

Nighttime bike event at Meyers golf course

Tahoe Games Bike Nights will continue with races on Aug. 15 and Sept. 26.

Family-friendly cross country night bike races will feature a custom illuminated course that runs through the Lake Tahoe Golf Course, over fairways, into the rough, through sand traps and over bridges with the occasional cart path. The course is approximately 3 miles per lap, with most classes riding 2 laps.

Tahoe Game Bike Night is free, with a \$15 competitors entry fee. Registration will open at 7pm. Races will begin at 9pm, with three heats based on respective classes and age groups. In addition to the top three riders for each class, awards will be given out to the "Most Awesome" and "Best Glow."

Helmets and bike lights are recommended for all competitors, however; JetLites will be on-site at every event offering free light rentals to ensure rider safety. The course will be designed for ages 10 and up to enjoy on any type of non-motorized bicycle.

Fallen USFS firefighter on his first fire

By Dana Griffin, KCRA-TV

A rookie U.S. Forest Service firefighter killing while

fighting a fire near Lake Tahoe was remembered as a hard worker who sacrificed his life for others.



Michael
Hallenbeck

Michael Hallenbeck, 21, of Shingle Springs, died when a tree came crashing down on him Saturday evening while he was battling the Sierra Fire in Eldorado National Forest.

Hallenbeck was based out of the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

“There’s hazards everywhere, and the Forest Service is always trying to have that balance of protecting our wildland firefighters,” USFS spokeswoman Cheva Gabor said. “Their safety is of utmost importance to us.”

Read the whole story

**South Tahoe parade
application deadline**

approaching

South Lake Tahoe's 50th Anniversary Parade is billed as a unique opportunity for organizations, service groups, athletic teams, schools to showcase what they have to offer while joining with the entire community to celebrate the city's history.

The theme of the Sept. 19 parade is Past, Present and Future.

Applications are due Sept. 1. They are available **online**. There is no fee to participate. The parade is open to walking groups and vehicles with the route beginning at Al Tahoe Boulevard and concluding at the Y.

More information contact Tracy Franklin at 530.542.6093 or tfranklin@cityofslt.us.

Elton John at Harveys

Elton John in his second appearance at Harveys in Stateline on Aug. 8 plays hit after hit.

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets

in South Lake Tahoe



Stella

Stella and Gemma are super cute, almost identical sisters and they would like to go home together. They are 10 weeks old, and very energetic, as you would expect.

Stella and Gemma are spayed, microchipped, tested for FIV, and vaccinated. They are at the El Dorado County Animal Services shelter in Meyers, along with many other dogs and cats who are waiting for their new homes.

Go to the Tahoe animal shelter's Facebook page to see photos and descriptions of all pets at the shelter.

Call 530.573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information on adopting a pet.

For spay-neuter assistance for South Tahoe residents, go **online**.

– Karen Kuentz

EJ proves he's 'still standing' after 5 decades



Elton John rarely took a break from cranking out the tunes on the piano Aug. 8 Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

STATELINE – When legendary performer Elton John launched into the “B itch is Back” on a warm Lake Tahoe night, the crowd sprang to its feet, and I was immediately transported into total nostalgia as my childhood took center stage in my mind.

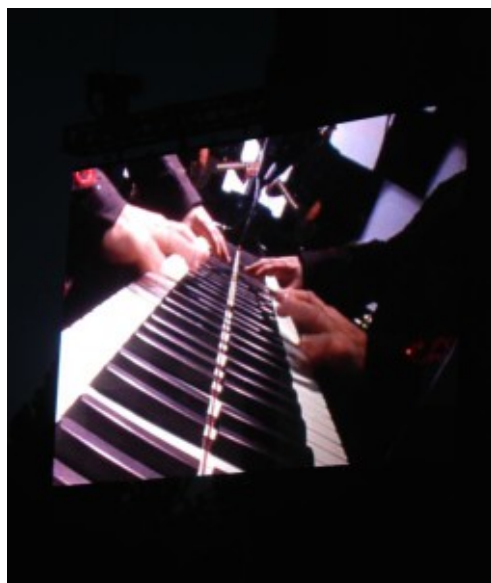
Like many people (a cluster of them around me at the Harveys Summer Outdoor Concert Series Saturday night), I grew up with this rock icon who has sold more than 300 million records and become one of the best-selling artists in the world. Despite the shared experience with so many others, his performance seemed so personal to me.

