Landing Resort settles claim involving Yelp

By Rebecca Jarvis, Kinga Janik and Chris James, ABC News

It was the Yelp review that led to Yelp revenge.

After wedding guest Rabih Zahnan stayed the Union Street Guest House in Hudson, N.Y., for a friend's wedding, he turned to the business-review website Yelp to write about what he thought was an abysmal stay.

"There was a musty order, it smelled bad, we kept the windows open for the entire time we were there," Zahnan told "Nightline."

But the Guest House fought back. Zahnan said he received an email from the inn saying there would be a $500 fine to the bride and groom for each negative review posted online by them or their guests.

The bride and groom apparently overlooked the fine print in their wedding contract put forth by the guest house, which said, "A $500 fine will be deducted from your deposit for every negative review of USGH placed on any Internet site by anyone in your party."

As this story went viral last week, a collective consumer fury ensued, and the inn's star rating on Yelp plummeted to a dismal 1.5 out of 5 stars as a barrage of users posted angry, and clearly facetious, reviews about the business. One person even called it "the worst hotel in history."

Over the last few years, the Yelp review has taken on a life on its own, and has truly become make-or-break for businesses nationwide.

James Demetriades owns the Landing Resort and Spa in South

Lake Tahoe. He admits to reading online reviews of his hotel all the time, but he took issue with the one comment he said went too far.

“In one case we had an individual who made extremely derogatory remarks about the manager, about the restaurant, about the food, about myself individually,” Demetriades said. “We decided to file suit against this person for defamation.”

Court records reveal the case was settled out of court with no money exchanged.

Read the whole story

Calif. drought transforms global food market

By Alan Bjerga, Bloomberg

For more than 70 years, Fred Starrh’s family was among the most prominent cotton growers in California’s San Joaquin Valley. Then shifting global markets and rising water prices told him that wouldn’t work anymore.

So he replaced most of the cotton plants on his farm near Shafter, 120 miles northwest of Los Angeles, and planted almonds, which make more money per acre and are increasingly popular with consumers in Asia.

“You can’t pay $1,000 an acre-foot to grow cotton,” said Starrh, 85, crouching to inspect a drip irrigator gently gurgling under an almond tree.

Such crop switching is one sign of a sweeping transformation

going on in California – the nation's biggest agricultural state by value – driven by a three-year drought that climate scientists say is a glimpse of a drier future. The result will affect everything from the price of milk in China to the source of cherries eaten by Americans. It has already inflamed competition for water between farmers and homeowners.

Growers have adapted to the record-low rainfall by installing high-technology irrigation systems, watering with treated municipal wastewater and even recycling waste from the processing of pomegranates to feed dairy cows. Some are taking land out of production altogether, bulldozing withered orange trees and leaving hundreds of thousands of acres unplanted.

"There will be some definite changes, probably structural changes, to the entire industry" as drought persists, said American Farm Bureau Federation President Bob Stallman. "Farmers have made changes. They've shifted. This is what farmers do."

Read the whole story

Tahoe Keys Marina forced to pay debt

An El Dorado County sheriff's deputy spent a couple hours at Tahoe Keys Marina on Aug. 9 collecting $7,000.

"There was a civil judgment against the marina for a debt that was owed. We had a court order – writ of execution – to place a person at the business to seize funds to cover the debt owed. This was done. The debt has now been paid off," sheriff's Lt. Pete Van Arnum told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The deputy was collecting all of the money that was coming across the counter until he had the $7,000.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe



Shilo

Shilo is a very sweet girl who is a bit subdued at the shelter. She is very quiet and mellow, but we think she will perk up once she gets into a good new home.

She is about 6 years old, house trained, and she walks very nicely on the leash. She is OK with other well-mannered dogs, and didn't chase the cats that she met at the shelter. She is content to sit at your side or at your feet.

Shilo is possibly a border collie mix, a little skinny at about 45 pounds, who would be happy in just about any home.

Shilo is spayed, microchipped, tested for heart worm, and vaccinated. She 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

Opinion: Preserve Washoe Meadows State Park

By Charles Goldman

California's state parks face an uncertain future if the Parks Forward Commission, Gov. Jerry Brown and the Legislature focus primarily on the financial, infrastructure and management woes of lands held in the public trust. Instead, they should equally resolve to protect the natural resources that are the essence and the foundation of our parks system. As well, the Parks Department could – and should – lead initiatives to address climate change, water conservation and renewable energy sources.

