

Thanksgiving weekend sales slide 11%

By Hiroko Tabuchinov, New York Times

Have Americans finally had enough of Black Friday madness?

Sales, both in stores and online, from Thanksgiving through the weekend were estimated to have dropped 11 percent, to \$50.9 billion, from \$57.4 billion last year, according to preliminary survey results released Sunday by the National Retail Federation. Sales fell despite many stores' opening earlier than ever on Thanksgiving Day.

And though many retailers offered the same aggressive discounts online as they did in their stores, the web failed to attract more shoppers or spending over the four-day holiday weekend than it did last year, the group said. The average person who shopped over the weekend spent \$159.55 at online retailers, down 10.2 percent from last year.

Over all, 133.7 million people shopped or planned to shop at stores or online over the four-day weekend, 5.2 percent fewer than last year, the federation said. And shoppers spent an average of \$380.95 over the four days, 6.4 percent less than the \$407.02 they spent last year.

Read the whole story

Wet week ahead for Lake Tahoe

The National Weather Service in Reno has issued a winter storm watch for this week for elevations above 7,000 feet in the

Lake Tahoe Basin.

The watch is from Dec. 2 at 10am though Dec. 4 at 4am.

The wet system is expected to drop snow at lake level. High temperatures, though, are predicted to be in the 40s in South Lake Tahoe. This means moisture could partly be in the form of rain.

By Thursday the snow should be tapering off. Roads are expected to be slick and visibility limited, especially over the passes. For current road conditions, click on the state icons on the home page of *Lake Tahoe News*.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Ensure Christmas trees don't become a hazard

Here are Christmas tree fire safety tips.

Select a fresh tree with good color and firm, flexible needles that do not easily pull from the branches.

Place the tree in plain water immediately after recutting the trunk at least one-half inch above the old cut. The container you use for your tree should hold 2 to 4 quarts of water. The longer you wait to place your tree in water, the greater the chances are that it will lose the required moisture content to keep it fresh through the holiday season.

Never place your tree on a wooden stand.

Locate the tree away from sources of heat. Avoid placing the tree near heaters, wood stoves, fireplaces, large appliances, such as TVs, and direct sunlight.

Be careful not to block a door or other exit with the tree or rearranged furniture.

Use mini-lights on your tree and never place candles on or near your tree. Remove your Christmas tree as soon as possible after the holiday.

Never burn your Christmas tree or wrapping paper in the fireplace. The rapid burning and excessive heat can damage the firebox and chimney creating a serious fire hazard.

– Sallie Ross-Filgo, South Lake Tahoe Fire Department

Supreme Court to weigh whether Facebook rants are threats

By Irin Carmon, MSNBC

What does Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts think about Gamergate? How seriously does Justice Clarence Thomas take Facebook rants? And will Justice Anthony Kennedy's First Amendment enthusiasms extend to rap lyrics?

All of these intriguing questions are on the table at the nation's highest court Monday morning with oral argument for *Elonis v. United States*. The case features a Pennsylvania man, Anthony Elonis, who claims his Facebook rants about killing his estranged wife and others were rap lyrics. Having been

convicted of those threats, Elonis is asking the court to put down a standard for what counts as a “true threat,” which is not protected by the First Amendment: Should that test be how the speaker intended the comment, or whether the recipient felt threatened?

Elonis comes just in time for national debates over Internet bullying and stalking, about rape culture and violence against women, and about the role in the press and artists in publishing provocative material. It may also make some of the nine justices squirm. They aren’t exactly known for their technological aptitude, nor their pop culture savvy, and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg recently accused her male colleagues of having a “blind spot” around gender.

Read the whole story

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe



Pilot

Pilot is a 2-year old Yorkie-mini Schnauzer mix who is happy

and friendly, social and cuddly.

He was brought to the shelter last week with several other small dogs from an overcrowded Central Valley shelter by Umbrella of Hope, a wonderful partner of the Meyers shelter. Pilot is a sweet little guy who loves to be held.

Pilot is neutered, microchipped, tested for heartworm, and vaccinated. He is 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

Tahoe Choir losing director, gaining singer



Linda Mitchell is stepping
down after 21 years as
director of the Tahoe Choir.
Photo/Provided

By Kathryn Reed

A voice that has been missing from the Tahoe Choir for the last 21 years will soon be returning. But it also means the choir will have a new director after Sunday's concert.

