

Young actors needed for 'The Jungle Book'

Auditions for Missoula Children's Theatre production of "The Jungle Book" are Jan. 12 at Sierra House Elementary School's multipurpose room from 4-6pm. Plan to stay for the full two hours.

Some of the cast members will be asked to stay for a rehearsal immediately following the auditions. Auditions are free. If cast, there is a \$50 per child fee to participate in this weeklong theater experience.

A limited number of scholarships are available by calling Peggy Thompson at 530.542.3632.

Approximately 60 roles are available for local students. All students in K-12 may audition. No advance preparation is necessary. Rehearsals will be held Monday through Friday from 4-8:30pm. The performances are scheduled for Jan. 17 at 3pm and 6pm at the South Tahoe High School theater.

For more information, call Tahoe Arts Project at 530.542.3632.

Opinion: Be smart when driving in winter conditions

By Leona Allen

The Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team would like to remind everyone that extra precautions need to be taken while traveling during the winter. Along with potential hazardous road conditions,

motorists can expect extreme delays due to snow conditions or accidents. We recommend following these tips to ensure a safe trip to your destination:

- Ensure that your vehicle is stocked with extra warm clothing, food, water, a shovel and other survival supplies in case you become stuck on a mountain road.
- Make sure that your gas tank is full before leaving on any trip.
- Always carry chains (it's the law).
- Leave your headlights on while driving.
- Advise someone when you're leaving and where you're going.
- Drive carefully, even when the roads appear dry. Patches of ice tend to accumulate on curves and bridges when the rest of the roadway is clear.
- Clean the snow completely from your car. Any snow left on your roof can slide down unexpectedly and a thin glaze of ice can reflect in the sun, obstructing your view.
- Check road conditions before you leave. For California go online or call 800.427.7623). For Nevada go online or call 877.687.6237.
- You must stop and put on chains when highway signs indicate chains are required. You can be cited by the California Highway Patrol and fined if you don't. You will usually have about a mile between "Chains Required" signs and the checkpoint to install your chains.
- If you are driving slower than the traffic around you, use turnouts so that others may pass.

Leona Allen works for Lake Valley Fire Protection District.

Odds of stroke rise sharply for young people

By Anita Creamer, Sacramento Bee

At the barbershop on Florin Road where he works, Chris Matsumoto was trimming a customer's hair one day in 2006. He'd taken time off work a couple of weeks earlier after having dizzy spells. Suddenly, the severe dizziness returned.

"I got dizzy again, so dizzy," he said. "And then I passed out with a client in my chair."

As it turned out, he'd suffered an ischemic stroke: A clot had blocked blood flow to his brain, cutting off the flow of oxygen and damaging the tissue. He was left unable to speak. The months after that passed in a blur for him, from his diagnosis and hospitalization through his early therapy to relearn how to talk and read.

He was 26 years old.

"This has been an eye-opening experience for me," said barber Chris Matsumoto of the stroke he suffered in his 20s. "Everything is still coming back slowly. It took a lot of work."

From 1994 through 2007, CDC research shows, the rate of ischemic stroke jumped by 47 percent for men ages 35 to 44 and 36 percent for women in the same age group. For men in their early 20s, the number of stroke-related hospitalizations rose by more than 50 percent during that period.

Read the whole story

Safeway to pay nearly \$10 mil. in hazardous waste lawsuit

By KCRA-TV

OAKLAND – Safeway Inc. has agreed to pay nearly \$10 million in civil penalties to settle a environmental protection lawsuit filed in Oakland alleging that the grocery store chain failed to properly dispose of hazardous waste at more than 500 California facilities over seven years.

The San Francisco and Alameda County district attorney's offices said Alameda County Superior Court Judge Wynne Carvill approved the settlement this morning after 41 district attorneys and two city attorneys filed a complaint on Wednesday.

"This investigation touched nearly every county in California, and today's results could not have been reached without the collaborative work of the many offices involved," Alameda County District Attorney Nancy O'Malley said in a statement.