Early commission statements and persistent Parks Department actions do not demonstrate the will or intent to tackle these challenges.



Charles
Goldman

A particular example of State Parks' obstinacy – dating from the previous scandal-plagued administration – is a Tahoe project that contravenes legislatively enacted parkland protection, betrays natural resource preservation and snubs the problems of climate change. The case in point is the proposal to expand up to nine holes of a golf course into Washoe Meadows State Park near South Lake Tahoe. This incursion is possible only because of an unprecedented move – pushed by the Parks Department for 2011 Parks Commission approval – to downgrade Washoe Meadows' state park status.

I was among the scientists in 1972 who opposed development to this sensitive riparian area along the Upper Truckee River. Lawsuits ensued until 1984, when the state purchased the land and assigned some 600 acres to State Parks to protect the "rare and irreplaceable natural resources" of what became Washoe Meadows State Park. But State Parks has now betrayed that protection with its golf course proposal, presented under the guise of river restoration and Lake Tahoe clarity.

My 1972 opinion is substantially unchanged, and all aspects of my original testimony still apply: This parkland must be protected for its significant environmental values and its link to all of the Tahoe basin.

It is extremely important to minimize fertilizer use in the Tahoe basin, especially where irrigation is involved. The proposed project imperils lake clarity due to the serious potential of fertilizer input from the golf course. Our 1972

concerns included the park's high water table, since added irrigation water increases the risk of surfeit nutrient percolation into the groundwater and then into the river. Despite contemporary golf course maintenance promises, the threats remain of surface and subsurface transport of fertilizer nutrients to the lake's largest tributary.

Adding to the problem, the topography of the proposed golf course, with greens in the uphill forest as well as in the floodplain and stream environmental zone, provides a system in which the normal hydrological force of gravity will press fertilizers toward the river and then to the lake.

Since my 1972 comments, Lake Tahoe has changed from a nitrogen-limited system to a highly phosphorus-limited system. While phosphorus is now the nutrient limiting factor, both elements are detrimental to the lake since they are the driving force for algal growth that accelerates the decline in water quality and contributes to deep water oxygen depletion.

Sediment is a major concern since it reduces transparency. Because the proposed golf course construction requires an extreme amount of soil disturbance, State Parks' environmental report noted a risk of increased sedimentation reaching the lake for up to seven years.

My colleague Jerry Qualls at UNR expresses alarm about the course's impact on Washoe Meadows' world-renowned fens – expansive peat-forming wetlands some 10,000 years old – that depend on mineral-rich groundwater. He and I concur that State Parks lacks detailed mapping and awareness of the park's underground hydrology. Extensive construction, excavation and expected irrigation demands could destroy the fragile wetlands that enhance air and water quality throughout the basin.

As a limnologist and president of the World Water and Climate Network, I lecture on climate change's effects on global lakes and rivers. The proposed golf course represents a poor

climate-change-related choice for many reasons: the use of irrigation water while precipitation declines; the potential increase in river water temperature as irrigation water is taken from the river; and the removal of carbon-dioxide-absorbing trees.

The planned cutting of some 1,600 trees in Washoe Meadows negates State Parks' lauded 2010 reforestation project at San Diego County's Cuyamaca Rancho State Park that sequestered the equivalent of more than 11,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide.

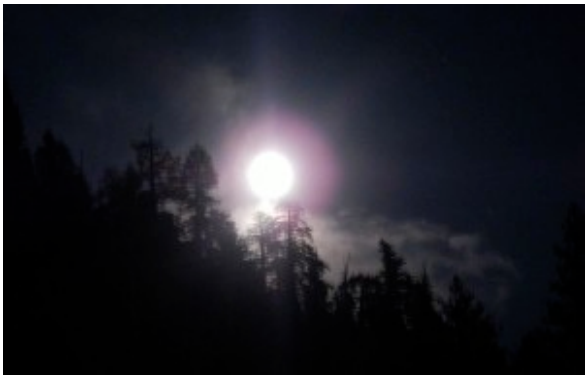
The state's environmental report in support of the golf course equivocates on the climate change issue, saying that the project's cumulative effects are "too speculative for a meaningful significant conclusion." This approach trivializes the issue, and further study is warranted.

