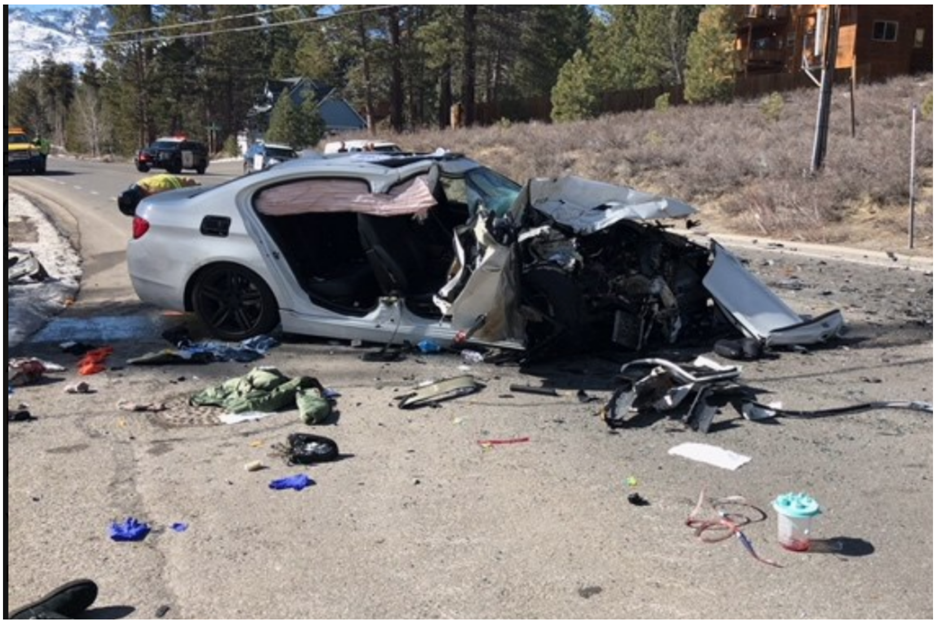
Life-threatening injuries in suspected DUI crash



Five people in this BMW were injured on Feb. 3 on the South Shore. Photo/LVFPD

By Kathryn Reed

A Stateline woman was arrested Saturday on felony DUI charges that injured five other people, two of them with life-threatening injuries.

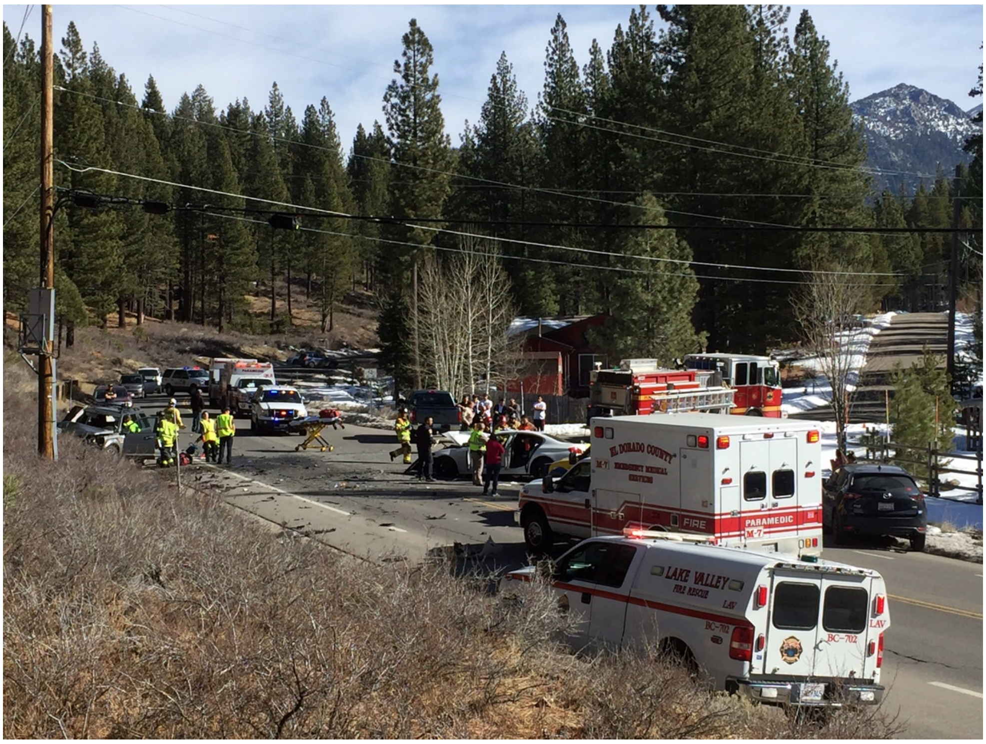
Bail was set at $125,000 for Hui Paxson, 29.