Prosecutors alleged that Safeway sent hazardous waste including medication, aerosol cans, flammable liquids, batteries, electronic devices and other toxic materials to landfills instead of properly disposing of them.

Read the whole story

Freeskier to talk about international feats

Tahoe freeskier Meghan Kelly will talk this month about her 2014 sailing and skiing expedition that began in Iceland and finished along the rugged southwest coast of Greenland.

The trip was created in cooperation with the Climate Reality Project and Polar Bears International in order to document the severe climate change of the region. Along the way Kelly and her team sought out first descents in a rarely accessible winter zone.

The Home Brew Series, presented by Alpenglow Sports and Tahoe Art Haus & Cinema, is designed to showcase local athletes who live regular lives and accomplish extraordinary feats in the mountains. The series is designed to be mellow, free, and community-centric for all ages and abilities.

Kelly's show is the third installment in a four-part series that runs once per month from November through February. Her talk is Jan. 9 at 7pm at Tahoe Art Haus & Cinema, 475 North Lake Blvd., Tahoe City.

Derby Dames looking for new recruits

The Tahoe Derby Dames, the South Lake Tahoe's all-female

amateur flat track roller derby league, is looking for skaters for its eighth season.

All skating abilities are invited.

The Dames offer general training for the new-on-your-skates to the well seasoned derby girl transferring to the lake. Practices are coed (offering everyone the chance to skate) while bouts follow the association's guidelines.

Equipment borrowing is on a first come/first serve basis. Bring a mouth guard.

Training is indoors at Kahle Community Center in Stateline through the winter on Sundays and Tuesdays from 8-10pm.

Email tahoederbydames@sbcglobal.net for info about becoming a Dame.

Garbage bears staying awake during winter

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

That Christmas visitor to Troy Brown's place wasn't Santa, it was a bear.

And that bear captured by wildlife officials in South Reno, like another in the same spot six days before, was demonstrating behavior noted by wildlife experts for more than a decade now – at a time of year when the animals are usually lying down for a winter's nap, many remain awake and on the prowl in search of food.

For the black bears of western Nevada, hibernation has become optional.

“You can keep bears up during the winter if you feed them,” said Jon Beckmann, a biologist and bear expert with the Wildlife Conservation Society.

And feeding them we are, primarily with garbage.

That same human-provided food source that has led to mounting conflict between people and bears across the Reno-Tahoe area is not only making bears bigger, it’s also altering fundamental aspects of their behavior.

Read the whole story

2 U.S. Ski Team athletes die in avalanche

By Ski Racing

SOELDEN, Austria – The U.S. Ski Team is mourning the loss of two promising development level ski racers killed Monday morning in an avalanche in Soelden. The two were among a group of six athletes freeskiing at the Austrian resort. The other four skied out of the slide and were not injured.

Killed in the avalanche were Ronnie Berlack, 20, of Franconia, N.H., and Burke Mountain, Vt., and Bryce Astle, 19, of Sandy, Utah.

“Ronnie and Bryce were both outstanding ski racers who were passionate about their sport – both on the race course and skiing the mountain,” said U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association

President and CEO Tiger Shaw. “Our hearts go out to the Berlack and Astle families, as well as to their extended sport family. Both of them loved what they did and conveyed that to those around them.”

Read the whole story

County launches website for West Slope parks

El Dorado County has launched a website to provide people with interactive maps, news, events and alerts about trails and parklands.

ParkWatchReport also has a tool for reporting illegal activity, conflicts, safety hazards and/or maintenance issues. To make a report a user must log in and cannot report information anonymously.

The website went live in December.

“This program was developed by a group of volunteers from the Horseman Association after an accident on one of the trails outside of our county,” Vickie Sanders, county parks manager, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It will also provide links to other rec providers. We do not have all the links on the program yet but that is the goal. This program ties into the master plan and is not in conflict.”

But only parks on the West Slope are listed. The county doesn’t operate any parks in the basin.

Sanders said, “This is just another tool for the public.”

Fast-food chains move to drop chemicals

By Candice Choi, AP

NEW YORK — Fast-food chains have a New Year's resolution: Drop the junk.

