

Busy Tahoe summer equates to big money



The Beacon restaurant at Camp Richardson is party central for much of the summer. Photos/Susan Wood

By Susan Wood

You weren't seeing a mirage this summer.

The vehicle backups on Lake Tahoe roads were not caused so much by heavy road construction, but by travelers who were frequenting the tourist destination in large numbers this summer. And according to tourism officials and stakeholders, there are multiple reasons they were coming to the mountains.

Some may think tearing up the infrastructure would deter tourists because fewer lanes mean slower traffic, thus delaying the fun. But in the case of the Lake Tahoe Visitors

Authority's marketing efforts, it brings people in because travelers welcome an improved South Shore when they consider a destination for their vacations.

"Our focus has been renovations, and redevelopment projects are under way. In our market, word has gotten out about Tahoe's improvement projects, and that's powerful in the media," LTVA Executive Director Carol Chaplin told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Definitely we think visitation is up. There are a lot of factors, but I haven't talked to anyone who isn't pleased – how much so depends on who you talk to."

Chaplin estimated a 15 to 20 percent leap in lodging and restaurant receipts compared to 2014. The summer campaign increased LTVA's website visits by 240 percent. In July alone, the LTVA reported 45,000 visits a week.

And an even more welcome sign: Hotel booking windows are longer in terms of advance notice and length of stay. This means more mid-week business – something all tourism-related businesses strive for.

Attributable factors vary, but one the LTVA has kept its eye on is its inaugural promotion to the San Diego market. This requires getting in the head of the average vacationer. The San Francisco Bay Area market will always be a cash cow for Lake Tahoe, but San Diego is whole new terrain. It takes more than three times the drive time to get here, or it requires paying for airfare. It's simple math – the bigger the investment, the longer the investment in time staying here.

A market area split by a drive or fly option has been lucrative at first glance.

"We're hitting the sweet spot on that," Chaplin said.

And beyond gas prices being down, the events seem to fuel the interest. Recreation-oriented – including the adventurous, extreme kind – have been popping up like spring wildflowers. An old favorite golf event – the American Century Championship

– celebrated its best attendance ever at 41,800.

“Generally speaking, travel is up and international travel is up,” she added.

All over the West, the trend for more traveling has increased.



Getting a parking spot at one of the beaches was tough at times. Photo/Susan Wood

People are on the move

Summer lodging occupancy is up 8 percent, with revenue rising 14 percent May through October, according to Denver-based DestiMetrics. The travel data research firm collects data from 19 western mountain destination resorts in six Western states.

“The robust numbers this month not only illustrate strength in both occupancy and rates but successful and sustained growth in summer business for mountain communities,” company Director Ralf Garrison said in a statement. “It’s pretty clear that mountain travel, as a whole, is strong and resilient despite weather challenges including everything from drought to excessive rainy patterns that have been experienced in different regions this summer.”

In California, the State Parks system has seen an overall estimated increase of up to 10 percent this summer. Some venues such as Donner State Park have enjoyed at least a 30 percent increase in visitors, with Emerald Bay leading the way at a 40 percent leap in receipts this year compared to the previous one. State Parks get revenue from parking, visitor centers and campground bookings.

"This is one of the busiest summers some of our rangers have ever seen," parks spokesman Scott Elliott said.

One of the biggest reasons for the push to travel is pent up demand. Tourists who may have been still stinging from the recession along with a lingering, slow-to-recover job market are fed up with waiting to travel.

North Shore looking good

"As a destination, we're running 75 percent occupancy – and that's doing great," North Lake Tahoe Resort Association spokesman J.T. Thompson told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Thompson indicated the North Shore is up 20 percent in pre-bookings – another notable positive trend. Pre-bookings translate to reservations made up to six months in advance. Those are usually reflective of more mid-week business, coinciding with South Shore trends.

"We know we're going to get the Bay Area, but we're hitting Los Angeles and Southern California and seeing the rewards for it," he said.