I owned a handful of albums, and as an adolescent locked myself in my room for hours to listen to his music – even convincing myself “Captain Fantastic” and the “Brown Dirt Cowboy” (named after the 1975 album) represented real people. After all, the songs of EJ aren’t all about his catchy singing, masterful ease of piano playing and ideal sing-along melodies.

His lyricist since 1967, Bernie Taupin, partly spawned my desire to be a writer. His impression spanned beyond me in South Lake Tahoe. I sat next to well-known Realtor Carl Fair most of the evening, and we discussed the show as if we were record producers.

“One of Bernie’s best,” Fair said to a few songs, while I nodded in agreement.

In particular, Fair was patiently waiting for EJ, which the crowd yelled on occasion, to perform his favorite – “Daniel” off the “Don’t Shoot Me, I’m Only the Piano Player” album. John delivered the sentimental piece in more of an electric rock format than the recording. Still, it had an impact.



Elton John’s fingers fly across the ivory.

Since the song is about a brother, I thought of growing up with my late sister – and how music was so instrumental in our lives. The 1973 album came out the same year as one of his best-selling albums “Goodbye Yellow Brick Road.” Back then, albums had passages you could read, and I used to open this one to learn all I could about the English performer. On this song collection, he produced “Bennie and the Jets” – with its signature piano key pounding heard again Aug. 8, complete with the “ssssss” at the end of “Jets.” Also from “Goodbye,” he performed the title song – which everyone mouthed the words to – along with “Candle in the Wind.” The song written for actress Marilyn Monroe is the best-selling single of all time.

Dressed in a black pant suit with simple sequins on the sleeves and back (rather understated compared to when I saw him dance on the piano a few decades ago at the Irvine arena), John played hit after hit with no breaks to speak of except to stretch, bow and reach out to the audience. John provided little dialogue except near the end when he tipped his hat to the audience for supporting him.

“It’s been the most incredible journey. Through 47 years, there’s been one constant – the audience buying the records and the audience coming to these shows,” the 68-year-old said. “Thank you for all the loyalty and love.”

The message was appropriate from a performer who wholeheartedly admits to believing in love and even wrote and performed “Believe” to the enchanted crowd.

Many of John’s library of songs revolve around love, whether it’s the down-to-earth 1970 timeless hit “Your Song” that he also performed to the hushed Tahoe audience or something totally out of this world like his other blockbuster number “Rocket Man” off the “Honky Chateau” album.

As the crowd swayed and recited every word, I returned to my childhood recalling my feelings when I heard this song while

moving to Virginia from Vermont. It was pouring down rain, and my mom could barely see as she followed my father in the truck. Still, I felt safe and confident that my world on Earth was going to pan out as I looked out the window in the pitch-black sky at age 12. Like the astronaut, I longed for a promising, adventurous life. I remember thinking what a genius Taupin was at capturing the human experience: "It's just my job, five days a week." I even bought a jean shirt because Taupin wore one on one of the album photos. I passed on the outrageous costumes and wild glasses John is known for, though a woman sitting behind me wore her glasses.

Through the years, John has slowed on his movement on stage and flashy costumes. His band – complete with original musicians Nigel Olsson on drums and Davey Johnstone on guitar – graced the stage with suits and ties. Even with the fresh, stylish look, a close glimpse of Johnstone's experienced guitar playing showed aging, wrinkled hands. The long-time musicians were joined by bassist Matt Bissonette, Kim Bullard on keyboards and percussionist John Mahon, who was fun to watch as he brought out rattles, chimes and tambourines. John, who played in Tahoe five years ago, got personal pointing out how Mahon was celebrating his 35th wedding anniversary, delighting the mostly older Tahoe concert crowd.

Behind the band, a giant screen flashed images ranging from a checkerboard and psychedelic experience to photographs depicting memories and John's various looks in more than four decades of making at least 50 Top 40 hits.

The music was full and solid – and I especially appreciated the hot vocals since many concert sound engineers tend to up the instruments, thus drowning out the vocals. Not so for a superstar like John, who has lost a slight bit of range, but still puts out a powerful performance.

The singer even overcame being hospitalized for an abnormal swelling of his leg playing tennis near his home in Nice,

France, less than a week ago to make the Tahoe concert, according to a Daily Mail report.



Saturday's show was Elton John's second at Lake Tahoe.

Tennis is one of John's favorite sports. Fans got a hint of this early on when he wrote with Taupin "Philadelphia Freedom" off "Captain Fantastic" in honor of the tennis team of his dear friend Billie Jean King, a legend in her own right on the courts. Patriotic images swirled across the giant screen during that song.

