

Couple with baby rescued along Rubicon Trail

By Siemny Chhuon, KXTV

RUBICON SPRINGS — A California Highway Patrol helicopter rescued a young Fairfield couple, their 4-month-old daughter and their friend from the Rubicon Trail in El Dorado County Tuesday.

It's a story Elizabeth Oldknow will one day tell her daughter.

"I still don't know how to completely process it," Oldknow said.

Oldknow, her husband, their baby and their friend set out on a fun day trip Tuesday along the rocky Rubicon Trail. But then their Jeep got stuck in Rubicon Springs.

"Obviously, it was a mistake to go as far as we did," Oldknow said. "I wish we turned around sooner."

With no way out, they were forced to spend the night in the woods. Fortunately, they found a campground.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe overhauls employee benefits package

By Kathryn Reed

While South Lake Tahoe employees will have more in their

paychecks, it's going to cost many of them more to retire. This is because retiree health care coverage is going away for almost all current workers.

The South Lake Tahoe City Council at a special meeting this morning at 8 is expected to approve agreements with five of the six bargaining units. A tentative agreement has been reached with the 11-member Police Employees Association that will come back to the council at a later date.

"Transformative" is the word City Manager Nancy Kerry and Mayor Hal Cole used during an exclusive interview with *Lake Tahoe News* this week when describing the changes that are about to unfold.

By changing the health care plan, eliminating retiree health benefits for employees not yet retired, and modifying coverage the city will see a cost savings of \$1.5 million a year for each of the next three years. This starts with the fiscal year that began Oct. 1. The city is taking that savings and reinvesting it in the employees.

So, while there are raises and the introduction of deferred compensation programs that are similar to the private sector's 401(k), the money for these benefits has already been allocated and nothing is being taken away from the public to make it happen.

"The most important element of the overall financing strategy for the restructuring of wages and benefits is that it is funded from current and anticipated available resources, not additional taxes from the taxpayers, and in fact, it will reduce the city's and therefore the taxpayers' contribution payments to the other post-employment benefits trust over the next many years," Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

When Kerry was hired the unfunded liability for health care was \$47 million. With getting retirees onto Medicare, that figure dropped to \$25 million. Today's changes should bring

that amount to \$15 million. An actuarial study will be completed after the first of the year that will provide a detailed analysis of the unfunded liability.

"We could never have set enough aside," Kerry said of the promises previous councils and city managers made to employees.

Kerry has been working to resolve the health care and other unfunded liability issues for nearly three years. Cole said he tried to address the issue with previous city managers but they never wanted to deal with it or said nothing could be done.

"Pressure forces you to be innovative," Kerry said. She said it took a strong council and knowing the community would not tax themselves to deal with the debt or raises.

While in years past each employee group usually got the same percentage of raise, that is not happening now. The pot of money has been split equitably, which means fairly by dollar amount and not percentage. Each group decided if they wanted the money in the form of raises, deferred compensation, health care or other benefits.

Salaries will increase between 2.5 and 4 percent this year and next, and from zero to 4 percent in 2016-17. It has been nearly five years since most employees received a raise.

The city was paying \$19,000/year for a family health plan. Now it will be paying \$12,000.

A change is that employees may opt out of the health plan – something that was not allowed before.

"We have to stay self-insured because we have so many retirees. They are the most expensive," Kerry explained.

There are 800 people in the plan, though only 175 of them are employees. Without the change, that number could have grown to

1,200. When the current crop of retirees and their dependents are no longer covered by the city then officials can look at not being self-insured.

The city has created what it calls Plan A. That is a basic health plan that has a \$5,500 deductible. The city picks up the cost for singles, couples and families. Vision and dental are no longer offered. If people want a better plan, they can pay the difference for it.

Changes in the first year will see a positive net fund balance of approximately \$500,000. The recommendation is for that money to be set aside to pay for changes in the following two fiscal years.