Beyond the specific target market push, other factors abound for more tourist traffic such as spectacular warm weather compared to extremely hot temperatures. With that, you take the celebration of the continued emergence of human-powered events. Combine that with Lake Tahoe's natural beauty, and it's a recipe for business success.

And unlike other areas of California struggling with drought,

Thompson believes the dry conditions may have helped lake visitation to varying degrees. First, fewer skiers prompted by less snow last winter pushed vacations to spring and summer. Then, there's the mere lack of water everywhere else.

"We have a lot of water (in comparison)," he said.



Non-motorized water sports don't need to worry about the drought as much as motor boats. Photo/LTN file

Just change watercraft

Even with a lower water level at the lake, there's opportunity.

It's location, location, location coupled with activity trends for Inn by the Lake General Manager Jeremy Agnew. He has seen a huge uptick in business stemming from the blockbuster popularity of standup paddleboarding. SUP requires little water underneath. That said, power boats are driven out farther on the lake, thus creating a serene experience as peaceful as hiking on water.

El Dorado Beach is a hotspot for the sport, and Inn by the Lake is feet away as the host hotel for the SUP races.

Agnew cited a surge in recreational warriors, international tourists and more childfree couples traveling in mid-August when the school year starts.

The numbers seem to add up.

Money coming in

According to South Lake Tahoe, the last transient occupancy tax collections recorded for June showed a year-over-year increase from \$1.08 million to \$1.27 million in receipts. Rooms rented comparing the same month year-to-year show a leap in city bookings from 54,548 to this year at 59,041.

“It’s been crazy this year. It started in February with people coming up because we didn’t have snow, but they liked that they didn’t have to drive in it,” Agnew said.

Ditto, said Tom Turner, who owns restaurants on the South Shore, east side and Truckee. Although his Caliente eatery traffic was tied up in the Kings Beach roadwork mess, that restaurant along with Riva Grill (South Lake Tahoe) and Bar of America (Truckee) witnessed “more people eating and drinking instead of skiing,” he noted.

Bob Hassett, who runs the Camp Richardson, Timber Cove, Lakeside and now Round Hill Pines marinas, enjoyed a decent showing on his water taxi. He pointed out how people would cart their bikes from one section of the lake to another. The increased traffic overall offset the occasional challenges experienced by the lake’s lower-than-usual water level near shore. Improvise. His staff would simply negotiate the boats out 200 yards to help the watercraft renters.

“It’s been a good summer. There were definitely a lot of people in town, and I’m happy to see that. People were pleasantly surprised they could even get on the lake and heard marinas are closed. We’ve tried to get the word out there’s plenty of water out there,” he told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Hassett went as far as to say business revenue at the marinas, which mainly represents boat rentals, is back to where it was at pre-recession standards in 2008.

This experience may coincide to a completely different South

Shore business.

With five years under her belt, Paige Rice who runs Tahoe Best Friends said she's had the "best summer ever."

The doggie day care service has been busy throughout the summer for overnight business, and that goes way beyond the locals. Some people decide to travel with their pets and stay wherever without worrying about whether the lodging establishment takes pets or not. They'll even visit their dogs during the day to check in with them.

She averages 25 daytime dog visits and 20 overnight.

"And it's consistently growing," Rice said.

She's not alone.

Sandy Cole has owned the Simple Bliss Vegan Café in the middle of South Lake Tahoe for three years and experienced a surge in business this summer to the tune of doing two-to-three times the traffic than in previous years.

"It's been amazing. I grew up here, and I haven't seen it like this for a while," she said, noting the best times are the hottest. In particular, when Sacramento hits 100 degrees, Tahoe represents an ideal escape.

"I'd be up here too if I lived somewhere else," Cole quipped.

