Mold found at former Stateline school

Mold found at the former Kingsbury Middle School site has put what officials hope is only a minor obstacle into the process of selling the parcel.

"The board adopted a resolution (April 10) which authorized me to work with our buyer to address the findings of mold in the building. We hope to have those negotiations tied up this week and move forward with the sale," DCSD Superintendent Teri White told *Lake Tahoe News.*

The Douglas County School District board first voted to put the 22-acre site on the market in January 2012.

In January, the district entered an agreement with a **Bay Area firm** to buy the property and buildings for $3.75 million.

The empty 36,000-square-foot former Kingsbury Middle School in Stateline is costing the district between $10,000 and $15,000 a month to ensure the alarm is on, pipes don't freeze and other basics are taken care of.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Opinion: Legislation to help

overtaxed Californians

By Ted Gaines

To overtaxed Californians, every day feels like April 15. California sports the highest income tax brackets of any state, top-five gas taxes (and that's without including the "cap-and-trade" fees on every gallon, which would push us to the top of the heap), the highest corporate tax in the western states, and so on down the line. And for all that money, the state's taxpayers get broken down roads, crumbling spillways, and a laughingstock of a high-speed rail project that is attaining cult status in the annals of wasteful spending.


Ted Gaines

I say enough. That's why I'm introducing a group of bills to ease the burden on the families and businesses who see too much of their money go to Sacramento with too little result.

Senate Bill 995 will raise the standard deduction by $1,500 for single filers and $3,000 for joint filers, creating a benefit that will be enjoyed by everyone.

Senate Bill 996 will lower California's corporate income tax from 8.84 percent to 6.84 percent, and take us from ninth highest in the U.S. to 25th highest. California has lost 9,000 businesses or expansions to other states recently, and the legislature seems intent on taxing the rest of them out of state as soon as it can. But by giving them a chance to keep more of what they earn, we can retain businesses, and help them invest, expand, hire more workers and raise wages for their employees.

Senate Bill 1218 will make contributions to 529 College Savings Plans tax deductible in California. Currently, money in these plans grows tax-free but California is one of nine states that forces savers to use after-tax dollars to fund the plans. With college costs exploding and students graduating with heavy debt, we should make it easier for families to save. By letting savers deduct 529 plan contributions, we can help them build bigger college nest eggs for their children and grandchildren and free up more state dollars for our neediest students.

Senate Bill 1231 is going to grant a $6 billion tax rebate to the people by sending a check to every Californian who filed a tax return in 2016. The governor estimates that California has a surplus of more than $6 billion this budget year, and that's after fully funding our rainy day fund. That's after increasing school spending by nearly 70-percent over the past 6 years. This money is extra, above and beyond the comprehensive plans and unreasonable demands of California state government. This is simple tax justice, and the overburdened California taxpayers deserve their money back.

Taxpayers need a champion in Sacramento. These bills are ambitious and taken together would strike a blow against the tax-and-spend politicians who are spoiled by their stranglehold on taxpayer wallets. Even with all these changes, California won't transform into a tax haven. It still won't fully compete with zero-income tax Nevada or zero-sales tax Oregon. But these bills are a giant step in the right direction, and they would let the people know that their fate isn't to always get poorer so their government can get richer.

Ted Gaines represents the 1st Senate District, which includes all or parts of Alpine, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Shasta, Sierra and Siskiyou *counties.*

Plastics found in organic fertilizer from food waste

By Christopher Joyce, NPR

Tiny particles of plastic are showing up all over the world, floating in the ocean, buried in soil, in food and even in beer. Now there's new research that's found microplastics in fertilizer — organic fertilizer from food waste, in fact.

Collecting food waste to make fertilizer is a big deal in parts of Europe and is catching on in the U.S. But Ruth Freitag, a chemist at the University of Bayreuth in Germany, says there's a problem.

"What happens most of the time is that people don't like to put garbage into the bin as it is. They like to wrap it up," she says — usually in a plastic bag. Freitag says some of the contamination also comes from plastic food wrappers as well; she can tell by the type of plastic they find.

Read the whole story

Gold Rush medicine subject of

talk

Bob LaPerriere

Bob LaPerriere, a retired medical doctor and historian, will be sharing stories of the woes of immigrants traveling to California for the Gold Rush in a talk on May 8.

These adventurers were subjected to numerous devastating diseases at a time when doctors were unable to provide specific treatment and many of the doctors were really not doctors. Thousands died from various epidemics at a time in history when the most advanced medical treatment consisted of bleeding, cupping, puking, purging and the use of “drugs” such as mercury and arsenic.

LaPerriere will explore these experiences using quotes from diaries of the time to illustrate and bring the past alive.

The event starts at 7pm at Camp Richardson’s Historic Hotel, 1900 Jameson Beach Road. Cost is $3 to attend, free for Lake Tahoe Historical Society members.

Wirth out as president of

Squaw-Alpine resorts

Andy Wirth's tenure as president of Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadow is over. Photo Copyright 2018 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

Andy Wirth is no longer at the helm of Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski resorts.

