

Northstar gondola makes ride to slopes faster



Skiers and riders board Northstar's gondola to get to mid-mountain. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – Speed – it's what most riders want. Waiting in lines and slow lifts don't add to a memorable ski day, at least not in a positive way.

Comfort is another biggie.

Northstar has been listening. While skiers and snowboarders might not notice the changes at first, the Big Springs Gondola has been overhauled in the last two years. The latest upgrade

for this season is making the 30-year-old transport faster. In five minutes people are whisked from the village to mid-mountain.

The change allows for an increase of 10 percent more of the six-seater cars being able to get from the bottom to the top compared to years past.

During the summer engineers worked to make the whole apparatus quieter and smoother.



It's a quick ride for passengers on the gondola to get to mid-mountain. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

"The infrastructure was upgraded with the most recent technology available, keeping terminals from being too loud for guests waiting to onboard," Cass Walker, the resort's spokeswoman, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

In the previous offseason the doors and windows were replaced, as were the seats – which came with more cushioning. Most of

the work was done in house.

The outside equipment holder now accommodates the fatter skis, with it being able to hold six pairs of skis and four snowboards.

Prior to the gondola's opening in 1985 people had to rely on the Village Express Chairlift. The starting point is close to the gondola. But seldom does the lift run. It's just not as efficient. Plus, it drops people off right on a run.

The gondola drops people off within walking distance to three main chairlifts that go farther up the mountain. Plus, this is mid-mountain, where there is a day lodge. And for those who are not skiing and just want a ride up the mountain, the gondola is the E ticket ride to get there.



The gondola crosses the road leading to the Ritz-Carlton. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

“The entire terminal has also been renovated – featuring lovely scenic and village shots and some great accolades. We

will also be including new furnishings within the terminal," Walker said.

Per company policy Walker would not release how much it cost to improve the gondola. All she would say is parent company Vail Resorts has infused \$30 million into Northstar in the last five years since it acquired the property.

For now, this is the end of the planned upgrades to the gondola. This means it will be a while before Northstar has what Vail ski resort has – a heated eight-seater gondola.

Opinion: Don't blame the candidates—blame yourself

By Andrés Martínez

We may finally be getting the presidential candidates we deserve.

Forget all that talk about the wisdom of voters, and the great American people. We are the problem, with our shrill, hyperbolic, extremist, intolerant, and polarized ways of engaging in politics over the past two decades.

I can recall in the late '90s being totally befuddled by how some of my friends, perfectly sensible people when the subject wasn't politics, would go apoplectic at the mere mention of Bill Clinton.

Our president, I can recall a Michigan banker friend named John telling me, was a socialist, a dishonorable man intent on destroying America. John would practically start shaking when discussing Clinton and the need for the cretin to be removed

from office. I couldn't understand where all this vitriol came from. To what water cooler did he retreat to where such views were the norm? (A clue: I think it was from him that I first heard of Fox News).

Sure, Clinton had his personal weaknesses (almost clichés for a politico, though, which in other eras would not likely have led to impeachment proceedings). But as far as I could see, the president was overseeing a massive economic boom (deregulating John's banking industry along the way), taking on Democratic unions to push for free trade agreements, balancing the federal budget, and deploying U.S. forces overseas, when required, in places like Kosovo and Iraq. How did all that make Bill Clinton a crazed socialist?

I was equally perplexed by the irrational level of contempt and vitriol leftist friends and colleagues felt toward George W. Bush late in his first term, and throughout his second term. The man was a fascist, they'd say, amid wishful talk of impeachment. I, too, disagreed with much of what Bush did, and worried about that administration's competence, but the criticism among impassioned liberals, congregating online at a new crop of progressive websites and watching MSNBC and Jon Stewart, was absurdly over the top.

The facts, once again, were becoming awfully elastic and selectively parsed. Take the war in Iraq. Within a couple of years of the 2003 invasion, Democrats talked about the war as a secretive, despicable Bush plot. Never mind that plenty of Democrats supported the initial decision to go to war, and that there had been little daylight between the Clinton national security team's assessment of Saddam Hussein's behavior, capabilities, and intentions, and the assessment of the Bush team.

What was becoming clear, however, is that we Americans—specifically the more politically engaged among us—have been losing our ability to respectfully and

constructively disagree with governing leaders of a different party, not to mention with each other. Instead of opposing certain policies of a president we don't see eye to eye with, we jump to questioning that president's legitimacy to even hold the office, to represent us.

Of course, this psychosis has been most pronounced during President Obama's administration, when plenty of Republicans have repeatedly questioned the president's birthplace and religion. And, once again, the extremist rhetoric portraying him as a feckless socialist seems far removed from facts, when you consider how he responded to the financial crisis by shoring up banking institutions without taking them over, embraced a moderate market-based approach to healthcare reform (instead of a single-payer approach), and ratcheted up the drone campaigns against terrorists in countries like Yemen and Pakistan. There's plenty to disagree with Obama on, and I understand conservatives' ire at Obamacare and some of his progressive social agenda. But isn't there a way to oppose the president without ridiculing the man, questioning his patriotism, and denying his legitimacy as a twice-elected leader of the free world?