Opinion: Following your conscience isn't the same as

being right

By Brian D. Ellison

We can say this of Kim Davis: She understands freedom of conscience. Standing defiantly behind the counter, submitting to federal marshals, emerging to a hero's greeting with presidential candidates by her side, Davis understands that no law, no court, no other human being, can bind her mind and heart. The clerk of Rowan County, Ky., has grasped that being true to what she believes is more important than her professional future, her public image, her personal well being. She has suffered for her beliefs, and in so doing she has followed a great tradition of letting one's conscience be one's guide. In this, we can admire her. Maybe, just maybe, she'll even be remembered in a positive light.

That does not, of course, mean she is right.

She is not right about religious freedom – not by a long shot. Her stand at the Rowan County Courthouse, true to her conscience though it may be, was not a free exercise of religion. On the contrary, it was an act that, according to reason and the laws and founding principles of our nation, is exactly the opposite. It was an infringement on that freedom.

She is also not right about what Christian faith would demand. While she might not regard me – an openly gay minister who has been working for more inclusive and affirming stances toward LGBT people in my church and society – as a credible source, I would argue that even her conservative evangelical brand of Christianity does not at its heart tolerate behavior like hers.

Though Davis is now free from the confines of the Carter County Detention Center, it is not too late to reflect on her act of conscience and the cries of the thousands who gathered to celebrate it. It is also not too late for her to present a

truer picture of biblical faith, one that both obeys its commandments and leaves her conscience intact.

The right of people to freely practice their religion was enshrined in the First Amendment's protections – and, for most of our country's history, in the largely unchallenged habits of Americans (at least when it comes to practicing conventional, mainstream Christian religion). This enshrinement has meant, among other things, that pastors preach what they want (and marry whom they want, not incidentally), that partakers of the Eucharist drink what they want, and that certain tribes smoke what they want.

For a long time, religious liberty wasn't discussed much in the political news because the subject is so, well, religious. Until the last couple of years, that is.

To many today, "religious freedom" has come to mean the freedom to interfere on religious grounds. Today, "religious freedom" is given as grounds for an employer not to provide health care coverage. As a cover for parents who create a public health risk for other people's children by not vaccinating their own. As a pre-emptive strike in support of the hypothetical florist who so abhors same-sex matrimony that he cannot abide giving it his imprimatur of calla lilies and hydrangeas.

These are complex cases, to be sure. They reflect a dynamic legal question that we will surely be sorting out for years to come.

But the Kim Davis case is uncomplicated: Religious freedom is no justification for a court clerk to refuse to issue marriage licenses in accordance with a decision of the Supreme Court of the United States. In fact, religious freedom means exactly the opposite of what Kim Davis seems to think it means. Religious freedom protects couples from her. In the current drama, Davis is the state, and her infringement on the

religious freedom of the couples appearing before her for licenses is the very definition of violating the First Amendment.

There are fair and practical questions here. Must Davis' conscience really bind her actions as clerk, anyway? Does the IRS worker who processes tax returns bear moral responsibility for the wars those taxes support? Was Davis personally vouching for the moral character, practical wisdom, or even the legality of each of the marriages behind the licenses she freely signed in the past? If so, she bore a bigger responsibility than one might think a county clerk should be obliged to accept.

To be clear, Davis does get to enjoy certain religious freedom protections. No court can force her to issue licenses, and the judge who sent her to jail made no such demand. She had the option then, and still has it now, to resign as clerk. No one has a right to public office. Consider the numerous county clerks who resigned last summer in the week after the Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*. Several of them made thoughtful public statements explaining that since they could no longer uphold the law of the land, they would do the only thing they could with a clear conscience: step aside. This is the real act of conscience – the act that earns you mention in the same breath as other great leaders who have sacrificed for a cause. If, of course, the cause was just.

I've been ordained for 16 years, including 13 years pastoring a congregation with whom I could not be fully open about my identity as a gay man because of denominational policies. For the last three years, I've led a national organization that has worked for LGBT inclusion in my denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA). We've been pleased in the past year to play a part in giving our pastors and congregations the freedom to offer the blessing of marriage to all couples, regardless of gender. These changes in our church took effect just weeks before the Supreme Court made it a relevant issue

in every single state.