For employees who are close to retiring and would not have been saving for post-retirement benefits there will be a transitional plan.

Council members and current retirees are also impacted by the changes. The latter have always been subjected to whatever current employees agree to. This means they will be on Plan A for health coverage, with the option to upgrade if they want.

Councilman Tom Davis is considered a retiree because when he left the council he took on retiree status – unlike Cole and Brooke Laine when they initially stepped down. Even though Davis is on Medicare, when he retires again from the council this will allow him to tap the city's supplemental health insurance for the rest of his life like all other current retirees. The other current council members are eligible for Plan A and will receive no medical benefits when they leave the council.

South Lake Tahoe is the only public entity in the Lake Tahoe Basin that offers any retirees medical coverage. It's also one of the only public agencies to have not given raises in the last five years.

It's possible the changes South Lake Tahoe is making to its medical plan will be precedent setting. City officials have been asked to speak to other cities about what South Lake Tahoe has accomplished in overhauling its health care offerings.

Opinion: Truckee has a drinking problem

By Adam McGill

As your police chief, I'm frustrated. More than a year ago, I wrote to you regarding our community culture surrounding the use of alcohol. I received a great deal of positive remarks and many people have shared with me they changed their behavior in light of learning more about our alcohol use and its impacts.



Adam McGill

I was encouraged and remained committed that we can do more. Yet the symptoms of this issue continue to cross my desk almost daily. I can't ignore that rarely a day goes by that we do not arrest a local resident for driving under the influence or drunk in public. Just in the last few days: One local overturned their vehicle while DUI, somehow escaping serious

injury. Another local was driving in excess of 80 mph in the Glenshire Drive construction zone, passing vehicles, all while under the influence with two children in the vehicle, one of which not even belonging to the driver. A third was so drunk inside a downtown bar that officers had to carry the individual out.

These examples are not rare. Similar situations have occurred throughout 2014. Somehow, none of this year's events has led to serious injury or death. Our luck will run out.

Despite an enormous effort in prevention and education by Truckee Police Department and many others in the community, arrests for alcohol related offenses continue to climb. We are on pace for more than double the number of DUI arrests in 2014 as compared to 2013. The same is true for people arrested for being so drunk in a public place that they cannot care for themselves. Most of these arrests are locals, your neighbors, people you know and care for. The police cannot solve this issue through arrests alone. Only a community can change this cycle.

Several studies show residents of Truckee-Tahoe are healthier and happier than most of the U.S. population. We exercise more, we smoke less tobacco, we have better nutrition, and we're outdoors more. These same studies indicate we also consume 25 percent more alcohol and in higher amounts than the average U.S. population. The people here are tough, resilient, and fully capable of enacting change to our culture surrounding the use of alcohol. What is preventing us from doing so?

You can start today to enact change by discussing this issue with your friends, neighbors, co-workers, and children. Did you know Truckee kids report the No. 1 reason they choose not to drink is because they don't want to disappoint their parents? Did you also know that Truckee kids report they frequently drive in a vehicle with an adult who has been

drinking alcohol? What adults say and do matters.

Contrary as it may seem to some, I am not against drinking alcohol. I am not advocating for prohibition to return in Truckee. Alcohol is perfectly acceptable and even enjoyable at the right time and place, but drinking in excess or getting behind the wheel of a car isn't just your issue – your choices can have consequences for everyone else and it is my job to do all that I can to protect everyone, including many times, people from themselves. Calling attention to a community safety issue is my obligation.

What will be our tipping point? Will it be the death of an innocent child? The time to act is now, before the tragedy. The police will continue to arrest people but that will not change the culture of our community. Let's work together. Let's make it nearly impossible for my officers to find a DUI. Let's make arrests a rarity and not the norm. Only we can make a fundamental change of what is acceptable behavior and what is not. There is no middle ground on this issue.

Will you stand with us and say enough is enough? To learn more go online.

Adam McGill is Truckee's chief of police.

