like it used to.

Fifteen years after the state legislated compliance with national safety standards for new and renovated public playgrounds, I can take the Three Stooges—my three sons under age 8—to parks around California confident I'll see the same reassuringly safe equipment: low swings, low slides, ubiquitous guardrails, and super-soft rubbery mats to cushion falls.



Joe Mathews

But all that safe sameness is boring. Today, the playground pieces that once captured children's attention—merry-go-rounds, custom teeter-totters, Tarzan-style ropes, high monkey bars, and flat swings—are nearly impossible to find. It turns out that safer playgrounds, while producing less litigation over injuries, carry their own risks.

Pediatric researchers warn that today's playgrounds no longer provide the fast-moving kinds of play that help children overcome fears and develop sensory and motor skills. Older kids, finding safer equipment less challenging, may be using

playgrounds less.

California parents should counter these trends by seeking out those classic California playgrounds too old (before the mid-'90s) to comply fully with today's regulations. So I've been introducing the Three Stooges to dangerous old playgrounds.

On road trips, we've visited Santa Barbara's Kid's World playground, a giant wood fort with so many places to hide that you can't keep your eyes on your kids. Despite the risk of falls, we've enjoyed the playground at Tidelands Park right on Morro Bay—with its wood-and-metal pirate ship allowing kids glimpses of bay otters and a majestic view of Morro Rock.

Then there's our local San Gabriel Valley favorite, La Laguna, at Vincent Lugo Park in the city of San Gabriel. Someone should write a book about the Mexican artist Benjamin Dominguez, who created 14 somewhat scary concrete structures a half-century ago, near the end of a difficult life that also produced the Atlantis playground in Garden Grove. The concrete structures look like dinosaurs and whales and octopi, and kids climb slippery steps to go down long, treacherous slides.

The Three Stooges love La Laguna so much I decided to take them to the mecca of old-school California playgrounds: the Dennis the Menace Playground inside El Estero Park in downtown Monterey. Last week, on the way to visit my grandmother in San Mateo, we made our pilgrimage.

Dennis the Menace has had some safety updates, but it remains much the same place designed in the 1950s by Monterey citizens, including Hank Ketcham, creator of the troublemaking comic strip character for whom the park is named. A suspension bridge hangs high and long near the playground's entrance. The place is full of extra long and twisty slides. Our only disappointment was that you can no longer play on the old rail steam engine near the entrance—a sign says the city is seeking a way to allow access that complies with state safety laws.

After an hour on the playground, I drove the family north to grandma's, muttering about playground greatness being a thing of California's past. But a few days later, I was proven wrong—when I took the Stooges to Palo Alto's Mitchell Park, where the Magical Bridge playground opened just last year.

Magical Bridge is annoying in the way of so many Silicon Valley enterprises; it's not content to be smart, it has to tell you how smart it is. Playground signs cite research on how its equipment improves your children's vestibular development, and offer links to a website boasting that Magical Bridge is "the nation's most innovative and inclusive playground." There's a donor wall honoring the worthies who covered the \$3.8 million cost, a "Kindness Corner" with anti-bullying messages, and "a patent-pending safe slide landing."

In spite of its preciousness, the place is great.

Magical Bridge is the brainchild of a local mother who wanted a playground to serve children with all manner of developmental and physical disabilities, including her own daughter. The place achieves a magical combination: It's at once more inclusive and more challenging than the standard California playground.

Large disc and bucket swings accommodate kids with disabilities and create speedy movement to satisfy risk takers. There are multiple bridges, a two-story playhouse, and a theater—all fully accessible. A 24-string laser harp allows children of all abilities to make music with movement.

The slides are tall, and there are two 21st-century versions of the merry-go-round. One connects a spinning circular platform with a cone of ropes that allows kids to climb as they spin.

At the top of the merry-go-rope structure, the Stooges enjoyed a 360-degree view of this new and classic California playground. They also loved the dangerous and novel feeling of

being so high that they were out of the reach of their parents.

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.

Books Americans want out of public libraries

By Niraj Chokshi, Washington Post

Explicit sexuality, offensive language, homosexuality, a religious viewpoint: Those are a few of the common objections to the 10 most-challenged books of 2015, according to the American Library Association's latest "State of America's Libraries" report.

The list, published this week, includes some well-known titles – the Holy Bible ranked sixth – along with some lesser-known ones.

Some deal with discovering sexuality; "Fifty Shades of Grey" ranked second.

Read the whole story

Tax Freedom Day comes late in

Calif.