Which is to say: I'm not a lawyer; I'm a minister. And what I'm struck by most in this national conversation around Kim Davis is not actually the debate about religious freedom. What strikes me most is the lack of conversation over the morality of her decision, the uncritical acceptance of the idea that her act of "conscience" is faithful and true to her religion. I've been struck by the people rallying around her outside the jailhouse during and after her incarceration, and their praise for the principles Davis has purportedly upheld so well.

Much can and will be written about Davis' failure to demonstrate all manner of Christian virtues. How she did not show love and grace to the same-sex couples who stood before her. How there may have been some logs in her own eyes while she was identifying specks in the eyes of others. How her views conflict with ample biblical scholarship and a growing Christian movement – that includes many evangelicals – to support same-sex marriage as a faithful expression of covenant love.

Why have so few Christians – who can and do disagree about the morality of homosexuality – stood up and said what we almost all agree on – that it just isn't OK to break promises? I don't know any Christians – or, honestly, people of any religious faith – who would otherwise defend a failure to honor vows. Here, according to the Associated Press, is the vow taken by every county clerk in Kentucky upon assuming office:

"I, ———, do swear that I will well and truly discharge the duties of the office of ——— County Circuit Court clerk, according to the best of my skill and judgment, making the due entries and records of all orders, judgments, decrees, opinions and proceedings of the court, and carefully filing and preserving in my office all books and papers which come to my possession by virtue of my office; and that I will not

knowingly or willingly commit any malfeasance of office, and will faithfully execute the duties of my office without favor, affection or partiality, so help me God."

Filing and preserving all papers. Without partiality. So help her God.

The instruction not to bear false witness is one of the Ten Commandments of Judeo-Christian tradition. It grounds us in our relationships and allows our public officials to enjoy the confidence of the people they serve. When people in leadership do not do what they say they will do, the system breaks down, along with our trust in each other. And, our faith teaches, willful failure to honor our commitments is sin, which leaves us broken and disconnected from the source of our life, our joy, our hope.

Kim Davis is neither evil nor saintly. She is the county clerk of Rowan County, Ky., who has found herself in a firestorm not entirely of her making, for which she was not prepared. She has been at the mercy of ideological lawyers she did not hire, secular media prone to portray rural Christians as backward, and a brutal Twittersphere full of ad hominem attacks. In the midst of it all, she has sought to sound a moral voice of conscience, and for that she deserves some admiration, even though her views are mistaken. What she does not deserve is a pass from doing the right thing – keeping her promises, doing her job, or making the sacrifice that goes with her principled stand.

And religious leaders, rather than angling to stand by her side at a rally, should be holding her accountable for that.

Brian D. Ellison is a Presbyterian minister, executive director of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians and a host/contributor at KCUR, the NPR affiliate in Kansas City, Missouri. You can follow him on Twitter at @PTSBrian. He wrote this for Zocalo Public Square.

Study: Antarctica melts if all fossil fuels burn

By Justin Gillis, New York Times

Burning all the world's deposits of coal, oil and natural gas would raise the temperature enough to melt the entire ice sheet covering Antarctica, driving the level of the sea up by more than 160 feet, scientists reported Friday.

In a major surprise to the scientists, they found that half the melting could occur in as little as a thousand years, causing the ocean to rise by something on the order of a foot per decade, roughly 10 times the rate at which it is rising now. Such a pace would almost certainly throw human society into chaos, forcing a rapid retreat from the world's coastal cities.

The rest of the earth's land ice would melt along with Antarctica, and warming ocean waters would expand, so that the total rise of the sea would likely exceed 200 feet, the scientists said.

