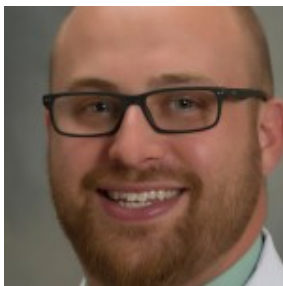


Opinion: Reading to a child is critical

By Jonathan Halem

Can you recall a favorite nursery rhyme from childhood? How about a favorite book?

Some of my early favorites were the “Incy Wincy Spider” song and “Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you See?” picture book.



Jonathan Halem

Early language development is intricately linked to a child’s exposure to reading, talking, and singing starting from infancy. Though infants may not talk back, research shows a child’s language exposure at an early age predicts his or her success in school.

According to the 2012 National Survey of Children’s Health, more than 35 percent of U.S. children enter kindergarten without the language skills needed to effectively learn how to read. This challenging start can cause academic difficulties in the years to come.

Help your child get an early start with his or her reading skills. Here are storytelling tips I have compiled with recommendations from pediatricians and the American Academy of Pediatrics to help stimulate early brain and language development.

- **Make it fun.** Cuddle up and make reading time a comforting interaction. Infants recognize and favor their parents' voices and faces from when they are only a few days or weeks old. Read with emotion and mix up the volume with whispers, sing-song tones, and silly voices. Although infants may not comprehend the words or story, they will respond to vocal emotions and facial expressions when you read or talk.
- **Make it tactile.** Select colorful and durable books. Children respond excitedly to bright colors and, as they get older, may like holding the book or putting it in their mouth to experience the feel. Though a young child may lose interest in a story after a few minutes, continue to read, talk, and sing with your child frequently. This interaction stimulates the child's interest and expands his or her attention span.
- **Make it insightful.** Stories open the opportunity to ask questions and talk about feelings. Can you show me the train? Which animal says "tweet"? In time, as comprehension expands, your child may identify what is in the picture. Suggest what emotions the characters in books might be feeling and give your young child a chance to share if he or she sometimes feels similar emotions, such as happy, sad, or mad.
- **Make it interactive.** Preschoolers can be chatty and very curious. At this age, they may retell parts of their favorite stories or make up their own. Build on this cognitive development by asking your child follow-up questions. What do you think will happen next? What is the character thinking or what is this character feeling? These conversations not only help develop language and reading skills, but also spark creativity and curiosity.
- **Make it a routine.** Read with your child every day. Make it a calming activity – this is especially beneficial for the bedtime routine or afternoon downtime.

Your child is never too young or too old to enjoy reading a book with you. Get inspired from attending “Mother Goose on the Loose” and other storytimes at the public library. Expand your book collection by checking out library books or exchanging books with other families. Then have your child pick out a book, get comfortable, and enjoy this important time.

Jonathan Halem is a pediatrician at Barton Pediatrics in Stateline.

Vitamin drinks may not be a healthy choice

By Anahad O'Connor, New York Times

Companies are increasingly adding vitamins and minerals to juices, sports drinks and bottled water, responding to a growing consumer demand for these products. Even though the amounts of added nutrients in these drinks are typically small, some nutrition scientists are concerned that through their overall diets, many people may be ingesting levels of vitamins and other nutrients that are not only unnecessary, but potentially harmful.

“You have vitamins and minerals that occur naturally in foods, and then you have people taking supplements, and then you have all these fortified foods,” said Mridul Datta, an assistant professor in the department of nutrition science at Purdue University. “It adds up to quite an excess. There’s the potential for people to get a lot more of these vitamins than they need.”

Today more than ever, studies show, the average person is exposed to unusually high levels of vitamins and minerals. Already, more than half of all adults in the United States take a multivitamin or dietary supplement. Bread, milk and other foods are often fortified with folic acid, niacin and vitamins A and D.

A study published in July found that many people are exceeding the safe limits of nutrient intakes established by the Institute of Medicine. And research shows that people who take dietary supplements are often the ones who need them the least.