The anecdotal sense that we have become a far more polarized society was borne out last year by the largest political survey ever conducted by the Pew Research Center. The survey found that Republicans and Democrats are further apart ideologically than at any point in recent history; that the two parties no longer overlapped in any meaningful way; that, in 20 years, the share of Americans expressing consistently across-the-board conservative or liberal positions had doubled, as had the percentage of Republicans and Democrats holding "very unfavorable" views of the other party. The study also found that more and more of us are hiding out in our hardened ideological silos, increasingly segregated from fellow citizens and media that don't share our worldview. And by worldview, we no longer seem to be talking solely about

one's interpretation of objective facts, but one's subjective choice of facts.

My list of causes for this would include the end of the Cold War (the daily threat of nuclear extinction didn't allow for self-destructive partisanship); the balkanization of media, aided by the advent of the Internet; the takeover of politics by the fundraising-industrial complex (it's much easier to raise money if you're screaming that you're fighting a danger to the republic rather than a well-meaning, if misguided, friend from the other side of the aisle); and the poisoning of the idea that Washington is a permanent home where our representatives should live, mingle, and learn to get along.

Choose your favorite polarizing culprits from that list, or add others to it, but there is no denying that we've landed at an ugly moment on the eve of the 2016 vote. Recent primaries have featured early "silly seasons" when voters have flirted with absurd candidacies before sobering up. But now the silly season is threatening to spill over into the actual voting process.

Let's stipulate the obvious: Donald Trump, Ben Carson, Ted Cruz, and Bernie Sanders are beyond the pale. In a more serious time, they never would have been considered credible candidates in a national election. Only in silos of same-thinking dogmatism is this not obvious. Trump, in particular, has masterfully capitalized on the cultural moment, turning into a fascist demagogue before our eyes, exhorting people to channel their anger with the status quo and "Make America Great Again" by bullying foreigners and minorities, those "others" who are to blame for all our woes. His candidacy embodies and fulfills the hysterical tenor of our political discourse. He is our political Frankenstein. If we elect Donald Trump president, half the country's cries that our president is a fascist unfit for office will—for once—be no exaggeration.

The Republicans don't have a monopoly on a lack of seriousness. Sanders is not leading in the polls, but the fact that so many Democrats treat him as a legitimate choice is alarming. When the self-avowed Socialist (again, real life is catching up with our once exaggerated epithets) was asked in a recent debate how high he'd like to raise income tax rates if elected, he vaguely joked that they wouldn't go higher than 90 percent. Hillary Clinton is in a different league, credibility-wise, but our debased political culture is forcing her into some intellectually dishonest contortions. So, for instance, she had to come out against President Obama's Asian trade pact (which she championed and negotiated as secretary of State) because the "base" these days won't tolerate any deviance from its dogma or overlap between the parties. It all boils down to "us" versus "them."

There is that old aphorism (often attributed to Alexis de Tocqueville, but of uncertain origins) that, in a democracy, the people get the government they deserve. We must have a reckoning with ourselves, as voters and citizens. It's great fun to sit back and mock, or demonize, these presidential candidates, but they aren't the underlying problem. We are.

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Study: Teenagers aren't getting enough exercise

By Roni Caryn Rabin, New York Times

Teenagers can be a notoriously sedentary group. Now a study showed that school may be a big part of the problem.

The study, which used GPS devices to track when and where teenagers were getting physical activity, found that, on average, they were physically active only 23 minutes a day while at school. Meager as that figure is, it made up over half the 39.4 minutes of physical activity the average teenager got every day.

Teenagers are “one of the tougher groups to get active,” said Jordan A. Carlson, a research assistant professor at Children’s Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, Mo., and one of the authors of the new study, which was published in Pediatrics. By some estimates, fewer than one in 10 adolescents get the 60 minutes of physical activity a day recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Read the whole story

Killing of calf highlights tension with wolves in Calif.

By John King, San Francisco Chronicle

A calf was likely killed and eaten by wolves in Siskiyou County last month, state wildlife officials said – the first reported case of the endangered predators dining on ranchers’ livestock and an incident that may raise tensions over wolves’ reappearance in California.

The killing of the calf prompted the first “livestock depredation investigation” since a wolf crossed into

California from Oregon in 2011, marking the first evidence of a wild wolf in the state since 1924. The apparent attack involved the “Shasta pack,” which consists of two adult wolves and five pups.

The 48-page investigation report – which includes color photos of the two rear legs that were all that remained of the carcass – was released Friday. It comes as the state takes public comments on a comprehensive draft plan for how wolves, which were classified as endangered in California in 2014, might be managed as they multiply.

Read the whole story

TSA to provide pre-check for Reno holiday travelers

By Marcella Corona, Reno Gazette-Journal

Holiday travelers can keep their shoes on, their coats on and their belts on when flying from Reno starting on Monday.

The Transportation Security Administration is set to offer a temporary location where travelers can enroll in the TSA Pre-Check program at the Reno-Tahoe International Airport, officials said Friday in a news release.

TSA officials had announced earlier this month that the existing pre-check at Fingerprinting Express would no longer process applicants after Friday.

