

Automatic knob reads, controls stove temp

By Russ Parsons, Los Angeles Times

A company called Meld is getting ready to produce a knob it says you can attach to any home stove that will read the temperature of what you're cooking and automatically keep it stable to within a single degree.

Sound like a good idea? More than 450 Kickstarter backers think so. Meld's campaign hit its \$50,000 goal within seven hours of its launch Tuesday.

It works like this: A temperature probe is clipped to the pot of what you're cooking and connects via Bluetooth with your smartphone (IOS or Android). Your smartphone then communicates with the temperature dial on the stove, which automatically adjusts to maintain the desired temperature.

[Read the whole story](#)

Grand jury slams El Dorado County HR Dept.

By Kathryn Reed

A highly-critical assessment of El Dorado County's Human Resources Department was released this week by the grand jury.

The report's title is "Board of Supervisors neglects Human Resources".

"Members of the Board of Supervisors fail to comply with the legal requirement to notify the HR Department when they become aware of alleged unlawful activity against one of their employees," the report says.

It points out how the same issues the civil grand jury found in 2006-07 are occurring today.

"Human Resource policies are nonexistent or out of date, employee classifications are suspect, significant work is being contracted out to private contractors and no effort has yet been initiated to satisfy various requirements of state and federal employment law," the report says.



Pam Knorr

Part of the problem is there have been four HR directors since 2009. Today Pam Knorr, who is also the acting chief administrative officer, runs the department. She took over the CAO duties in November when Terri Daly was run out of office by the Board of Supervisors and was appointed in February to have the job for one year.

Knorr was hired by Daly to be in charge of the Human Resources Department. No background check had ever been done on Knorr. Knorr has served in various positions in Amador, Napa, Placer and Alpine counties. Before coming to El Dorado County in September 2013 she was CAO in Alpine County for five years. An employee from Alpine County has since filed a lawsuit against her.

Knorr did not return a call from *Lake Tahoe News*.

“Employees fear that a complaint submitted to the HR Department will not be kept confidential and they may be subject to retaliation. The HR director acknowledged that this a reasonable fear, based upon past behavior,” the report says.

Besides recommending the county follow state and federal law, it also believes Knorr should be shown the door.

Recommendations include:

- The Board of Supervisors should aggressively seek a new and qualified chief administrative officer.
- The Board of Supervisors should appoint a qualified manager of Human Resources.
- The Human Resources function should be centralized under a manager reporting to the chief administrative officer.

“I believe that the Board of Supervisors is doing our due diligence to make necessary changes within our organization to ensure that the concerns of the grand jury as well as doing what is best for our employees are addressed. Change does not happen overnight – especially when it comes to cultural climate change within a large organization,” Supervisor Sue Novasel told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I am confident that the county is on the right track to making the long overdue and appropriate changes to our organization.”

Novasel said she did not disagree with report. She believes the hiring of an assistant CAO and risk manager will help Knorr be able to focus on HR more.

The lack of a strong HR Department has been impacting several departments.

Without a functioning HR Department, the county’s legal team is relegated to deal with many issues that come up. This, the grand jury says, has led to more of a punitive reaction to complaints than problem solving.

“Because county counsel is acting as de facto HR director, legal work that could be handled in house is contracted out. The county spends significant sums of money on outside consultants and attorneys for HR related issues. The county has spent significant sums of money on private consultants identifying personnel issues but has taken only the initial steps toward resolving the issues identified,” the grand jury found.

The report goes on to say, “Failure to strengthen the Human Resources Department has led to personnel issues being inadequately and improperly addressed by individual managers or supervisors who do not understand their obligations under California employment law. El Dorado County has a reputation for poor employer-employee practices. It does not attract the most qualified applicants for employment.”

No employee manual exists and training is virtually non-existent.

The civil grand jury usually makes its findings public in June, but instead posted five reports this week. In addition to the HR report, there are ones on the jails, Ponderosa football field, El Dorado Hills Community Services District, and outpatient mental health.

A call was placed to the grand jury office. No one answered and it was not possible to leave a message.

Opinion: Nevada's tax system is failing

By Bill Robinson, Las Vegas Sun

Gov. Brian Sandoval said it. The Chamber of Commerce is saying it. Democrats are saying it. Republicans are saying it.

Saying what? The tax system in Nevada needs reform.

Why now? My mentor, Reuben Zubrow, did a study in 1960 which the Nevada Legislature used to build a tax system that was simple, stable and synchronized with the budget. For two decades, it funded our state effectively on three legs: property, sales and gross gaming revenue taxes. It was designed to collect lots of taxes from folks who live outside Nevada.