[Read the whole story](#)

Sage grouse face decline if

wildfires can't be stopped

By Keith Ridler, AP

BOISE, Idaho – If increasingly destructive wildfires in the Great Basin can't be stopped, the sage grouse population will be cut in half over the next three decades, scientists say.

A report released Thursday by the U.S. Geological Survey comes just ahead of a court-ordered Sept. 30 deadline faced by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to decide whether sage grouse need protection under the Endangered Species Act. Experts say such a listing could damage Western states' economies.

"The sagebrush steppe and sagebrush ecosystem are in trouble," said Matt Brooks, a fire ecologist with the USGS and one of the report's authors.

The study also identified potential ways to avert sage grouse declines by classifying areas for their resilience to disturbance and resistance to invasive species such as cheatgrass, and then applying suitable strategies. Public land managers have already been doing that, but the USGS report could fine tune those efforts.

"It adds to the science that managers, and especially fire managers, can use," said John Freemuth, a Boise State University professor and public lands expert. He said the report could factor into a sage grouse listing decision.

"That's an indication that in the future (managers) will apply resources more effectively to protect the habitat," he said.

The report is also in line with an order by Interior Secretary Sally Jewell in January calling for a new wildfire-fighting strategy using a "science-based" approach to protect wide swaths of the intermountain West sagebrush country that supports cattle ranching and struggling sage grouse.

Looming through much of the USGS report is cheatgrass, an invasive, fire-prone species that wipes out sagebrush ecosystems with wildfire as its main weapon.

"Management of cheatgrass is definitely a key," Brooks said.

The study that examined 30 years of data up to 2013 found that burned areas near sage grouse breeding grounds nullified population growth that would normally occur after years with high precipitation. The study also looked ahead 30 years at projected wildfires and recovery rates of burned areas and predicted long-term population declines in the study area that included Nevada, Utah, Idaho, Oregon and California.

"Habitat degradation within the Great Basin ecoregion of the Intermountain West of North America is a contemporary example of how disturbance is driving rapid changes in ecosystem structure and function across enormous spatial scales," the report said.

The 43-page study didn't include a 436-square-mile wildfire in southwest Idaho in August that destroyed 297 square miles of sage grouse habitat, 83 square miles of that considered priority habitat that contained breeding grounds, called leks.

Rehabilitation efforts drew a high-visibility visit by the director of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Neil Kornze, to Idaho, who noted the agency's concerns about a potential sage grouse listing as a reason for the trip.

The chicken-sized, ground-dwelling bird ranges across 11 western states, with much of its habitat administered by the BLM. The birds once numbered in the millions but now have an estimated population of 200,000 to 500,000.

Sage grouse are one of some 400 species that use the sage brush steppe. But scientists consider sage grouse an indicator of the overall health of the sagebrush steppe, sometimes called the sagebrush sea for the vast areas it covers and

which is also facing challenges.

“It’s so much beyond a bird,” Freemuth said of the potential listing. “It’s people’s lifestyle. It’s people’s recreational opportunities. It’s everything. The bird is just the symbol of all that.”

Reno’s divorce history digitized

By Guy Clifton, Reno Gazette-Journal

For much of his life, crooner Frank Sinatra had a notoriously prickly relationship with the press, but when he came to Reno in August of 1951, Old Blue Eyes was downright cheerful.

Apparently, divorce will do that for some guys.

It was a big month and a big year for Reno divorce. Not only was Sinatra “singing for his supper,” at the Riverside Hotel as he established residency, actress Rita Hayworth came to town to divorce Prince Aly Khan.

Their stories and hundreds more are told on a **website** developed by Special Collections at the UNR and funded through a grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services.

The collection includes more than 500 photographs, and more than 500 additional items that include oral histories, audio clips, film clips, newspaper articles, magazines, books, divorce ranch ledgers and a variety of other items.

Read the whole story

Food Network to feature restaurant founded in Tahoe

JimBoy's Tacos, which was founded in a camper trailer in 1954 at Kings Beach, is going national.