Read the whole story

Phone scam making rounds in EDC

The El Dorado County Sheriff's Office has received reports of people receiving a telephone call from someone identifying themselves as a computer technician working for a reputable computer company such as Dell. The caller tells the victim they are certified to work on Microsoft products and they received warning messages from the victim's computer that it is vulnerable and they called to fix the problem.

Officials are warning people this is a scam. Microsoft or their partners do not make unsolicited phone calls, often referred to as cold calls, about your computer's security or software.

Cyber criminals may ask you to go to a legitimate website and install software which will allow them to access your computer

remotely in order to fix it. Once you do this, your computer and personal information is vulnerable.

If you receive a phone call like this, hang-up and refuse to become a victim.

Bill would raise Calif. smoking age to 21

By Alexei Koseff, Sacramento Bee

In an effort to keep cigarettes out of the hands of teenagers, state Sen. Ed Hernandez, D-Azusa, announced legislation Thursday that would raise the legal smoking age in California from 18 to 21.

“Tobacco companies know that people are more likely to become addicted to smoking if they start at a young age” Hernandez said in a statement. “We can no longer afford to sit on the sidelines while big tobacco markets to our kids and gets another generation of young people hooked on a product that will ultimately kill them.”

Nine in ten smokers take up the habit by the age of 18, according to the American Lung Association in California, and 36,000 California kids start smoking each year.

Read the whole story

LTCC inviting public to learn about bond

Lake Tahoe Community College is hosting an open house Feb. 5 from 5-7pm to educate the public about Measure F, what it will mean for the campus and community.

It will be in the main building.

Administrators, staff and students will answer questions about the bond, and share information about what's coming to campus, and when.

SLT fire captain arrested on child porn charges



Mark WyGant

By Lake Tahoe News and News 10

South Lake Tahoe fire Capt. Mark WyGant has been charged with receipt of child pornography.

The investigation began when a computer flash drive was found in an unassigned locker at a city fire station, according to the federal criminal complaint. A search warrant had been obtained by local police to view the contents of the flash drive.

The criminal complaint stated more than 5,000 images of children engaged in sexually explicit conduct were on the drive. Additionally, there were more than 50 video files

depicting child pornography on the drive. Several of the videos showed a minor known to WyGant. WyGant admitted in an interview with law enforcement on Thursday to recording those videos, the complaint said.

WyGant has been placed on paid administrative leave.

“We will not make any further comment other than the press release which was just approved by the FBI,” City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

WyGant was promoted to captain in 2010. He was instrumental with the mass casualty training drill at the airport in August.

Court documents show that the alleged crimes began in March 2011 and were ongoing until at least December 2014.

He did not enter a plea at his hearing Jan. 30 in federal court in Sacramento.

If convicted of possession of child pornography, WyGant faces five to 20 years in prison. He is being held without bail.

His preliminary hearing was scheduled for Feb. 13.

Carl Thomas ‘Tom’ Ritchie – 1954-2015



Tom Ritchie

Carl Thomas "Tom" Ritchie passed away at Renown Regional Medical Center on the morning of Jan. 1, 2015, after receiving fatal injuries in a fall. He was 60.

Tom was born Oct. 24, 1954, in Huntington Park and grew up in Pico Rivera in Southern California.

He moved to his beloved Lake Tahoe in 1979. He spent a lot of time hiking and enjoying the outdoors.

Tom also loved his music. Never taking lessons, he learned at a young age to sing and play the guitar by ear, and had been part of numerous garage bands. During his years in South Lake Tahoe he played with the local band Lightning Rose, and then as lead guitarist and singer for Thunder Rose.

Tom is survived by his children, Allyson Ritchie, Chelsea Ritchie and Christian Ritchie, all of South Lake Tahoe; and sister JoAnne Johnson of Sisters, Ore.

He was preceded in death by his beloved parents, Carl and Lauraine Ritchie, and his beloved sister, Judy Ritchie Renken Leach.

A memorial service is planned for summer 2015.