Paxson was driving east on Pioneer Trail near Vanderhoof Drive just after 11am Feb. 3 when she drifted into oncoming traffic, the California Highway Patrol told *Lake Tahoe News.* The Land Rover struck a BMW carrying five people.

Two people were flown to Renown Medical Center in Reno, with the others taken to Barton Memorial Hospital in South Lake Tahoe.

Lake Valley Fire officials said it took 20 minutes to extricate the front passenger of the BMW. She was one of the most critically injured. She was wearing a seat belt.

Because this is an on-going investigation, it is not known if everyone was wearing a seat belt.



Pioneer Trail on Feb. 3 was closed while emergency crews tended to victims in a head-on collision. Photo/Mike Rhoden

The other people were either out of the vehicle walking around or sitting when first responders arrived.

Some of the injuries sustained by the victims include a broken jaw, spinal fracture, brain bleed, concussion and compression fracture of the spine.

Occupants of the BMW were from out of town, with some from Napa, San Jose and China.

Paxson was taken to Barton before being booked into jail.

The road was close for about two hours as both of the totaled vehicles were cleared and officers collected evidence.

Calif. cities: Pension costs 'unsustainable'

By Adam Ashton, Sacramento Bee

Most California cities expect their spending on public employee pensions to climb by at least 50 percent over the next seven years, restricting their ability to fund basic services like public safety and parks, according to a study their lobbying organization released on Thursday.

The report escalates the League of California Cities' appeal for more flexibility in negotiating pension obligations. Almost all of California's cities belong to the $360 billion California Public Employees' Retirement System, and some cities over the past year have raised increasingly loud complaints that fee hikes from the pension fund are "crowding out" other spending priorities.

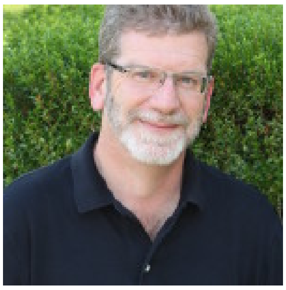
The new report warns that pension costs are becoming "unsustainable."

Read the whole story

Money Matters: Take time to rebalance portfolio

By Rick Gross

The past nine years have been extraordinary for the stock market. From March 2009 to the end of 2017, the Standard & Poor's 500 Index, a benchmark of market performance, rose close to 300 percent. In 2017 alone, the index gained more than 21 percent.



Rick Gross

If you are an investor who has benefited from the extended bull market in stocks, you might think there's no reason to rebalance your portfolio. However, certain investments or sectors you own may have prospered in recent years, possibly affecting the level of risk you have in the market. With market performance where it is, it may make sense to review your portfolio and determine if changes are appropriate.

The importance of rebalancing

Rebalancing is a process of shifting assets in your portfolio back to your original allocation to more suitably reflect your investment objectives and risk profile. Because the markets move in unpredictable cycles, it's important to remember that the types of returns many investors saw in 2017 won't necessarily be repeated in the next few years. While stocks have historically moved higher over time, there are periods when they either perform below average or give back some of the gains they previously achieved. These market swings mean an investor may have to make adjustments to their portfolio mix over time. Keep in mind that rebalancing does not guarantee a profit or protect against a loss.

As a simplified hypothetical example, assume an investor's portfolio was established with a mix of 60 percent stocks and 40 percent bonds. This mix would be determined based on the investor's risk tolerance and goals. After the market's recent winning streak, stocks may now represent 70 percent of the portfolio. This could be considered an "overweight" position compared to the investor's designated allocation. If stocks experience a correction, the "overweight" position in equities could work against the investor. It may make sense to reduce the stock position back to its original allocation of 60 percent, and move 10 percent of the portfolio back into bonds. In this way, the portfolio would more accurately represents the investor's risk profile.

When to shift assets

There are many market or personal events that may cause investors to rebalance their portfolios. While the following rules of thumb may give you an idea of when to consider reallocating your investments, remember that the right time and frequency is different for each investor. Consider reallocating:

· **When one asset class is a certain percentage higher or lower than its original representation in your portfolio.** Your investments will swing up and down day-to-day and week-to-week, so work with your financial advisor to establish a benchmark for when volatility may trigger a change in your investment makeup.

· **At a set time frame, such as quarterly, biannually or annually.** Reviewing on a regular schedule may help you avoid making an emotional decision during times of market volatility.

· **When you recognize a broad, persistent trend in the markets.** For example, upward trends in emerging markets' performance or rising interest rates in the U.S. could affect your portfolio or present an investing opportunity based on your goals.