The Food Network is planning to film a segment at the Folsom location this fall. Last week's shoot had to be rescheduled (new date not yet released) because a member of the TV crew got ill.

Celebrity chef Guy Fieri recommended the chain for "Guilty Pleasures"; especially for its ground beef taco.

Most of the chain's nearly 40 locations are in Northern California, though the first one in Orange County opened last weekend.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Letter: New law violates Prop. 215

To the community,

The American Medical Marijuana Association has announced that it is filing a lawsuit over the violation of Proposition 215

by the California Legislature and Gov. Jerry Brown. The recent adoption of the Medical Marijuana Regulation and Safety Act attempts to modify a voter initiative, Prop. 215, something specifically forbidden by the California Constitution.

Our medical cannabis rights, protected for nearly 20 years by Prop. 215, have been hijacked and Prop. 215 is under attack like never before. The new law is an unacceptable and illegal infringement on our rights under Prop. 215.



Steve Kubby

These are the four areas that were of the greatest concern to patients and their physicians:

1. Patient gardens now limited to 100 square feet.
2. It is now a crime to share a joint from your garden with anyone.
3. Must now use your regular doctor for recommendations, most of whom have no experience with the medical use of cannabis
4. Allows city, county or both to ban cultivation, storage, manufacture, and transport.

I'm getting calls from frightened patients who fear their own state government is planning on going after cannabis doctors as if they are some sort of dangerous threat that must be carefully supervised. Sick people cannot handle this kind of stress. Thousands of patients will die because of this calculated attempt to thwart the will of the people and deprive them of medical cannabis and the doctors who write recommendations to use the healing herb.

David Allen, a retired heart surgeon and expert on cannabinoid medicine, warns against the unintended consequences of the new Medical Marijuana Regulation and Safety Act. According to Allen, the proposed law “will create more crimes of cultivation, processing, storage, transportation, sales, and possession. It will create an army of bureaucrats that will increase the police state and create super drug task force solely for cannabis and no other drug,”

Steve Kubby, American Medical Marijuana Association executive director and South Lake Tahoe resident

Gamblers are betting against a Trump White House

By Matt Egan, CNN Money

Don't bank on Donald Trump becoming the 45th president of the United States.

That's the message from the gamblers placing bets on the 2016 race for the White House.

Trump is beating his rivals by double-digits in national polls, but bettors remain skeptical the billionaire's lead will last until the Republican convention in Cleveland.

Jeb Bush is actually the odds-on favorite to win the GOP nomination, according to Irish gambling website Paddy Power. (Nevada casinos are prohibited from offering bets on U.S. political elections.)

[Read the whole story](#)

Sierra Nevada snowpack at a 500-year low

By Cheryl Katz, National Geographic

From frustrated snowboarders to migrating birds arriving at shriveled wetlands to wildfires raging through national parks, the Sierra Nevada's lack of snow has transformed just about every aspect of life in California. Farmers, fish, forests, gardeners, hikers, boaters, and more depend on Sierra snow for water.

But now it's clear that the "snow fail" in the 400-mile long mountain range has reached epic proportions: This year's snowpack is the driest it's been in at least 500 years, according to new research published Monday.

This stark finding comes from an analysis of more than 1,500 California blue oak tree rings dating back to the early 1500s, when Spanish explorers were just beginning their conquest of the state.

[Read the whole story](#)

Tahoe CCC crew sent to Valley Fire

A dozen young men and women based at the California Conservation Corps center in Meyers are providing logistical

support to CalFire at the Lake County Fairgrounds to assist with issues surrounding the Valley Fire.

They are working 16-hour shifts along with five other CCC crews.

Statewide, the CCC has 40 crews – 520 corpsmembers – dispatched to eight wildfires.

The California Conservation Corps is a state agency in which young people ages 18 and 25 provide natural resource work and emergency response efforts.