Placer SPCA to receive dogs rescued from meat farm

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

Dogs rescued from South Korea, where they had been raised for meat, will soon be available for adoption in Placer County.

Staff members from the Placer Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals will travel to San Francisco International Airport today to receive five or six dogs. The Humane Society International has shut down multiple dog meat farms to give these animal a second chance at life, according to a Placer SPCA news release.

Read the whole story

Authorities criticized for lack of warning about wildfire

By Associated Press

High school math teacher Bill Davis watched from his home as smoke mounted from one of the most destructive fires in California in recent memory.

From a previous fire in late July, he knew to expect a recorded call on his cellphone or look for someone coming through the neighborhood with a bullhorn yelling for people to evacuate.

“None of that happened,” he said. His house in Lake County burned after he finally rounded up his cats and left.

Davis was among a number of survivors who say they never got an official evacuation notice Saturday about the blaze – a situation that raises questions about whether more could have been done to notify residents.

Authorities defended their warnings and rescue attempts, saying they did all they could to reach people in the remote area of homes, many prized for their privacy.

“You may get that notice, or you may not, depending on how fast that fire is moving. If you can see the fire, you need to be going,” said Lynnette Round, a spokeswoman for CalFire.

Round said two men in Calaveras County – 66-year-old Mark McCloud and 82-year-old Owen Goldsmith – died after rejecting orders to evacuate.

Three people were killed in a separate fire in Lake County. It wasn’t clear if they received evacuation notices. However, two of them declined requests by friends and family to leave.

The body of 72-year-old Barbara McWilliams, who used a walker, was found in her home in Anderson Springs. Her caregiver, Jennifer Hittson, said there were no evacuation orders when she left McWilliams’ home around 3 p.m. Saturday and no indication the fire was that serious.

She asked McWilliams if she wanted to leave but the retired teacher declined, saying the fire didn’t seem bad.

Elsewhere in Anderson Springs, the body of former newspaper reporter Leonard Neft, 69, was found near his burnt car after what may have been an attempt to escape, his daughter Joslyn Neft said Friday. His wife had asked him to leave earlier Saturday, but he said the fire looked far away.

Elsewhere in Lake County, the body of Bruce Beven Burns, 65,

was found in a building on the grounds of his brother's recycling business, where Burns also lived. It's unknown why he stayed.

Davis said he waited for an evacuation notice until the electricity failed. At that point, he called CalFire for information and waited on hold for an hour.

"When I finally got through … they said my street was not on an evacuation order, but you might want to leave. I was never told, 'Get the hell out of there, there's a huge fire coming at you,'" he said.

The Lake County sheriff's office has declined to respond to repeated phone calls and emails seeking comment on how and when residents were notified. In a statement issued earlier this week, sheriff's Lt. Steve Brooks said CalFire requested evacuation assistance at 1:50 p.m. Saturday but it remains unclear which communities were notified and how.

CalFire spokesman Richard Cordova could not confirm early evacuation details but said that given the speed of the fire, the death toll could have been much higher.

"Any loss of a life is heartfelt, but there should have been a lot more lives lost with the way that fire was moving," he said.

The Lake County fire tore through 62 square miles in 12 hours, burning nearly 600 homes and causing thousands of residents to flee. Lucas Spelman, fire captain for CalFire, said 15,400 people were under evacuation.

Lake County Supervisor Jim Comstock, 65, who lives in Middletown, said he didn't receive an evacuation order and he believes authorities didn't have time to issue orders in person, given the fire's speed.

Comstock stayed on his 1,700-acre ranch with his wife,

daughter and grandchildren, battling the flames. The fire scorched all but 50 acres of his land and spared his house and barn.

“I’m old, and I’m ornery,” he said of the reason he stayed.

Gary Herrin defended his 3 acres in Middletown. No one told him to leave, he said, and he wouldn’t have anyway.

When the fire hit his street around 5:30 p.m. Saturday, Herrin said, he and several others used water from wells and swimming pools to battle flames, saving eight homes.

At 10 p.m. he collapsed by a swimming pool with about 6 inches of water left. “We were going to stand our ground, and we decided to fight,” he said.

The story brought a shudder from James McMullen, a former California state fire marshal who runs a fire consulting business in Davis.

“Some people don’t realize how intense a wildfire is and they say, ‘Oh, I’ll just stay here with my garden hose and leap up on the roof, and yet that’s the worst thing they can do,'” he said.

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2 ex-Calif. governors come out against teacher tenure

By Bob Egelko, San Francisco Chronicle

Former Govs. Pete Wilson and Arnold Schwarzenegger and constitutional scholar Laurence Tribe joined the legal attack on California’s teacher tenure laws, telling a state appeals

court the job-security and seniority statutes leave some of the state's neediest students in the hands of incompetent teachers.