Calculated annually by the Tax Foundation, Tax Freedom Day is when Americans have earned enough money to pay their annual tax obligations at the federal, state and local levels. California's Tax Freedom Day lands on April 30, six days after the national mark of April 24.

"California's complicated and oppressive tax system continues to make life hard," Board of Equalization member George Runner said in a statement. "Californians will have to work 120 days to pay our tax bill this year and, unbelievably, some lawmakers want to make the number higher by raising taxes."

According to the Tax Foundation, Americans' total tax bill comes to nearly \$5 trillion, or about 31 percent of their income. Collectively that amounts to taxpayers handing over more money to the government in 2016 than they spend on food, clothing and housing combined.

Compared to other states, California's Tax Freedom Day is one of the latest in the nation. Only Connecticut, New Jersey, Massachusetts and New York have later dates.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- El Dorado County Sheriff's Office is having a free prescription drug disposal day at Lira's Market in Meyers on April 30 from 11am-5pm.

- The Douglas County Public Library Teen Advisory Board is hosting a free poetry slam contest April 29 at 4pm at the Minden Library. Teens age 12 and up may recite their original

poetry. For more info, call 775.782.9841.

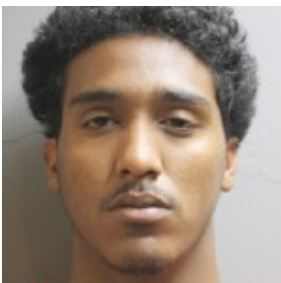
- UCCE Master Gardeners of Lake Tahoe is hosting a talk by Bonnie Turnbull about climate change at Tahoe. The free talk is April 28 from 6:30-7:30pm in the Aspen Room at Lake Tahoe Community College.

- Kahle Community Center in Stateline will be opening the basketball courts for a roller skating party on April 28 from 6-8pm. Bring skates (no metal wheels) or rent a pair there for \$2. Cost is \$5 for ages 13 and older, \$3 for 12 and younger, and seniors.

- South Tahoe Association of Realtors donated 80 Easter baskets to the Family Resource Center and Live Violence Free.

3rd suspect in SLT murder behind bars

A third suspect in the January murder at a South Lake Tahoe motel has been arrested.



Domenic
Seanlee
Randolph

Domenic Seanlee Randolph, 22, was apprehended April 19 in

Texas.

Dennis Wright, 40, of Amador County died in drug deal-robbery gone bad on Jan. 30. He reportedly had more than 100 pounds of marijuana for sale at the Beverly Lodge.

Randolph, along with Tristan Demond Batten and Harvest Cyle Davidson, has been implicated in the crimes. Still at large is 26-year-old Dion Jermaine Randolph Vaccoro.

It is possible other people could be arrested in connection with the incident.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Lake Tahoe's clarity declines by 4.8 feet

By Lake Tahoe News

Lake Tahoe is getting warmer and that is not a good a thing for its clarity.

In 2015 the pristine waters got a little less so in summer and winter, according to data released April 19 by the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. The average clarity last year was 73.1 feet; 4.8 feet less than 2014.

“It is commonly believed that drought years produce clearer water conditions, but the reality is more complicated than that,” Geoff Schladow, TERC director, said in a statement.

With more runoff this year compared to the last few springs,

the summer 2016 reading could bring even more bad news.

Lake clarity is measured with a Secchi disk, which looks like a white dinner plate. The measurement is based on how far someone can clearly see it from the deck of a boat, with multiple readings taken throughout the lake.

Researchers say the clarity loss is not a long-term trend, but instead can be attributed to year-to-year variability based on the conditions in the lake.

“In 2015, the runoff water into the lake was warmer than the previous year on account of the low snow-to-rain ratio,” Schladow said. “As a consequence, fine particles flowed in closer to the surface, where they impacted clarity, rather than plunging to the deeper parts of the lake.”

Summer clarity averaged 73 feet, a 3.7-foot decline over the preceding year. Winter clarity last year declined by 7.6 feet to 71.6 feet.

During most years, clarity is worse in summer than winter. Schladow said 2015 was an exception because the lack of deep mixing during the winter resulted in little of the pristine, deep water being brought up to the lake surface to dilute the clarity-reducing contaminants. Even so, researchers said long-term decline in summer conditions is still a major concern.

NTPUD seeks public input on future rec needs

North Tahoe Public Utility District is looking to the community it serves to determine future recreation needs.