Other images came to mind when EJ started "Tiny Dancer," the poignant tune off the 1971 album "Madman Across the Water." That's what the John-Taupin collaborations accomplished for decades, creating words that have an impact on listeners. We can all share the pain and anguish of "Sorry Seems to Be the Hardest Word" and "Don't Let the Sun Go Down On Me," which I stood up for amid a seated crowd.

Then there are the silly and jovial "Saturday Night's Alright for Fighting" and "Crocodile Rock." The latter was expected as the fun encore, and John delivered. And as a hint the night was coming to a close, John autographed records, shirts and CDs for the concert-goers up front. It was refreshing to see a middle-aged man in front of me yelling: "Rock on that piano, baby."

Notes: The Harveys concert series rocks on with the band Slightly Stoopid on Aug. 13; country act Dierks Bentley on Aug. 23; and Sammy Hagar on Sept. 5.

Opinion: Grand jury destroying its credibility

By Larry Weitzman

In the third and most insidiously false political report (Case GJ-14-12) from the Civil Grand Jury (FY 14/15) entitled “Putting Political Gain Above What’s Right for the County” is a perfect title to describe the grand jury actions. They have become a political body and a kangaroo court worthy of a Third World dictatorship.

In another attempted political and character assassination of the county auditor, the GJ attempts to blame the alleged \$3.5 million loss of federal fund reimbursement on the failure of what is known as the county Cost Allocation Plan on the auditor instead of the proper culprit, the county Information Technology director, Kelly Webb. The GJ talks of having credible witnesses, but if that list were revealed, you would find that the witnesses were the actual culprits or accessories – the responsible parties. You would also find that their testimony was not evidentiary, as it was unsworn. However, my research consists of dozens of emails, many from the actual culprit, Kelly Webb, admitting she didn’t

understand how to prepare and what to prepare in the way of documentation and keep and maintain the billing and record keeping required. Webb was clearly unqualified; she didn't understand record keeping within her department and that she didn't understand the CAP.



Larry Weitzman

Not only did Webb fail to understand the CAP, so did the GJ in that a large part of the reimbursement loss is a result of IT Department's failure to directly bill and maintain the related time records. That is not part of the CAP, as direct billing is an independent requirement outside of the CAP. Webb failed to do just that as listed in the state Controller's Office findings: "Detailed time sheets are not maintained for those staff that are directly billed to departments. IT Department Management does not understand the purpose of the Countywide Cost Allocation Plan."

15 years without problems

For more than 15 years the CAP rarely, if ever, had a problem with the state Controller's Office. It had gone through several desk audits during this period with no issues. IT for that period did its job with respect to the CAP and the recovery of state and federal reimbursement of IT costs with respect for the services rendered to these reimbursable programs. It's a matter of properly billing and allocating its mainframe, network usage and other expenses incurred in IT for these reimbursable programs.

Now let's get one thing clear: The CAP is not the problem or

issue. The problem is each department's responsibility with the collection of reimbursable expenses, billing and data with respect to state and federal programs and that has to do with record keeping within each respective department for the CAP. And that fact is made clear in the State Controller's report. This issue was not with the CAP; it was the IT Department's failure to do proper record keeping, even IT's failure to keep track of computers connected to its network.

What could have caused that after 15 years of no issues? Something must have changed within the IT department and it did starting with the appointment of Webb to the position of interim IT director in February 2011. One of the duties of department heads is allocating department costs to those functions and programs within the county to accurately reflect their costs. By doing so the county can recover and/or receive reimbursement for certain state and federal programs the county administers.

Key person laid off

But something else happened and that was the layoff (by having her position eliminated) of a certain senior department analyst (orchestrated by Webb and then-CAO Terri Daly). This particular IT analyst for the past several years kept the appropriate billing records and time sheets, kept track of network inventories and performed various mainframe allocations that correctly supported the CAP and to obtain reimbursements for IT time related to state and federal programs administered by El Dorado County. After this analyst's elimination, recordkeeping and direct billing relative to the reimbursements and CAP went south. No one in IT continued the work of the eliminated senior IT analyst. A direct Webb failure.