It is "nearly impossible to remove ineffective teachers from classrooms" because of the state laws, lawyers for Wilson and Schwarzenegger said in a filing to the Second District Court of Appeal in Los Angeles. After 15 years of legislative inaction and an unsuccessful 2005 ballot measure backed by Schwarzenegger to change the tenure law, it is time for the courts to act, they said.

No other state allows "such lopsided school laws which favor teacher interests over the rights of students," said a second brief coauthored by Tribe, a Harvard law professor with liberal leanings whose students have included future PresidentBarack Obama and U.S. Chief Justice John Roberts. Other academics who signed the brief included Rachel Moran, a UCLA law school professor and former dean.

Read the whole story

Truckee collecting unused prescription drugs

On Sept. 26 from 9am-1pm the Truckee Police Department and Tahoe Truckee Future Without Drug Dependence will give the public an opportunity to prevent pill abuse and theft by ridding their homes of potentially dangerous expired, unused, and unwanted prescription drugs.

Bring medications for disposal to the Gateway Shopping Center parking lot in front of Safeway at 11290 Donner Pass Road.

Remove pills from containers. Sharps and aerosols are not accepted.

This event is for residents only; no businesses or DEA registrants.

In the previous nine National Take-Back events from 2010-14, approximately 277,595 pounds or 138 tons of unused medication was collected from Northern California and Central Valley residents. Nationwide, 2,411 tons of drugs were collected.

“Medicines that languish in home cabinets are highly susceptible to misuse and abuse. Rates of prescription drug abuse in the U.S. are alarmingly high, as are the number of accidental poisonings and overdoses due to these drugs,” Truckee police said in a statement. “Studies show that a majority of abused prescription drugs are obtained from family and friends, including from the home medicine cabinet. In addition, Americans are now advised that their usual methods for disposing of unused medicines – flushing them down the toilet or throwing them in the trash–both pose potential safety and health hazards.”

Gaines makes it official – running for EDC supervisor



Beth Gaines

Beth Gaines, who represents part of Tahoe in the California Assembly, made it official Friday that she will be running for the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors.

Gaines, who now lives in El Dorado Hills, will seek the seat currently occupied by Ron Mikulaco.

The election is next year.

Term limits will force her out of the Assembly.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Chefs, vintners take home awards from Truckee event

The 30th anniversary of the Lake Tahoe Autumn Food and Wine Festival included multiple days of of activities ranging from a hands-on mozzarella making to numerous farm-to-table dinners.

Leading up to last Sunday's grand finale at Northstar was the Blazing Pans Mountain Chef Cook Off. Executive chef Jason Friendy of the Resort at Squaw Creek/Six Peaks Grille and executive chef Rob Wyss of Sunnyside competed in the hourlong competition, producing three-course meals with this year's secret ingredient, beer. Friendy was awarded the title of Blazing Pans Mountain Chef champion.

Sunday's Culinary Competition and Grand Tasting featured

nearly two dozen restaurants paired with premium wines, craft beers or spirits. More than 60 wines were poured during the weekend along with a selection of handcrafted beverages.

The Judges Choice Award is granted to the winner of a blind tasting by a panel of industry experts including professional wine judges, professional chefs, culinary experts and food and wine pairing experts. The second competition, People's Choice Award, is chosen by festival attendees' ballot votes.

The winners were:

Judges' Choice Awards

Best Pairing of Food and Beverage

- Gold: Northstar California Resort and Benziger Family Winery
- Silver: Six Peaks Grille – Resort at Squaw Creek and Alaskan Amber Brewing Co.
- Bronze: Granlibakken Resort and Emeritus Vineyards

Best Food

- Gold: Wolfdale's Cuisine Unique Restaurant
- Silver: Smokey Bones Bar & Fire Grill
- Bronze: Moody's Bistro, Bar & Beats

Best Red Wine

- Gold: Emeritus Vineyards
- Silver: Chappellet Winery
- Bronze: Veedercrest Vineyards

Best White Wine

- Gold: Gruet Winery's Champagne
- Silver: ZD Wines
- Bronze: Lumen Wines

Best Beverage Other than Wine

- Gold: Charbay Distillery & Winery

People’s Choice Awards

Best Beer: Goose Island Brewery’s Seasonal Oktoberfest
Best Other Than Wine: Charbay Distillery & Winery
Best White: ZD Wines
Best Red: Orin Swift Cellars
Best Table Presentation: Northstar
Best Food: Campo Reno
Best Pairing: Northstar and Benziger Family Winery.

Bijou Bike Park set to transform SLT cycling



Matt Stuck works to get Bijou Bike Park in South Lake Tahoe ready to open Sept. 19. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

To the uninitiated, Bijou Bike Park doesn't look like it's anywhere near finished. And, yet, it's opening today in South Lake Tahoe.

To the cyclist who is well versed in these types of things, the park looks phenomenal. Some of those riders have been testing the various features.