Phone scams targeting El Dorado County

El Dorado County sheriff's deputies are getting lots of reports from victims of phone scams.

The caller tells the victim there is a warrant for their

arrest unless they take care of it by making a payment. In some cases the male caller states he is a lieutenant with the sheriff's office, and tells the victim that they failed to appear for a jury summons. He tells them that there is now a warrant for their arrest, and they need to put some money on a green dot card which can be purchased at Rite Aid or 7-Eleven. The caller has the name, address and phone number of the victim.

In other cases, the male caller states he is with the IRS, and tells the victim they owe a large amount of money to the IRS for tax fraud. He tells the victim that the IRS will place a lien against their property, and they will attach their wages unless they send a payment by Western Union money order.

Neither the sheriff's office nor the IRS will contact people demanding a financial payment.

If someone receives a suspicious phone call demanding money, they should contact the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office at 530.573.3000.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



- There will be a series of six caregiving classes starting Oct. 20 in South Lake Tahoe sponsored by Barton Health.

- Aaron Atkins is Northstar's ski and snowboard teams' director.

- East West Partners is seeking approval from Placer County and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency for a development on a ridgeline above Kings Beach. North Tahoe Preservation Alliance, Sierra Club and Friends of the West Shore will answer questions about the project Oct. 16 at 6pm at Kings Beach Event Center, 8318 N. Lake Tahoe Blvd.
 - The USA Cycling Amateur and Para-Cycling Road National Championships will be in North Lake Tahoe June 24-28.
 - Lake Tahoe Hard Rock donated blankets, sheets, towels, lamps, irons, alarm clocks, shampoos and non-perishable food to local charities including Christmas Cheer, Live Violence Free and South Shore Christian Assembly.
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King Fire 100% contained

After nearly a month, the King Fire east of Pollock Pines is 100 percent contained.

This means there is a ring around the fire, but it is still burning. People can expect to see smoke from the interior of the fire area until the area experiences significant rain or snow this winter. Most of the 97,717 acres burned are on the Eldorado National Forest, though part of the Tahoe National Forest also burned.

It started Sept. 13 by a man who remains in jail charged with arson. Twelve houses were destroyed and 68 outbuildings were lost.

A Burned Area Emergency Response Team is assessing the post-fire threats to life, safety, property, and critical natural and cultural resources on the national forest.

Studies: Talking to your car can be dangerous

By Joan Lowy, AP

WASHINGTON – Just because you can talk to your car doesn't mean you should. Two studies have found that voice-activated smartphones and dashboard infotainment systems may be making the distracted-driving problem worse instead of better.

The systems let drivers do things like tune the radio, send a text message, or make a phone call while keeping their eyes on the road and their hands on the wheel, but many of these systems are so error-prone or complex that they require more concentration from drivers rather than less, according to studies released Tuesday by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety and the University of Utah.

One study examined infotainment systems in some of the most common auto brands on the road: Chevrolet, Chrysler, Ford, Hyundai and Mercedes. The second study tested the Apple iPhone's Siri voice system to navigate, send texts, make Facebook and Twitter posts, and use the calendar without handling or looking at the phone. Apple and Google are working with automakers to mesh smartphones with infotainment systems so that drivers can bring their apps, navigation and music files into their cars.

The voice-activated systems were graded on a distraction scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing no distraction and 5 comparable to doing complex math problems and word memorization.

The systems were tested by 162 university students and other volunteers in three settings: a laboratory, a driving simulator and in cars while driving through a Salt Lake City neighborhood.

Apple's Siri received the worst rating, 4.14. Twice test drivers using Siri in a driving simulator rear-ended another car.

Chevrolet's MyLink received the worst rating, 3.7, among the infotainment systems. Infotainment systems from three other automakers – Mercedes, Ford and Chrysler – also were rated more distracting for drivers than simply talking on a hand-held cellphone. "What we continue to see from customers is that they demand this level of technology in their vehicles, that access to music and access to calls is now a critical part of the driving experience and so we're looking at innovative ways to provide that," said Chevrolet spokeswoman Annalisa Bluhm.