This is the last season Linda Mitchell will be the choir's director.

"The reason I'm leaving now is I feel like it is time. I feel like you need blood, new ideas, new music, new thoughts. So, I said I'm going to be stepping down," Mitchell told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I'm really looking forward to being able to sing in the choir."

It was in 1971 that Linda Madden Hughes started the choir. It's a community choir – made up of about 50 men and women of all ages who like to sing. Most are from the South Shore, with some members from the Carson Valley and North Shore. They put on two performances a year – one in December, one in May.

The ability to sing, and the time to rehearse and perform are the requirements to join.

The community choir is tied to Lake Tahoe Community College's choir. The two come together for the concerts. It's possible to get college credit while singing. Those taking the fall class are part of this month's concert, and those in the winter-spring classes perform in May.

Mitchell, 71, has been the instructor at LTCC as well; another job she is giving up at the end of this calendar year.

"Linda is not only a beautiful singer, but an inspiration to

all of us as an excellent teacher – one who imparts to the Tahoe Choir a love of music and a desire to make beautiful sound. Her passion for music is obvious to all of us and she has taught us all so much,” Julie Frame, Tahoe Choir board member, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

A board runs the choir, but mostly it is the director who does the work.

“I come up with the idea for the program and I then run it by the board,” Mitchell said. “Sometimes people might look at me and say, ‘Are you sure?’ One board member looked at me when I wanted to do Disney cartoon music. Then I explained Disney movies. She understood then. That was one of our most popular ones.”

The Dec. 7 – as is tradition with all the December concerts – is more focused on Christmas music. There will be the sing-along type songs, as well as more serious pieces. Mitchell picked “Lord Nelson Mass” by Joseph Haydn because it was written for four-part harmony.

“A choir is made up of different voice parts – soprano, alto, tenor and bass – so you have melody and harmony,” Mitchell explained. “Some pieces can be just the song, but it might not lend itself being written out for four different parts.”

She found that to be true when the choir did music of the 1960’s. It was hard to come up with music to harmonize. Other than the Beatles, the choices were limited.

Mitchell tries to find music that lends itself to solos, duets and ensembles.

“I’ve grown into a singer and a better person under Linda’s direction. She’s a lion tamer and a fabulous teacher in front of the choir,” Catherine Schoen, Tahoe Choir board member, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

While the singers are performing for free, there is a cost associated with putting on the performances. All of the rights to the music must be bought. This covers copyright issues. Through the years it has gotten more expensive.

"We have saved enough money to buy music risers to perform on. They were several thousand dollars," Mitchell said.

The choir also pays the accompanist. The Tahoe Choir gives Mitchell a small stipend, while the college pays her to teach.

While the choir has a vast music library, something new is always desirous.

Mitchell said last spring's concert featuring music from Cole Porter and George Gershwin was one of the best-attended performances because people were so familiar with the songs.

"I tend to love whatever I'm working on at the particular moment because I've invested so much into it," Mitchell said.

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Notes:

- Tahoe Choir and Lake Tahoe Community College Chorus' winter concert is Dec. 7 at 3pm at St. Theresa Catholic Church, 1041 Lyons Ave., South Lake Tahoe.
- Cost: \$10 for adults, \$8 for students and seniors, and free for children under 5.
- For more info, call 530.541.2635.
- A replacement for Mitchell has not been named.

Opinion: Sac Bee needs to get facts correct

By Larry Weitzman

On Nov. 19, the *Sacramento Bee* in its inimitable style wrote an editorial entitled “El Dorado County deserves better” which repeated the same old lies by writing, “Both an outside firm’s assessment of county government and a county grand jury found a deeply dysfunctional government in which bullying, intimidation and disrespect run rampant.”



Larry Weitzman

The editorial contended that the now terminated Terri Daly was trying to “turn around the culture of the county administration.” In an email to the editorial page editor, Dan Morain, I asked the question if they read the Van Dermyden Maddux report assessment of EDC government sometimes known as the “climate of fear” and the grand Jury report? The response was written by one of their editorial writers, Mariel Garza, and it said, “I don’t know where you get the idea we didn’t read the report. We did.” The *Bee*’s reading of the report leads me to believe English must be their fourth language, as they didn’t comprehend anything they read by writing their editorial.