The board will be hiring a consultant to provide a needs assessment, which is part of updating the Recreation and Parks Master Plan. The assessment will also provide input to the district about what residents think of parks and North Tahoe Event Center, and the level people are willing to fund both

Also at the meeting the board agreed to release a request for proposals for the operation and management of the North Tahoe Event Center.

Camp Rich trail, campground to be upgraded

Construction at Camp Richardson campground is slated to begin May 2.

This phase two of the U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit's retrofit to meet current standards for water quality protection and universal accessibility. Work to upgrade the campground on the south side of Highway 89 is expected to last about three months.

The project will relocate campsites and roads from sensitive stream environment zones, define and pave roadways and campsite spurs, manage on-site stormwater runoff, relocate a portion of the Pope-Baldwin Bike Path away from the highway shoulder and create a new campground entrance.

Groups offer free digitization of old Tahoe photos



Photographer H.T. Cowling on a pier at Tahoe. Photo/NLTHS

The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society and UNR's Photography Program are offering digitization services of historic visual materials related to the North Lake Tahoe community.

Digitization sessions will be open for drop-ins at any time June 26 between 10am and 4pm at the Gatekeepers Museum in Tahoe City.

Presentations will be given by historian Carol Jensen (2-3pm), photographer Peter Goin (11:15am-12:15pm), and photograph archivists Kimberly Roberts (3:15-4pm) and Katrina Windon (1-1:30pm). There will be docent-guided tours of the Gatekeepers Museum at 12:15pm and 1:30pm. All of this is free.

This one-day event offers a chance for community members and visitors to bring in historic visual materials documenting the region and have those materials digitized according to professional archival standards. In return, participants will have the option to donate a digital copy of these materials

for inclusion in the NLTHS's database, providing public access to anyone interested in researching North Lake Tahoe's cultural history.

The goals of this event are: To increase community awareness of the wealth of cultural heritage in the region and how they can use these resources in their own lives and research; to acquire new materials to fill in gaps in the existing cultural record; and to provide community members with the knowledge and tools they need to become custodians of their own family history materials.

For more information and a detailed schedule of events, go **online**.

Eastern Sierra overdue for large earthquake

By Scott Sonner, AP

Scientists say the Sierra's eastern front is long overdue for a large earthquake along the California-Nevada line, where a magnitude-7 event expected on average every 30 years hasn't occurred in six decades.

Nevada Seismology Laboratory Director Graham Kent says the region's earthquake "drought" is likely one of the sources of a public misconception that it is at a low risk of experiencing a serious earthquake.

He planned to discuss details about the latest research today during an Earthquake Economic Resiliency Forum ahead of the Seismological Society of America's annual meeting running

Wednesday to Friday in Reno.

Kent said a magnitude-6 earthquake or larger typically strikes every 10 years or so along the Sierra Nevada frontal fault system running from south of Yosemite National Park to north of Reno and Lake Tahoe. There were seven magnitude-6.5 or larger in the region from 1915 to 1954, but none since, he said. The last magnitude-6 was 22 years ago in the Carson Valley south of Carson City.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency estimates a 6-magnitude quake could cause up to \$1.9 billion in damage in the Reno-Sparks area and \$590 million in the populated area of South Lake Tahoe, Kent said.

“Let’s take advantage of this extraordinary quiescent period in our earthquake history,” Kent said. “We have a great opportunity to bring experts together with our community – those who need to put plans in place not only for disaster response but, just importantly, a plan for quick economic recovery.”

The experts are gathering in Nevada days after powerful earthquakes killed hundreds of people in Ecuador (magnitude-7.8) and killed dozens and wounded thousands in Japan (magnitude-7.1). Scheduled speakers include Dick McCarthy, executive director of the California Seismic Safety Commission, and Cory Lyman, director of the Salt Lake City Emergency Management’s “Fix the Bricks” program.

The largest earthquake ever recorded in the Sierra fault system was a magnitude-7.4 in 1872 in Owens Valley south of Yosemite National Park. It’s still the third largest in California history, behind the magnitude-7.9 at Fort Tejon in 1857 and the 7.8-magnitude in San Francisco in 1906. More recent studies of the fault lines and damage suggest the Owens Valley quake was probably bigger than the one in San Francisco, Kent said.

The Seismology Laboratory at UNR chronicled the event in its March newsletter with historical excerpts from naturalist John Muir, who wrote about the violent shaking while at Yosemite.

“I ran out of my cabin near the Sentinel rock, both glad and frightened, shouting, ‘A noble earthquake!’” Muir wrote. “The shocks were so violent and varied and succeeded one another so closely, one had to balance in walking as if on the deck of a ship among the waves.”