· **Because of changes in your own life.** Major life events, such as marriage, divorce, the birth of a child or grandchild, or deciding on a retirement date, may require you to adjust your investments so they align with your new priorities. For example, if you decided to retire early you may want to reduce your exposure to risk in case the markets dip before your retirement date. This could mean shifting a portion of your portfolio into more conservative investments.

Be aware of tax ramifications

Even if you hold investments in a variety of accounts, consider assessing all of your holdings as one portfolio to determine if you need to rebalance your assets. Be aware that if you sell positions in taxable accounts, you may incur taxable gains. If you make changes within a tax-advantaged account (such as IRAs or a workplace retirement plan), you may be able to avoid any current tax implications from the rebalancing process.

Even if your portfolio is making progress toward your goals, it’s important not to keep your investments on autopilot. Your asset allocation can have a major impact on your ability to reach your future goals, so it’s worth ensuring your mix remains on track. Consult with your financial advisor and tax advisor before you make any decisions about your investment strategy.

Rick Gross is a financial advisor and private wealth advisor with Ameriprise Financial Services Inc. in South Lake Tahoe.

Pizza event to benefit animals in S. Lake Tahoe

Animal Coalition of Tahoe’s next fundraiser if Feb. 7.

Pizza for Pups will raise money for ACT’s spay-neuter program.

It will be at Blue Dog – Midtown in South Lake Tahoe from 6-7pm.

Cost is $10.

For more info, call 530.400.4766.

Placer County opens tourism grant process

Placer County has revised the application process for entities wanting grant money coming from North Lake Tahoe lodging taxes.

Applications will first be reviewed by the new 13-member Capital Projects Advisory Committee. The committee, co-chaired by the county and North Lake Tahoe Resort Association, will evaluate project proposals on how well they advance key priorities outlined in the county’s Tourism Master Plan, and will make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors.

Placer County is seeking applications from community members for four seats on the CAP Committee. These seats, appointed for three-year terms, are intended to represent community interests in housing, social services, arts and culture. The applications are due Feb. 21

Last year, Placer County collected approximately $18 million in transient occupancy taxes. The county is committed to investing 100 percent of lodging taxes generated in North Lake Tahoe to support tourism and implement the Tourism Master Plan.

Grant applications are due March 30 at noon. Here are the guidelines.

Nearly half of California is back in a drought

By Kurtis Alexander, San Francisco Chronicle

The T-shirt-wearing temperatures and lack of winter rain have combined to push nearly half of California into all-too-familiar territory: a state of drought.

Less than a year after Gov. Jerry Brown declared an end to one of the worst droughts in California history, a consortium of nationwide water experts reported Thursday that 44 percent of the state is again experiencing at least moderate drought conditions.

The plight is worst in Southern California, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

Read the whole story

Tahoe Women’s Community Fund has money to give away

The Tahoe Women’s Community Fund will be granting $68,000 to the South Shore Community this spring, which is more than double was awarded a year ago.

Applications are due by 5pm on Feb. 26. Grant recipients will be announced April 2.

Grant categories:

- Poverty and housing: Accepting grant requests up to $10,000
- Children and youth: Accepting grant requests up to $10,000
- Mental health and wellness: Accepting grant requests up to $3,000
- Education and literacy: Accepting grant requests up to $3,000
- Community and environment: Accepting grant requests up to $3,000.

CHP warning Super Bowl revelers not to drink and drive

The California Highway Patrol is teaming up with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to remind motorists to designate a sober driver before the Super Bowl begins.

According to data from the CHP’s Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System, during last year’s Super Bowl, one person was killed in an alcohol-involved collision and 41 others were injured on California’s roads. That same day, there were 247 arrests made by the CHP for driving under the influence.

Officers say to leave your car keys at home if you will be consuming alcoholic beverages, use public transportation, a designated driver, or a ride-hailing service to stay safe.

The public can help by calling 911 if they suspect a drunken driver.

SLT city attorney bill far exceeds contract limit

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe is in uncharted territory with having a firm doing its legal work instead of having an in-house attorney, as had been the protocol for 50-plus years until last fall.

When Tom Watson submitted his resignation in August which became effective in September, the city also employed a deputy city attorney and a legal secretary. The city still has a legal secretary.

Nira Doherty

Burke, Williams & Sorensen LLP out of Oakland was brought on board to take the place of Watson and his deputy.

This firm had been used as outside counsel, so the city was familiar with their work. Plus, Nira Doherty, the attorney assigned to South Lake Tahoe, had been the deputy city attorney before becoming a partner with the private law firm. She had also worked as outside counsel for the city, so her familiarity with local issues was a bonus.