Maybe the *Sac Bee* can read the very plain English as published in *Lake Tahoe News*, just the facts, not emotion. The claims as asserted by Daly and the GJ report that attempted to destroy County Auditor Joe Harn was that he was a bully and that there was a culture of fear in the county. Unfortunately, the Van Dermeyden Maddux "study" showed absolutely no such thing and if there were a "climate of fear", it was created by Daly.

Here are the facts from the Van Dermeyden study: The highest employee satisfaction rating in county departments consisting of four or more employees was, you guessed it, Harn's Auditor-Controller's Office at 92 percent. The survey was secret and anonymous. Some of the lowest satisfaction ratings were in the CAO's office with the Community Development Agency scoring the lowest at 22 percent. Guess who headed the CDA? That's right Kim Kerr, Daly's handpicked candidate for the position of assistant CAO. Kerr was also forced out of EDC as she submitted her resignation a week after Daly was forced out. If there were a bully in EDC's administration, it sounds like it was Kerr.

Another low scoring department within the CAO's office was IT at 41 percent, which was run by Daly's handpicked head Kelly Webb. Webb has since been demoted by the BOS because she was incompetent. What does that say about Daly? What does that say about the reading comprehension of the *Sac Bee* editorial writers?

Of the 1,934 people who were surveyed, only 11 mentioned harassment as an issue and the question as to workplace challenges only one commented as to bullying. There is a significantly higher percentage of bullying and harassment in kindergarten classes.

More positive numbers showed that 91 percent of those employees who responded said their work "makes a difference to the citizens of EDC." Eighty-seven percent of respondents said that their department "provides a high level of public

service.”

About 88 percent of the 86 percent who responded to the question of the most desirable aspect of the workplace are (in order of descending percentage) the people, the work environment, the work itself, compensation and location. But the No. 1 response was the people. With results like those, one would have to understand that there is good employee morale in EDC and if there is a climate of fear, it is located within the CAO's office and created by Daly and Kerr. Since Daly's departure, according to employees within the CAO's office, the atmosphere has become more relaxed with less tension already.

Readers have to wonder what survey the *Sacramento Bee* read in assessing that there is a climate of fear in El Dorado County unless they are referring to the CAO's office itself. But that wasn't the case as the *Bee* looked at Daly as being the savior of EDC. In reading the executive summary of the Van Dermeyden Maddux survey, one has to wonder of the *Bee's* ability to comprehend the questions and the survey results and tabulations. Maybe the *Bee* purposely didn't want to understand the results.

One important fact that remains unknown and which the authors of the study wouldn't reveal is how the data from the EDC survey stacks up against other jurisdictions. Perhaps the reason is that the survey results are some of the best when compared to other surveys.

The *Bee's* read of the grand jury report “A Prescription for Dysfunction” only adds to the *Bee's* failure of reading comprehension saying that the GJ “found a deeply dysfunctional government in which bullying, intimidation and disrespect run rampant.” Again, it is the *Bee's* failure to comprehend the English written word. With respect to the allegations of criticism against the auditor, the GJ admits they don't know if the allegations are true when they wrote, “Whether or not

the criticisms directed at the controller are true..." and they admitted they never investigated any of the allegations when they wrote "the GJ did not investigate the allegations made against the auditor-controller following the county's workplace assessment..."

It sounded like Jonathan Gruber, the economist who designed Obamacare and who said, "The American voters are too stupid to understand," participated in writing the GJ report when it wrote, "the electorate has no valid basis for evaluating the performance of officials performing the specialized and sometimes esoteric duties of these offices (referring to the auditor, etc)."

Therefore any conclusion made by the GJ regarding these issues should be printed on toilet paper because that's their net worth, but that might be wasting toilet paper. If there is a dysfunction in EDC, it is in the GJ itself. Instead of being finders of fact, the GJ became political spin-doctors committing malpractice. Nothing they said in that report had any basis in fact. It was an attempt by Daly to take more control of the county. It reminds me of the latest Obama moves with bypassing our elected Congress and ignoring the results of the last election.

But the *Bee* was certainly correct about one thing; El Dorado County does deserve better. And with the termination of Daly and Kerr it hopefully finally will happen, but that is up to the BOS.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Bees' future may depend on their past

By Carl Zimmer, New York Times

The future of bees may depend on understanding their past.