Wirth has been a polarizing figure in the Olympic Valley and greater Lake Tahoe-Truckee areas.

Why exactly the 54-year-old abruptly left has not been disclosed. A statement by Wirth issued by the resort called it a retirement. "It is after careful consideration and reflection that I have made this decision. My retirement will allow me to not only spend more time with my family, but focus on some of my passions, including the active support of wounded warriors and environmental causes – advocacy and action."

Wirth did not return *Lake Tahoe News'* phone call.

He could have easily decided to step away after nearly dying in an October 2013 skydiving accident that ripped off most of his right arm, causing extensive bleeding.

Wirth has been leading Squaw since August 2010, when he was appointed to be president after Nancy Cushing stepped down from that role. She had been president since 1994, but was running the entire resort after her husband, Alex, died in 2006. It was Alex Cushing who brought the Winter Olympics to the resort in 1960.

KSL Capital Partners of Colorado bought Squaw in November 2010 and kept Wirth on board. Since then, Alpine Meadows has come under the same ownership umbrella.

In April 2017, KSL partnered with Aspen Skiing to buy Intrawest Resort Holdings' six resorts, and then went on a buying spree that included Deer Valley in Utah and Mammoth in California. The new company, named Alterra Mountain Company, kept Wirth on as the leader of Squaw-Alpine.

While Wirth described himself as an environmentalist, environmental groups saw him as the enemy. This largely has to do with him being the mouthpiece for KSL's plans to spend $1 billion over 25 years to build more than 1,000 residential units, hotels, retail, restaurants and bars, and an indoor adventure center.

Lawsuits have been filed regarding that project.

Then there is the controversial proposal to build a **gondola** that would link Squaw and Alpine on the outskirts of Granite Chief Wilderness Area.

Deaths and accidents, while part of the reality of the ski industry, have also plagued the resort during Wirth's tenure, with some questioning safety and how incidents are handled.

Wirth has also overseen millions of dollars in improvements, mostly at Squaw. His leadership has also brought in a more customer service oriented approach to dealing with guests. He was also instrumental in bringing the **World Cup** back to Squaw in 2017.

In the interim, Ron Cohen, Alterra's deputy general counsel, will serve as president and COO in Wirth's place. David Perry, Alterra's president and COO, will also be having more of a say regarding Squaw-Alpine until someone is hired to run the Tahoe resorts.

California winemakers have eye on China's tariffs

By Julian M. Alston, Daniel Sumner and Olena Sambucci, The Conversation

California's vintners and grape growers are among the latest potential victims in the escalating trade spat between the U.S. and China.

Responding to U.S. plans to impose import duties on goods from China, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce reciprocated by introducing new tariffs on 128 U.S. products, including an additional 15 percent import tariff on wine.

Wine producers in California are concerned about the immediate and longer-term implications of this new tariff, on top of those already in place. Reports have already begun to circulate about orders being canceled, redirected or renegotiated as a result.

How worried should U.S. winemakers be?

The U.S. wine industry

The U.S. is a major player in the global wine industry both in terms of consumption and production.

Americans consumed 3.59 billion liters of wine in 2016, or about 11.1 liters per person. About a third of that was imported.

In terms of production, the U.S. ranks fourth after Italy, France and Spain – making more than 3 billion liters in 2016. California produced about 85 percent of that.

While the vast majority of U.S. wine is consumed domestically, about 10 percent is shipped overseas. In 2017, the U.S. exported 380 million liters of wine worth $1.46 billion. Canada was the top destination, importing 28 percent of the total, followed by the U.K. with 15 percent, Hong Kong at 8 percent and Japan with 6 percent.

China’s small share

China, for its part, imports quite a bit of wine. Very little, however, comes from the U.S.

China imported about $2.37 billion worth of wine in 2016, most of which came from the European Union. Only $76 million, or 2.2 percent, was American.

That puts China sixth among top destinations for U.S. wine exports, with a share of about 5 percent.

These figures underestimate the true value somewhat because more than half of Hong Kong’s imports are then shipped or smuggled to China. Even allowing for these adjustments, Chinese consumption of U.S. wine makes up less than 1 percent of the total value of American production.

It’s clear that at the moment China is not all that important to most California wine producers. Why then are U.S. wine producers anxious about new tariffs disrupting trade to this relatively minor market?

It’s all about the future. Although per capita consumption of wine in China remains very low, China is the world’s fastest-growing wine market and is expected to soon become the second largest, after the U.S.

From 2000 to 2016, Chinese wine consumption soared from 219 million liters in 2000 to 1.24 billion liters in 2016. Some observers estimate growth was even higher. Much of that consumption was imported – especially in the premium wine segment.

Economists who have studied these markets project further significant growth in China’s demand for wine, including premium wine imports.

This would make getting pushed out of China especially troubling at a time when global per-capita wine consumption has been declining, especially in Europe.

Already at a disadvantage

Even without the new tax, U.S. exporters were facing a tilted playing field that would have constrained the potential for increasing California’s market share.