Outside counsel is usually brought in for specific cases much like in the medical profession when a specialist is needed because the general practitioner's knowledge has been exhausted.

The firm's contract calls for 80 hours of legal work a month at a rate of $19,500/month or $234,000/annually. They actually bill in six-minute increments.

However, the actual monthly bills from the law firm are:

- October – general municipal services – $40,046.24
- October – retiree association lawsuit – $16,726.12
- November – general municipal services – $34, 097.44
- November – retiree association lawsuit – $6,037.38
- December – general municipal services – $21,961.44
- December – retiree association lawsuit – $4,762.84.

That's a total of $123,631.46 for three months. Without the retiree lawsuit fees, the total is $96,105.12. Either way, the monthly bill exceeds what the contract calls for. Multiply that last quarter by four and the annual bill will actually be $384,420.48.

Watson was making more than $160,000 a year. His hours per week, month, year were unlimited. Even if one tacks on 25 percent for benefits, that total is just more than $200,000 a year. An in-house attorney is essentially available 24/7, with no overtime.

Lake Tahoe News through a public records request asked about the details of the bills from Burke, Williams & Sorensen. City Clerk Suzie Alessi responded that that information was protected by client-attorney confidentiality.

Lake Tahoe News then requested all phone records and all emails every city employee and every council member has had with anyone at Burke, Williams & Sorensen. Redacted emails would be acceptable. The deadline per the Public Records Act has not been met, so the information will likely be published at a later date.

Ironically, though, it is Doherty who has some say over what records are released. She is not a fan of the media, not even when she was on the city's staff full time. She has a history of not responding to questions no matter the forum in which a reporter asks.

All of this is relevant because this is taxpayer money. The public has a right to know what it is paying for and if it is worth it. The council also has an obligation to explain its actions.

Doherty's review was on the Jan. 23 council agenda, as was the city manager's. There was no reportable action regarding either official.

Mayor Wendy David had no response to *LTN*'s question as to why nothing is on the Feb. 6 agenda about the city attorney when the city manager's review is on it again.

At some point the council has to decide what it is doing regarding the city attorney position – in-house, outside counsel, and if outside, is this the attorney and/or law firm to stick with?

Each of the City Council members was asked a series of questions and given a deadline. Only Tom Davis responded. He told *Lake Tahoe News*, “I too have the same questions. I will be asking that these items be put on the agenda so we can discuss in public with the council.”

Here are the unanswered questions:

· Regarding the future of the city attorney position … when does the council expect to make a decision regarding retaining the current law firm and/or interim attorney or deciding to have someone in-house full time?

· How was the current firm/attorney hired without an RFP? How is that not a violation of Government Code?

· Is the reason there is no contract for the current firm on the next agenda because you realized there needs to be an RFP? If that isn’t the reason, what is the reason?

· Is there an expiration date, so to speak, in the current contract?

· What happens when the financial limits of the contract are met? Does that mean the city is without legal counsel? Please explain how that works.

· There was no reportable action from the last council meeting regarding the city attorney’s review. Why? What is the next course of action?

· How does the council justify the expense of this firm?

· How often do each of you contact anyone at the law firm on a weekly/monthly basis? Please estimate how much time is by phone, email, text or in person?

· Do you find this form of city attorney more efficient or in-house counsel more efficient? Why?

A question just for Councilman Jason Collin was:

· Do you believe you should recuse yourself from any discussions regarding the city attorney when you socialize with her and are good friends with her husband? Why or why not?

Letter: South Lake Tahoe and its streets

To the community,

I am presently very concerned that the City Council now intends to not fund maintenance of city streets.

Consider my points:

1. Since Measure C has failed, the City Council can now shift blame of our streets in disrepair upon the voters.

2. If the street repairs were now adequately funded, this would be like an admission that the funds were available before the Measure C proposal.

The "no" voters were correct in their votes. Math, tells us why. Nancy Kerry had made it public knowledge that the city employees' retirement benefits would rise in the coming years from $4.7 million to $9.7 million by year 2022. Measure C was expected to raise only $2.5 million per year. Measure C was clearly not an answer to our problem. The problem would return again before year 2022.

One most obvious solution to the problem is to reduce the city employees' retirement packages. Nancy Kerry has now decided to eliminate retirement health care. But in my opinion, our City Council will not act to allocate funds for street repairs. At the community talk (at Y coffee shop) Tom Davis was asked: "Are street repairs on City Council's agenda?" The answer came back "no."

If you think through all of this, you'll arrive at the same conclusion that I have. I want the citizens to understand what's going on, so I want this all made public. If we continue to wait, we'll lose another year.

Daniel Harvey, South Lake Tahoe homeowner