As people express distaste for food they think is overly processed, McDonald's, Taco Bell and other chains are trying to shed their reputation for serving reheated meals that are loaded with chemicals. That includes rethinking the use of artificial preservatives and other ingredients customers find objectionable.

"This demand for fresh and real is on the rise," said Greg Creed, CEO of Yum Brands, which owns Taco Bell, KFC and Pizza Hut.

During the presentation for analysts and investors last month, Creed said the company needs to be more transparent about ingredients and use fewer preservatives.

Recasting fast-food as "fresh" and "real" will be tricky, in large part because it's so universally regarded as cheap and greasy. Another problem is that terms like "fresh," "real" and "healthy" have nebulous meanings, making it hard for companies to pin down how to approach transformation.

One way chains are looking to redefine themselves is by purging recipes of chemicals people might find unappetizing. Already, packaged food and beverage companies have

reformulated products to remove such ingredients, even while standing by their safety. PepsiCo, for instance, said it would remove brominated vegetable oil from Gatorade after a petition by a teenager noted it isn't approved for use in some markets overseas.

And fast-food chains are indicating they want to jump on the "clean label" trend too:

- Last month, McDonald's USA President Mike Andres outlined improvements the company is working on, including the simplification of ingredient labels. Without providing details, he said to expect some changes in early 2015. The remarks came after the company reported a 4.6 percent decline in U.S. sales for November, capping two years of struggling performance.

"Why do we need to have preservatives in our food?" Andres asked, noting McDonald's restaurants go through supplies quickly. "We probably don't."

- Subway, a privately held company that does not disclose sales, started airing TV ads Thursday for its new chicken strips free of artificial preservatives and flavors. After suffering bad publicity, the company said earlier last year it would remove an ingredient from its bread that an online petition noted was also used in yoga mats. The ingredient, azodicarbonamide, is approved by the Food and Drug Administration and widely used as a dough conditioner and whitening agent.

- Chick-fil-A said in 2013 it would remove high-fructose corn syrup from buns and artificial dyes from its dressings. A couple months later, it said it plans to serve only chicken raised without antibiotics within five years.

- Carl's Jr. last month introduced an "all-natural" burger with no added hormones, antibiotics or steroids. "We are obviously looking at other products on our menu to see which

ones can be made all natural as well,” said Brad Haley, the chain’s chief marketing officer.

It’s not clear how far fast-food companies will go in reformulating recipes. But the nation’s biggest chains are facing growing competition. In the latest quarter, customer visits to traditional fast-food hamburger chains declined 3 percent from a year ago, according to market researcher NPD Group. Fast-casual chains – which are seen as a step up from traditional fast-food – saw visits rise 8 percent.

Part of the appeal of fast-casual chains is that they position themselves as being higher in quality. Chipotle, which touts its use of organic ingredients and meat from animals that were raised without antibiotics, said sales at established locations surged 19.8 percent in the most recent quarter. And Panera vowed this summer to remove artificial colors, flavors and preservatives from its food by 2016.

The ethos of wholesome ingredients is increasingly being embraced across the industry. But not without some challenges.

Dan Coudreaut, executive chef at McDonald’s, has noted the difficulties in changing recipes. In an interview last year, he said McDonald’s is looking at ways to use culinary techniques to replace the functions of certain ingredients.

“If you take (an ingredient) out, what are you giving up?” he said.

Michael Jacobson, executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, said there are likely many cases where artificial preservatives or colors could be replaced with natural alternatives without significant costs. Since their functions vary, he said companies would have to evaluate recipes product by product.

“Sometimes, food additives can be crutches or insurance policies. If a food is frozen, germs aren’t going to grow. But

preservatives might be added just in case, or they may be used just because their supplier has been using it for so long," he said, adding that such changes are "not a big deal" in terms of the overall health.

Michele Simon, a public health lawyer and author of "Appetite for Profit: How the Food Industry Undermines our Health and How to Fight Back," also said getting rid of additives here and there won't be enough to change the way people think about fast-food.

"That's just rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic," Simon said. "These companies have a fundamental problem in who they are."