Charter phone system out of service

Updated 2:10pm: Service to the Tahoe area is coming back, including at Blue Angel.

Charter Communications is having a global outage that is affecting phone service.

For businesses like Blue Angel Café in South Lake Tahoe it also means not being able to process credit cards, so it is a cash-only dining experience today.

The Glenbrook office for Charter has a recording that says, "Technicians are currently looking into a service interruption."

The problem started about 9am Jan. 30. Two hours later Charter posted this on its Twitter feed, "We are aware of the interruption in services and apologize for the inconvenience. We are working diligently to resolve the issue."

Internet service is still working.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

California vintners digging up vines

By Chris Macias, Sacramento Bee

Faced with stagnant sales of low-priced wine and a glut of overseas competitors, grape growers in the Central Valley are ripping out their vines and replacing them with more profitable crops such as almonds.

The attrition of vineyards was highlighted in Wednesday's State of the Industry briefing at the Unified Wine & Grape Symposium, the annual trade show and convention for the state's wine industry. The presentation by Bay Area wine consultant Jon Fredrikson drew a standing-room-only crowd of more than 1,500 to the ballroom of the Hyatt Regency hotel across from the state Capitol.

Farmers, vintners and other wine professionals who gathered for the event learned that the market for lower-priced wines declined in 2014, while bottles priced at \$10 and above enjoyed growth as the economy improved

According to a survey by Gomberg, Fredrikson & Associates, the consulting and research firm co-owned by Fredrikson, wine shipments to the U.S. from all sources, including foreign countries, rose to 375 million cases in 2014, a 1 percent increase over the previous year. An estimated 224 million of those cases were produced in California.

Read the whole story

Don't let medical issues decimate savings

By Jack Lowrey

People pondering their retirement years often conjure images

of spending more time on a favorite pastime or traveling around the country or the world.

Health concerns can intrude on those idyllic scenes, though, not only affecting enjoyment of life but also punching a heavy dent in retirement savings.

As we age, usually our medical or long-term care expenses increase, sometimes depleting our assets to a level of crisis.

It's important for retirees, and anyone planning for retirement, to become educated about what the pitfalls are and what they need to do to avoid losing their life savings.

Long-term care especially can burn a hole in savings accounts. In 2012, for example, nursing home care averaged \$74,800 a year, according to a report by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

Meanwhile, assisted living facilities averaged \$39,500 per year, and home-health services averaged \$21 per hour.

More than 10 million Americans need some sort of long-term care, the Kaiser report said. That number covers all ages, even children, but about half are people 65 and older.

Those older Americans had looked forward to enjoying their golden years. They should be able to have actual golden years instead of what can end up being scary years, both personally and financially.

Certainly, being able to maintain good health is a key factor in protecting savings and making retirement enjoyable and satisfying, he says.

But life doesn't always work out that way. Fortunately, there are strategies seniors can use to lessen the impact of expenses brought on by long-term care needs. Those include:

- **VA benefits.** Military veterans may be able to offset nursing

home or assisted-living expenses through benefits provided by the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. A veteran's eligibility for long-term care services would be determined based on his or her need for ongoing treatment, personal care and assistance, as well as the availability of the service in the area where the person lives, according to the Department of Veteran Affairs.

Other factors, such as financial eligibility, a service-connected disability, insurance coverage, and/or ability to pay may also come into play.

- **Medicaid compliant SPIAs.** A SPIA is a single-premium immediate annuity. Typically, a SPIA is a contract with an insurance company where you pay the company a sum of money up front (the premium), and the company promises to pay you a certain amount of money periodically for the rest of your life.

A Medicaid compliant SPIA is a specially designed annuity that pays out over the person's "life expectancy" and has other specific characteristics. A couple who put money in a Medicaid annuity are able to avoid having the income from that annuity count against the financial assistance a spouse receives for nursing home care.

- **Setting up a trust.** Trusts can help shelter wealth from the look-back periods in Medicaid requirements and assist in qualifying for VA programs, among other advantages.

Jake Lowrey is a financial consultant and president of Lowrey Financial Group.