Without the new tariffs, China already collected a tariff of

14 percent on most U.S. wine – though it can reach as high as 20 percent in some categories. In contrast, wine from some countries, such as Chile, Georgia, New Zealand and, starting next year, Australia, enter China duty-free.

With the new tariff in effect, most American wines will incur duties of 29 percent.

Hong Kong, however, does offer a back door to U.S. wine. The China-governed island phased out its own steep tariffs on wine imports a decade ago. This has created an incentive for smuggling.

So what does all this mean?

Given the small share of total U.S. wine currently going to China, the new tariff would not likely have a material effect on the American wine industry, whether in terms of domestic prices or producer bottom lines. Still, it will be disruptive for particular businesses especially in the near term.

The real concern for American wine producers is that high tariffs applied today may make U.S. wine too expensive and cause them to miss out as hundreds of millions of Chinese middle-income consumers increase their wine consumption over the next decade.

More broadly, if the trade spat escalates to a trade war, serious damage will be done to all of U.S. agriculture, including grape and wine producers. Even more troubling, if the loss of trade causes broader damage to the U.S. economy, it could even affect demand for California wine in its most important market: the United States.

Julian M. Alston is director of the Robert Mondavi Institute Center for Wine Economics at UC Davis; Daniel Sumner is the Frank H. Buck Jr. distinguished professor of agricultural and resource economics at UC Davis; and Olena Sambucci is a postdoctoral scholar in agricultural and resource economics at

UC Davis.

Sewage spill contained near Upper Truckee River

South Tahoe Public Utility District last weekend experienced a sewage spill of nearly 2,500 gallons near Washoan Boulevard in El Dorado County.

It was coming from a manhole near Onnontioga Street.

"The blockage was caused by 'biodegradeable' toilet wipes hanging up on roots that intruded into the main sewer from unused sewer laterals. The roots were cut out, and a herbicide was added to the sewer to kill the roots in the service laterals," South Tahoe PUD General Manager Richard Solbrig told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Crews cleaned the area and tested the small drainage channel leading into the meadow that connect to the Upper Truckee River for bacterial contamination.

"Since several points close to the spill site tested above the health department's desired maximums, the area has been posted to avoid contact with water in the drainage channel," Solbring said.

Testing will continue on a daily basis until levels are safe. Warning signs will remain in place until then.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Douglas County explorers excel at competition

Douglas County sheriff’s explorers participated earned 15 trophies out of 19 events at the Central Valley Law Enforcement Explorer Competition.

They took the overall award, out-preforming the long standing first-place holders Hanford Police Department. They received three first place awards: in building search, team obstacle, and Individual Obstacle.

Fallon Montanucci was awarded a laptop computer as her scholarship prize for oral interview.

The 13 explorer posts competed April 6-7 in Tulare.

Exploring provides vocational training and experience to youths ages 14-20 who have a desire to learn about law enforcement or the military.

Competing were Cameron Norkunas, Maverick Duffy, Sierra Edwards, Manuel Castrellon, Tobin Schultz, Spencer Flanders, Charity Rosier, James Alvarez, Tyler Smith, Madison Palmer, Fallon Montanucci, Brady McLaughlin, Caitlyn McLaughlin, Nick Wiggins and Jocelyn Smith.

Calif. commercial pot revenue projections fall short

By Brad Branan, Sacramento Bee

In the first two months of cannabis legalization, consumers bought an estimated $339 million worth of marijuana products from retailers in California, 50 percent less than state projections, according to a leading analytics firm.

The state has estimated that retail cannabis sales for the year would be $3.4 billion, or $570 million every two months.

Read the whole story

Lake Tahoe real estate market starts year strong

Lake Tahoe’s real estate market started 2018 with strong sales, seeing a 68 percent rise in homes sold for more than $1 million. The median price of a home rose 25 percent to $665,000. Homes sold for less than $1 million were down 6 percent.

The figures are part of a quarterly report released by Lake Tahoe-based real estate agency Chase International. The numbers compare all MLS home sales from Jan. 1-March 31 to the same time quarter in 2017.

Incline Village saw the biggest jump in the sale of million-dollar homes with a 121 percent increase while the East Shore was the only area to see a jump (83 percent) in homes sold for less than $1 million. Incline also experienced a 29 percent increase in the median home price ($1,120,000) while the East Shore was the only area to see a dip (11 percent) in price to $830,000.

“Record low inventory around the lake is creating a seller’s market,” said Sue Lowe, corporate vice president for Chase. “The new tax laws and incentives in Nevada are fueling further interest and activity in those communities.”

The sale of condos priced over $500,000 was up 37 percent around the lake, while those priced less than that were down 11 percent. The median price of condo was up 15 percent to $430,000.

The median price of a home in Truckee dropped 1 percent to $705,000. Homes sold for more than $1 million were up 70 percent, while homes sold for less than $1 million were down 5 percent. There was a 188 percent leap in the sale of Truckee condos priced above $500,000, while those sold for less than that were down 33 percent.