As to requests for help from the IT Department, a series of emails demonstrates Webb's total and complete failure in compiling necessary information and failure to maintain

billing records as the cause of the county's losing the millions of reimbursable charges from outside agencies. In several emails from Webb, she never asks for help but instead tries to use and supply knowingly bogus information

IT wandering in the desert of incompetence

It all started in an email from Feb. 28, 2012, from the CAO's office in which it was indicated that IT was "in the process of completing "the cost applied charges (direct billing) for F/Y 2012-2013." Nothing could have been further from the truth as no one in IT kept time sheets or did the direct billing and Webb knew this. And there is no documentation of help being asked for by Webb. This was all a charade to hide Webb's incompetence.

In September 2012, the Auditor's Office appears to be getting nervous when they ask for billing rates with respect to IT. No answer until a follow-up message on Jan 7, 2013, asks again for information to which a reply is received in seven minutes saying, "These rates are so old that we have been unable to determine the methodology behind them. Kelly Webb and I know that all the IT rates need to be looked at." IT is not doing their job. In between this series of emails another series of emails from the Auditor's Office also asked for the same information directly below.

On Nov. 2, 2012, an email directed to Webb from the Auditor's Office asks Webb for IT costs-applied amounts (direct billing) for mainframe use and that the costs need to be updated: "We cannot use these amounts as they are currently budgeted." Twenty-five minutes later from Webb was an email response: "The current FY 12-13 budget does currently have IT cost applied amounts the same as FY 11-12. Laura and I have met but have not had time to go over the methodology in detail. I will need to talk to Laura to figure out who we have available to work on updating the FY 12-13 rates."

In a series of June 2013 emails starting with Webb, she admits she is trying to “recreate a scenario for both mainframe and network” from documents that are years old but admits, “We are out of time for cash departments ... but it would only be useful at this point for non-cash departments.” A week later IT again asks in an email, “Would it be appropriate to use the 11/12 methodology and apply to the 12/13 budget to come up with something for 12/13?” The auditor’s response on June 26, 2013: “Posting the FY 11-12 IT cost applied (direct billing) to FY 12-13 is not acceptable.”

In all the emails spanning over a year, nowhere is there a request for help from the IT Department, probably because the IT Department head was so incompetent she didn’t know what help to ask for. And this is not the whole extent of the mistakes and lack of knowledge demonstrated by Webb’s emails. There is more.

A direct email from the State Controller’s Office to EDC on July 24, 2013, says it all:

“We are in the process of our A-87 Cost Plan field review and I am requesting some supporting documentation from Information Technologies as follows:

“Please provide for each charging function (Systems and Programming, Network & PC Support, Telephone Communications, Central Duplicating and Records Management):

“1. The methodology used for direct billing

“2. Samples of direct billing invoices for

“ a. Child Support

“b. Social Services

“c. Roads

“If time records are used for any of the above methodologies,

I need to know how they're developed and whether estimates or actual time is used.

"Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

"Thank you.

"State Controller's Office"

The Controller's Office is clear: The failure of IT management is the reason for the loss of reimbursable costs and it clearly stated in its audit report: "detailed time sheets are not maintained for staff that are directly billed to departments."

That is a management failure of IT alone and no one else. The auditor can't reproduce those records or cure that fatal failure. Additionally, and most devastating was the finding by controller that "IT Department Management does not understand the purpose of the countywide Cost Allocation Plan."

This problem was not apparent in any other county department and not in IT until Kelly Webb was appointed Interim IT director. The Grand Jury's conclusion not only lacked evidence, but it was absolutely incorrect. Why should anyone believe any of their reports? The GJ has no credibility. Even as political spin doctors; they are guilty of gross malpractice. They are attacking competent county employees with a suicide bomb of incompetence.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of rescue.

The buzz(kill) about caffeine

By Ariane Wu and Murray Carpenter, Reveal

There's a slow but growing movement in the United States to ban the sale of caffeine – or certain kinds of it, at least.

In June, the Ohio Legislature passed a bill banning the retail sales of pure powdered caffeine. This comes on the heels of six U.S. senators urging the Food and Drug Administration to do the same.

These actions mystify some people because caffeine is often viewed as the beloved, mostly benign stimulant that gets us through the day. But it's much more than that. It's the essential ingredient in beverages worth more than \$120 billion annually in the U.S. It's a barometer of dietary trends and a mildly addictive food additive. It's a neuroenhancer and a performance-enhancing drug. And it's a regulatory mess.

Many Americans start their day with a cup of coffee ... or two or three. And with the recent boom in gourmet coffee, from Starbucks and others, it seems like we're drinking more coffee than ever. But we actually drink far less coffee than our grandparents did. U.S. coffee consumption peaked around 1950, then declined dramatically. Coffee was displaced, largely, by soft drinks. As coffee consumption declined, soft drink consumption spiked. Now we spend about \$77 billion on soft drinks annually, twice what we spend on coffee. And caffeine is a key ingredient in eight of the 10 best-selling soft drinks.