Matt Stuck, a volunteer with Bijou Bike Park Association, was reshaping one of the jumps earlier this week because on a test run the land was "heavy on the feet." The solution – make it steeper.

He expected the landing to be 8½-feet-tall, with a 6-foot-tall lip by the time he was done. Cyclists will come off the wood 6-footer, turn about 40 degrees in midair to land on the dirt embankment.



Ben Fish demonstrates the teeter-totter.

If that sounds too gnarly, there are tamer routes to take. This particular feature is on the big line. There are small and medium lines, as well.

Stuck on Sept. 16 gave the group attending the Tahoe Talk a preview of the route. With ease he flew through the air, scooted along the dirt, and played on the cedar obstacles. One is called the Hammock – but this 36-foot structure is no place to be dozing off.

“It’s like a roller coaster,” Stuck told *Lake Tahoe News* of the route.

Pete Fink, a member of the city’s Parks and Recreation

Commission, said kids are building more dangerous things in the woods. The park brings a more controlled environment to this type of fun.

The features have a metal frame with cedar on the top and anchors into the soil. Most of the landings are hard, compacted dirt.

Ben Fish since 2011 has been the driving force behind the park. He is president of Tahoe Area Mountain Biking Association as well as the nonprofit Bijou Bike Park Association. It is members of the latter who worked with the city of South Lake Tahoe to bring the nearly 5-acre park to fruition at a cost of about $200,000.



Riders will enter the Hammock from the feature on the right.

The contractor is the same group that has built the last three Olympic BMX tracks – including the one in Brazil.

“The city stepped up and took a chance,” Fish said. When the process started there were 35 such parks in the country, now there are about 100.

But it wasn’t easy. Often times cycling is seen as a second-class sport in Lake Tahoe compared to ball fields. Those get built at a cost $1 million, and hundreds of thousands of dollars have regularly been going into field improvements.

The bike park has a trail around the outside that is one-third of a mile. Near the entrance is a small pump track, with the larger one to the left in the trees. The intent of a pump track is that you don't need to pedal.

The three slopestyle routes are similar to the concept of slopestyle on snow where riders will go over a slew of features.

The BMX track is 1,000-feet long – a couple hundred feet longer than the current one near South Tahoe Middle School that will be coming out this fall. The Bijou track has a slurry seal on it.

All of the attractions are free and open during the hours of the larger park. Everyone, no matter one's age, must wear a helmet.

Fish anticipates daily maintenance will be required. His association is looking for volunteers.

The park opens today after the 50th anniversary parade that starts at 10am at the Y and finishes at Bijou Community Park.

Opinion: Time to stop subsidizing religion

By David Niose, Washington Post

The arguments for taxing churches have been around for many years, but there is reason to believe that America's changing religious demographics will soon give them more traction. As more Americans abandon organized religion, many of the newly secular are unsympathetic to subsidizing religion via the tax

code.

Recent polling shows that almost one in four Americans, and more than one-third of those aged 18 to 33, now claim no religious affiliation. Back when virtually everyone subscribed to a religious faith (the unaffiliated number polled in the single digits for most of the 20th century) an across-the-board tax break for all religions was arguably fair – or at least inoffensive. But times have changed, and so have attitudes about the extraordinary perks that churches enjoy.

Perhaps the most egregious example of religious privilege under the tax code is the so-called parsonage exemption. Under current tax law, "ministers of the gospel" may deduct virtually all costs associated with housing from their income. At its worst, the exemption subsidizes the unseemly: televangelists enjoying multimillion-dollar estates on the taxpayer dime. But even in a more ordinary context, the allowance represents an indefensible benefit running to organized religion, subsidized by taxpayers.

Read the whole story

Recent moves propel more drone flights in Nev.

By Daniel Rothberg, Las Vegas Sun

Eighteen months after its creation, Nevada's drone test site is finally gaining momentum.

After the Federal Aviation Administration broadened the state's authority earlier this year, the site conducted more

flights in one week than it had in all months prior. It now has a NASA contract and a service agreement with the FAA for flight trials and research.

The test site and Nevada's developing drone industry was the primary focus of an FAA-sponsored meeting Thursday in the Clark County Commission Chambers, where officials from federal, state and local government attempted to shed light on projections for the future of the industry in the state.

Read the whole story

Law firm hired to help defend Nev. ed program

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY – Attorney General Adam Laxalt announced Thursday that he has retained a nationally recognized law firm to help defend against the ACLU legal challenge to the state's new Education Savings Account program.

The firm Bancroft PLLC will provide the attorney general's office with legal strategy and analysis on the case, which Gov. Brian Sandoval has urged be resolved as quickly as possible.

Leading Bancroft's involvement in the case will be former U.S. Solicitor General Paul D. Clement, who has argued over 75 cases before the U.S. Supreme Court and is widely recognized as a top appellate advocate in the country.

Read the whole story