Climate change can never again be ignored in any serious environmental document. State Parks should now address the already obvious need to adapt any and all projects to climate change. It should be addressed through analysis that meets rigorous scientific standards rather than political or fiscal expediency.

State Parks and the park commission should reconsider the project that would decimate the heart of Washoe Meadows and affect the Tahoe basin. They must expand their overall vision for California's state parks. The need to adapt to climate change, to address water supply and quality issues and to initiate renewable energy projects must become central to their stewardship of our publicly held natural resources.

Charles Goldman is a retired professor from the UC Davis department of environmental science and policy. Goldman is the president of the World Water and Climate Foundation.

Super moon illuminates night sky



The super moon on Aug. 9. Photo/LTN

The super moon has been filling the night sky.

This moon, which is the closest to Earth compared to any other time of year, will be at its fullest on Sunday night. This will be the biggest and brightest full moon of the year.

The moon rise is expected at 8:12pm Aug. 10.

The big ball in the sky is obscuring the Perseid meteors. However, the meteor shower is expected to peak Aug. 11, so it’s possible it can be seen in the Tahoe sky as the moon diminishes.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Surplus military gear common in Calif. police forces

By Kevin Oliver, KCRA-TV

Local law enforcement agencies across California are recipients of surplus military gear, but some have been suspended from the program because of missing military equipment.

Grenade launchers, bayonets and armored vehicles were given to a number of California police departments.

The Davis Police Department received a mine-resistant vehicle, but decided not to keep it after an uproar by citizens, who said it wasn't needed and who didn't want it in their town.

The Amador County Sheriff's Department and the South Lake Tahoe, Yuba City and Vacaville police departments also got mine-resistant vehicles.

Data requested by KCRA 3 and just released by the Governor's Office of Emergency Services revealed more than 16,000 military surplus items – mostly guns – were turned over to police agencies all across California.

Read the whole story

Girls to be honored for

saving dad at Lake Tahoe

By Jennifer Shaw, Contra Costa Times

Veronica Tucker would have done the same thing if the man she helped save had been anyone else.

“Someone would’ve been waiting for him to come home,” the sixth-grader at North Creek Academy in Walnut Creek says of her valiant efforts.

In this case, she and a new summer camp cabin mate Grace McAdoo, both from Concord, instinctively teamed up to save Veronica’s dad.

The girls are being recognized with a proclamation by the Concord City Council, which will be presented at the meeting Sept. 9.

The girls were in the midst of enjoying a weeklong experience at Camp Concord at Lake Tahoe in July, where her dad was volunteering as a chaperon.

The elder Tucker, a diabetic – whose recent change in medication, coupled with the altitude and cold temperature of the lake – suddenly lost control of his extremities, struggled to breathe when his “chest locked up,” and managed to shout out for help, before the former longtime search-and-rescue volunteer started to sink beneath the water’s surface.

Read the whole story

How women can generate income for life

By Nanci Hellmich, USA Today

Many women have a “quiet fear” that they won’t have enough money for retirement, but they can take several steps to make sure that doesn’t happen.

“The key is to continue earning throughout retirement and to find ways to create income for life,” says Donna Phelan, 62, who has worked with thousands of women nationwide during her 18 years with several large Wall Street investment firms. She has an MBA in finance and is the author of a new book, Women, Money & Prosperity: A Sister’s Perspective on How to Retire Well.

Research shows that women often have far less saved for retirement than men, Phelan says. They frequently earn less than men and often take time out of their careers to rear children. They also spend more time with elder care. Some women don’t start thinking about their retirement savings until late in life, and by then it’s hard to save enough, she says.

Read the whole story

U.S. cancer mortality rate decreasing

By Michelle Fay Cortez, Bloomberg

The number of Americans dying from cancer has continued to fall since peaking in 1991, averting 1.5 million deaths that otherwise would have stemmed from one of the most feared diseases in the world.

The American Cancer Society, in its annual statistical report, estimates that 1.7 million Americans will be diagnosed with malignancies and 589,430 will die from them in 2015, roughly 1,600 people a day.

Cancer already is the leading cause of death among Americans ages 40 to 79, and is expected to overtake heart disease as the nation’s top killer in the next several years, said Chief Executive Officer John R. Seffrin.

Just four types account for half of all cancers in the U.S.: prostate, breast, lung and colorectal tumors.

Read the whole story