The United States imported nearly 17 million pounds of caffeine powder in 2014. Most of that is blended into soft drinks – 34 milligrams per can of Coke, for example. Although some of this caffeine is extracted from naturally caffeinated products such as coffee or tea, most of it is synthesized from chemical precursors such as urea, in pharmaceutical plants in

China, India and Germany.

In soft drinks, caffeine plays the same role as nicotine in cigarettes. Both nicotine and caffeine are harmless in small quantities and may even have health benefits, but they reinforce our cravings for unhealthy amounts. Sugar-sweetened soft drinks contribute to two of the most significant health problems in America: obesity and diabetes. Yet you can still buy soft drinks with food stamps, and The Coca-Cola Co. and other bottlers have lobbied vigorously against efforts to change this.

The soft drink industry also has opposed increased federal regulation of the caffeine blended into sodas and energy drinks. As it stands now, caffeine's regulatory regime is a jumble. Sell caffeine in its pure form, as a powder, or in an energy shot, and the FDA considers it a dietary supplement.

Blend it into Coke or a Monster Energy drink, and it's regulated as a food additive. Press it into NoDoz or Anacin tablets, and it's an over-the-counter drug. And when it's marketed as a migraine medication like Cafergot, the FDA regulates it as a prescription drug.

Consumer groups have been calling for better oversight of the many new caffeinated products on the market. Energy drinks, which are not required to display the amount of caffeine they contain, prompted more than 20,000 U.S. emergency room visits in 2011, double the number in 2007. And pure caffeine powder – which is virtually unregulated and powerful enough that a tablespoon is fatal for an adult – caused the accidental overdose deaths of two young men in 2014.

Researchers constantly are learning more about how caffeine affects us. In many cases, it has significant benefits. Modest doses of caffeine improve vigilance and cognitive performance and decrease fatigue. Caffeine boosts athletic performance significantly and alleviates headaches. A 2015 study showed it

is even associated with lower incidence of erectile dysfunction.

Although it is one of the best-studied compounds in the world, we still have much more to learn about caffeine, including the reasons it affects people so differently – making some people anxious and jittery, and others so happy and energetic that they feel as though they can't function without it.

Shingle Springs man dies fighting fire

Updated 8:20pm:

Michael Hallenbeck, 21, of Shingle Springs is the firefighter who died Saturday fighting a small fire near Sierra-at-Tahoe.



Michael
Hallenbeck

He was a member of Organized Crew 36 on the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

Hallenbeck was struck by a tree at approximately 5:30pm during the initial attack on the Sierra Fire, just inside the LTBMU boundary south of Echo Summit.

“Our hearts go out to the family, friends and fellow crew members of this brave firefighter,” Randy Moore, U.S. Forest Service Pacific southwest regional forester, said in a statement. “The loss of any member of our Forest Service family is a tragedy. The grief we are feeling at the sudden loss of two of our firefighters; Dave Ruhl last week on the Modoc National Forest and now Mike Hallenbeck on the basin, reminds us of the sacrifices these men and women make every day.”

The Sierra Fire is one of several dozen lightning-caused fires that began on multiple national forests in Northern California on Aug. 8.

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The blaze in which a U.S. Forest Service firefighter died was caused by lightning in the backcountry of Sierra-at-Tahoe.

The firefighter’s name has not been released pending notification of family. He was struck by a tree on Aug. 8.

The fire burned about one-tenth of an acre in “very rugged terrain,” Lisa Herron with the U.S. Forest Service told *Lake Tahoe News*. The Sierra Fire was not burning in the ski resort boundaries.

Officials said there was no spread overnight, but crews are returning today to make sure no hot spots developed.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Perseid meteor to light up night sky

By Jareen Imam, CNN

A moonless evening could give stargazers a fantastic light show this week.

The annual Perseid meteor shower, which is known for being among the brightest of meteor showers, is happening near the tail end of summer.

The major meteor shower will be visible in the Northern Hemisphere.

The best part about the showing is that it will happen a day before the new moon, meaning the night skies will be dark and perfect for meteor spotting. Under clear and dark skies, observers could expect to see up to 100 shooting stars an hour.

Astronomy experts say that those conditions have not been available since 2010.

Read the whole story