Starting in the 1970s, however, things changed in two ways.

Read the whole story

Ruling could open Calif. legislative records

By Jim Miller, Sacramento Bee

California's open-records section of the constitution does not exclude the Legislature, a Sacramento County judge has ruled, advancing a newspaper group's lawsuit seeking legislative records.

The Bay Area News Group sued the California Senate and

California Legislature last summer, seeking appointment books, calendars, and other records of indicted then-lawmakers Ron Calderon, D-Montebello, and Leland Yee, D-San Francisco.

Senate officials had denied the requests, asserting that the requested records were exempt under the Legislative Open Records Act.

Read the whole story

CASA looking for volunteers

CASA in South Lake Tahoe needs volunteers to become a voice for children who are in the court system due to abuse or neglect.

The five-week pring training begins April 28 at Lake Tahoe Community College.

Currently, 22 Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteers serve 31 children in South Lake Tahoe. There are 84 children from the South Lake Tahoe area waiting for an advocate.

Register for training online or contact Alexis Foley at 530.573.3093 or alexis@casaeldoardo.org.

Money available for

environmental projects

The Nevada Division of State Lands is offering grants for projects that will preserve and restore the natural environment of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Approximately \$350,000 generated from the purchase of Nevada Lake Tahoe license plates will be available. Proposals that include the implementation of construction projects listed on the TRPA five-year environmental improvement program will be favored.

Applications are due April 24 at 5pm in the State Lands Office, 901 South Stewart St., Suite 5003, Carson City. Grantees will be notified in June.

Applications and program procedures may be downloaded.

Despite drought, produce prices stay stable

By Russ Parsons, Los Angeles Times

California's drought has driven the prices of some fruits and vegetables up substantially, but others are actually cheaper than they were a year ago. In fact, the U.S. Agriculture Department's forecast for produce prices predicts modest increases of 2 to 3 percent.

Why aren't fruit and vegetable prices skyrocketing in these dry times?

There are several reasons, farm experts say. For one, many produce products are grown in coastal areas that have not been as affected by the drought as the Central Valley has been.

Also, they say, it's partly because the actual cost of growing the produce makes up only about 10 percent of the retail price – the rest covers transportation, handling, packaging and mark-up.

And almost paradoxically, except for the lack of rain, growing conditions have been nearly ideal.

Read the whole story

Morel crop may hit a record this year

By David Smith, Griffin's Guide

This year could produce a morel mushroom harvest worth millions upon millions of dollars.

2014 experienced a glut of forest fires in the northwest regions of the U.S. and Canada. Multiple fires burned thousands of acres from Northern California on up through the Yukon and Northwest Territories of Canada. That's good news for lovers and hunters of morel mushrooms, as the mycological word on the street is that this spring is going to produce the biggest morel harvest in years, maybe even of all time.

Morels are arguably the most widely-sought mushroom in North America, thanks to their deliciously earthy flavor, their fairly unmistakable appearance (even a mycological novice can quickly learn to properly identify the distinctive morel), and the fact that they are resistant to domestic cultivation (it's very difficult, if not impossible, to reliably grow morels on purpose).

They also show up in spring, that wonderful time of year to be in the woods when bugs are relatively few, the air is crisp and cool, and there's still a dearth of new, green undergrowth to hide tasty mushrooms.

Morels also appear in greater abundance in areas where fire damage occurred the year before.

Read the whole story

‘First Generation’ to be shown at LTCC

There will be a screening of the documentary “First Generation” at Lake Tahoe Community College’s Duke Theatre on April 10 from 6-8pm.

The film tells the stories of four California high school students who are trying to break out of the cycle of poverty they’re in by pursuing a college education.

LTCC’s TRiO-SSS program, which provides support services to first-generation students like those portrayed in the film, is sponsoring this free film.

There will be a post-film discussion led by LTCC TRiO-SSS

Coordinator Anna Lee about how local TRiO programs help low-income, first-generation students avoid some of the pitfalls seen in the film.

Gaming industry comes out swinging against tax bill

By Ray Hagar, Reno Gazette-Journal

A major tax plan proposed by Assembly Republicans – that features an expansion of the Modified Business Tax as a main component – met its major adversary Tuesday at the Legislature.

And that is the gaming industry – Nevada's largest taxpayer and employer.

The Nevada Resort Association made its opposition clear to a plan that officially is sponsored by the Assembly Taxation Committee and raises the rate of the state's payroll tax – or Modified Business Tax – and expands its reach by about 5,000 more Nevada businesses.

Gaming representatives pushed back on Assembly Bill 464, saying the tax will have a narrow base of taxpayers, hurts job growth and lacks fairness.

Read the whole story