Bees are in trouble, any entomologist will tell you. Honeybee colonies in the United States have suffered devastating losses in recent years. But colony collapse disorder, as it's called, affects only the species kept in beehives – the European honeybee, *Apis mellifera*. There are almost 20,000 species of wild bees, and they aren't faring well, either.

Nearly a third of bumblebee species in the United States are declining. In the Netherlands, more than half of the country's 357 species of wild bees are endangered. Many species of plants, including crops, depend on wild bees to spread their pollen. When they lose their pollinators, they may suffer, too.

"It's essential to know what is causing those declines," said Jeroen Scheper, a graduate student at Alterra, a research institution at Wageningen University in the Netherlands.

But it is not enough to consider the many challenges – from pesticides to parasites – that wild bees face right now. "We need to go back in time," said Scheper.

Read the whole story

Uber may take fight to Nev. Legislature

By Scott Sonner, AP

RENO — Uber Technologies' legal battle with Nevada's highly regulated taxi industry over Internet ride-sharing may be headed back to the political arena now that a judge has at least temporarily banned Uber's unlicensed operations statewide.

Whether his restraining order put the brakes on an unregulated transportation service, or pulled the plug on emerging technology, is one of the questions lawmakers may be left to decide if Uber can't persuade state regulators to find a way to marry its virtual world with the real one on the Las Vegas Strip and the streets of Reno.

Uber says it's the victim of overzealous enforcement of antiquated laws that never envisioned smartphones that could "e-hail" transportation on demand. It's unclear whether any bills that would change the regulations are in the works. None of the brief summaries of the hundreds of bills lawmakers and state agencies have requested so far mention ride-sharing.

The company said late Wednesday that it temporarily stopped offering rides in Nevada as a result of the ruling.

"It's unfortunate that Nevada is the first state in the nation to temporarily suspend Uber," company spokeswoman Eva Behrend said in an emailed statement.

Nevada's attorney general says the multibillion-dollar company finds itself in park because it thumbed its nose at regulators and deliberately broke the law to maximize profits as long as it could.

Uber refused to seek the licenses because it maintains it's a technology company, not a motor carrier.

Chief Deputy Attorney General Gina Session suggested the company may have been picking a fight in court "to get attention before the legislative session and get some momentum."

"Uber's approach is to start operations in open violation of the law in hope a groundswell of public opinion will override the regulatory concerns," she told Washoe District Court Judge Scott Freeman. She said the company acquiesced before in agreeing to regulation elsewhere, including Nebraska, South Carolina and Maryland.

"When it wants to, it can work with regulatory oversight," she said. "Why not in Nevada? Are we the Wild, Wild West?"

Freeman said he thinks he knows why.

"They can save a lot of money if I let them operate without regulation because I find they are not a common carrier," the judge said during a nearly seven-hour hearing late Tuesday.

At one point, he directly questioned Uber officials on the witness stand as to why they suddenly abandoned discussions with the state and launched in Nevada Oct. 24 without any regulatory authority.

"Discussions were under way," he said. "Two days later, all heck breaks loose."

"Or heaven," Uber lobbyist John Griffin countered, "depending on your perspective."

From the consumers' perspective, Uber says its Internet application matching riders with drivers using personal cars is cheaper, more efficient and more accessible, especially in underserved neighborhoods.

Uber argues its service is not public because it's available only to "members of the online community – in sharp contrast to a taxi driver who just happens to be picking up literally anybody on the street," Uber lawyer Donald Campbell said.

The state disagrees.

"Just because you don't wait on the curb doesn't mean you're not available to the public," Session said.

Even before the ruling, Campbell suggested Uber may take a different approach going forward, whether it's in the courthouse or the statehouse.

"We get the message," he told the judge.

Crews race to mulch barren King Fire terrain

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

Contractors working for the U.S. Forest Service are racing against Mother Nature to spread straw mulch over 1,200 acres of fire-scorched mountainside exposed by the King fire.

As several storms arrive in the next week, forest officials fear a big, wet one will hit. Without the underbrush and plant material that normally cover the forest, massive erosion will wash away roads, fill reservoirs and harm other critical infrastructure.

The September wildfire burned 97,717 acres. While much of the damaged forest survived with the trees' canopy largely intact, an estimated 30 percent of the damage is severe, said Mary

Moore, a key member of the team assessing the damage. Of that area, 1,200 acres were identified as key to protect through an aerial drop of mulch on the steep slopes near roads, waterways and other assets.

Read the whole story