Apple noted in a statement that researchers didn't use the company's CarPlay or Siri Eyes Free, which are designed for use in cars. However, David Strayer, the University of Utah psychology professor who led the two studies, said researchers consulted with Apple before beginning the study. The study used an iOS 7 version of Siri that was tweaked to be nearly identical to the iOS 8 version, which was just recently released, he said.

The systems with the worst ratings were those that made errors even though drivers' voice commands were clear and distinct, said Strayer. Drivers had to concentrate on exactly what words they wanted to use and in what order to get the systems to follow their commands, creating a great deal of frustration.

For example, an infotainment system might recognize a command to change a radio station to "103.5 FM," but not "FM 103.5" or simply "103.5," he said.

Siri sometimes garbled text messages or selected wrong phone numbers from personal phonebooks, Strayer said. During one test, Siri called 911 instead of the phone number requested by the volunteer driver and the driver had to scramble to end the call before it went through. Siri found the number in the driver's phonebook because the driver had called it once before.

"When these systems become more complex, like sending text messages or posting to Facebook, it pushes the workloads to pretty high levels and may be dangerous while driving," Strayer said.

The studies contradict claims by automakers, who have been pitching the voice systems to car buyers as a way they can safely enjoy social media and connectivity. Safety advocates say drivers assume that such systems are safe because they are incorporated into vehicles and are hands-free.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which regulates vehicle safety, has issued guidelines to automakers for dashboard systems and is working on similar guidelines for cellphones and voice-activated systems, but the guidelines are voluntary.

"Infotainment systems are unregulated," said Deborah Hersman, president of the National Safety Council and former chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board. "It is like the Wild West, where the most critical safety feature in the vehicle – the driver – is being treated like a guinea pig in human trials with new technologies."

Two of the infotainment systems were rated relatively low for distraction. Toyota's Entune received a 1.7, the distraction equivalent of listening to an audiobook, and Hyundai's Blue Lin Telematic System received a 2.2.

"The good news is that really well-designed systems offer us the possibility to interact in ways that aren't so

distracting,” Strayer said.

Winter-summer gear swap in Meyers

The inaugural Meyers Gear Swap is Oct. 19 from 11am-3pm in the parking lot at Tahoe Paradise parking lot.

Bring quality summer or winter gear to sell. Skis, snowboards, bikes, paddle gear, climbing gear, camping equipment, and other outdoor toys. All item should be no more than 5 years old.

Drop off sale items at the Tahoe Paradise Golf Course between 8:30-10:30am. Unsold gear must be picked up between 3-5pm. Unclaimed items will be considered donated.

There will be a \$1 charge per item plus 20 percent commission that will go to the Meyers Community Foundation. The Meyers Community Foundation is a newly established 501(c)3 that advocates for and promotes and serves the needs of the Meyers residential and business communities.

For more information, call Brian 530.545.9941 or Rene 530.545.0340.

Unity at the Lake celebrating 20 years

Unity at the Lake is putting on two events this weekend.

Oct. 11 is Manifest Your Dreams and Healing Seminar with Garland Landrith from 11am-5pm. Landrith is a master of emotional freedom technique. This will be a level one EFT training class with a certificate given to all who attend. Cost for the seminar is \$49, which includes a DVD and workbook, numerous papers as well as a mini-session with Landrith.

Call 530.544.2266 or email unityatthelake@sbcglobal.net to register.

On Oct. 12 is Unity's 20th birthday celebration and open house from 11:30am-3pm. There will be live music, face painting, an archive CD show and food.

For more information, call 530.544.2266 or go online. Unity is located at 1195 Rufus Allen Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

Remaining council candidates file financials

Here are the financial documents for South Lake Tahoe City Council candidates Bruce Grego and Matt Palacio.