Read the whole story

2015 may set record for worst fire season



The Washington Fire in June threatened the town of Markleeville. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

By Darryl Fears, Washington Post

The nation is closing in on its worst wildfire season in recorded history, with nearly 9.8 million acres already burned – the equivalent of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island and part of New Hampshire going up in flames.

Two large fires and more than 160 smaller ones remain active, and more fires are expected to be reported before the month ends. Together, they're likely to push the 2015 total past the record 9.87 million acres burned in 2006.

The extent of scorched earth reflects a warming trend that has made the United States considerably drier, scientists and fire experts say, with less mountain snowpack particularly in Alaska and the southwest.

Read the whole story

Resort group gives back to South Shore

The South Tahoe Alliance of Resorts has provided \$5,000 each to Boys and Girls Club of Lake Tahoe, Christmas Cheer, and Live Violence Free.

The Boys and Girls Club of Lake Tahoe used the \$5,000 to purchase equipment including new desks, chairs, computers and laptops.

A \$5,000 contribution was made through Raley's to Christmas Cheer to help keep the South Lake Tahoe pantry stocked with food.

Live Violence Free's donation will support needed maintenance to the confidential shelter for victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

STAR is comprised of Edgewood Companies, Lake Tahoe Hard Rock, Harrah's/Harveys, Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel, Lakeside Inn and Casino, MontBleu and Vail Resorts.

Prescribed fires planned on North Shore

The North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District may continue prescribed fire operations on the west side of Incline Village the week of Dec. 21.

Residual smoke may be seen in locations where operations have taken place over the last several weeks. To view a map with project locations and details, go **online**. Smoke from prescribed fire operations is normal and may continue for several days after an ignition depending on the project size and environmental conditions.

To receive prescribed fire notifications, send an email to pa_ltbmu@fs.fed.us.

Calif. lawmakers ask if fantasy betting is skill or chance

By Juliet Williams, AP

SACRAMENTO – Purveyors of daily fantasy sports gaming made their pitch for minimal regulations for the fast-growing industry before a panel of California lawmakers on Wednesday, arguing that the online sports match ups are a harmless outlet for fans and purely based on skill, not chance.

“These are games of skill, skill that rewards knowledge of sports,” said Griffin Finan, an attorney for DraftKings, one

of the nation's two largest operators, along with FanDuel. Griffin said that unlike gambling, the games rely on entry fees rather than wagers, and customers are not pitted against the company in the competition.

Whether the games rely upon skill or chance is key to the next regulatory steps. If they are based upon skill, lawmakers can impose regulations – from requiring transparency in their operations, imposing licensing and fees or taxing their business. If they are determined to be games of chance, lawmakers cannot intervene, but it's unclear if the leagues could continue operating.

Critics argue that the games in which participants “draft” players and win money based on the athletes’ performances in the real world are illegal online gambling that should either be shut down or heavily regulated.

Assemblyman Marc Levine, D-San Rafael, asked the representatives how they can say anyone in a jersey on the couch can win, if it's a game based on skill. “How do you justify the marketing? Unless you are pretty sophisticated, you are going to lose your money,” Levine asked.

Peter Schoenke, president of RotoWire.com, which syndicates the fantasy content to online companies such as NFL.com, said players can improve as they learn more and play more. Winning requires “judgment-making skills similar to a coach or a general manager,” he said.

California lawmakers are the latest to wade into the issue, which sprang to public attention after an onslaught of advertising at the start of the NFL season last September. As many as 20 states are expected to consider regulations next year.

Nevada regulators declared the bets illegal gambling and ordered the sites out of the state unless they acquire gambling licenses. New York's attorney general this week

ordered DraftKings and FanDuel to stop operating, but the companies won a temporary reprieve allowing them to continue operating through January.

The companies have also become a major source of revenue for professional sports teams, setting up comfortable lounges for players inside arenas and helping marketers connect with millennial fans, who want “second-screen content,” said Peter Thuresson, vice president of the LA Clippers.

Assemblyman Adam Gray, D-Merced, who led Wednesday’s hearing, has proposed legislation that would require league operators to be licensed by the state Department of Justice.

Representatives said they are eager to work with lawmakers – to a point. Martha Coakley, the former attorney general of Massachusetts, testified on behalf of DraftKings. She said the company supports regulations to address “compulsive behavior,” prevent underage players and transparency about fees.

When asked in an interview if the companies should be required to pay taxes, she said the companies already pay business taxes in the states where they are based, and everyone who wins more than \$600 receives a 1099 IRS tax form.

“So what would be the rationale to say, ‘We the state of California want, you know, a chunk of this?’ she said. “We are a business, we’re going to play by business rules, we do what other businesses do.”

Hyatt in Incline to be

upgraded

By Howard Stutz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Full House Resorts and an affiliate of Hyatt Resorts said Thursday they will invest a combined \$5 million to upgrade the Grand Lodge Casino at Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe.

Las Vegas-based Full House, which operates the casino through a management agreement, will invest \$1.5 million in new gaming equipment at the Incline Village property. Also, the company's lease to manage the Grand Lodge was extended to 2023.

Read the whole story