Snippets about Lake Tahoe

· The 24th annual Classy Crab Dinner is Feb. 3 at St. Theresa Catholic Church in South Lake Tahoe. Doors open at 6pm. Cost is $45 in advance, $50 that night. For more info, call 530.544.3582.

· Doctor Michelle Kim is joining the team at Incline Health Center.

· On Jan. 22 Sidelines Sports Pub at the Beach Retreat and Lodge in South Lake will be showing "The Bachelor" episode that includes scenes that were filmed last October at Valhalla. Show is at 8pm, recommendation is to come earlier for a seat.

· Elizabeth Pitcairn will perform with TOCCATA-Tahoe Symphony Orchestra & Chorus on Feb. 23, 7pm at St. Theresa Church in South Lake Tahoe. Buy tickets **online**.

· The Dave Mathews Band will be at Harveys on Sept. 7 at 7pm. **Tickets** range from $180 to $723.

Former EDC resident admits stealing dead aunt's benefits

Former El Dorado Hills resident Julia A. Wilbert, 53, pleaded guilty Jan. 17 to theft of government benefits.

According to court documents, from June 2007 through March 2015, Wilbert stole approximately $112,275 in federal government benefit payments intended for her aunt, who died in June 2007. Wilbert's aunt was an eligible recipient of

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation benefits paid by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. Wilbert had exclusive access to her deceased aunt's bank account, was the individual who reported her aunt's death, and proceeded to perform periodic transfers of thousands of dollars of VA benefit money from that account to her own bank account.

When confronted, Wilbert admitted that she had been acting out of "personal greed." Wilbert has agreed to pay back the full amount to the government as a part of her plea agreement.

Wilbert is scheduled to be sentenced April 18. She faces a maximum of 10 years in prison and a $250,000 fine.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

SLT adds confusion to shared use rental business

By Kathryn Reed

Policy is now being made by the part-time city attorney instead of the South Lake Tahoe City Council.

A letter was sent Jan. 11 to owners of shared rentals from the city's revenue division at the direction of Nira Doherty. Doherty is an attorney with Burke, Williams & Sorensen out of Oakland. The city contracted with the law firm to have Doherty represent South Lake Tahoe after Tom Watson left last fall.

(The firm is contracted to provide 80 hours of legal work a month at a rate of $19,500/month or $234,000/annually. They bill every six minutes. Doherty's review will be on the Jan. 23 council agenda, at which time the council is expected to discuss if it wants to continue with this type of representation or return to having a staff attorney.)

It is the City Council that is tasked with setting policy, and then staff doing the work to carry out the policy.

According to Mayor Wendy David, "(Doherty) was asked to interpret or clarify the code by the Finance Department. This is a one of the city attorney's jobs, to assist staff in applying the policies of the council, including codes and ordinances."

However, the council at no time gave direction for contents of the letter to become policy. The letter states that those using their property as a shared rental – meaning they allow short-term renters while they stay on the property – must have a business license and pay transient occupancy tax.

"My understanding of the council's intention was that we wanted to bring back a separate shared rental ordinance," Councilwoman Brooke Laine told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I am not aware of any direction that provides for the requirement of a business license."

The letter explicitly says, "This new VHR ordinance does not regulate shared rentals."

Doherty and the Finance Department appear to be deciding the regulations for shared rentals, not the council.

Council members were not aware the letter existed until *Lake Tahoe News* told them about it last weekend.

Councilman Tom Davis said he would answer *LTN*'s questions by Tuesday. He didn't. Councilman Jason Collin, per his MO, never acknowledged the questions.

David told *Lake Tahoe News*, "As you know, the council stated that we would bring back shared rentals at a later date. The date has not been agendized yet. My understanding is that TOT is a part of the shared rental owner expectation."

However, that is not what this reporter was told after the council took action last fall when it revamped the vacation rental ordinance. *LTN* was told that shared rentals would not be regulated in any manner until a separate ordinance was written sometime in 2018.

The city's policy related to shared rentals has been inconsistent at best. It's been an on and off again situation when it comes to the requirement to pay transient occupancy tax, or to even have a vacation home rental permit that was different from those renting out their entire house.

At one time in 2017 there was a one-time shared use rental permit that cost $114. This fee was good forever, or so city staff said at the time. However, the permittee never actually got a physical document. This differs from full house rentals which do have a paper document to show they are permitted.

Transient occupancy tax requirements have come and gone at various times. City employees give different information to different people, making it difficult to know what rules to play by. Paying TOT would put these properties on a level playing field with traditional hotels. It would also provide the city added income.

The city's Finance Department did not respond to questions about who got the letter. It's unknown if only people in the system already were notified or someone ferreted out the shared rental owners on the various platforms.

This city department has also not clarified why shared rentals need a business permit when owners renting out their dwelling year round or others subletting in the same manner do not have to have such a license.

Opinion: Calif. should follow Trump’s lead with tax cuts

By Ted Gaines

President Trump’s federal tax reform held up a mirror to tax-loving California politicians and they are afraid of what they saw.

At major issue to the panicked Progressive political class is the state and local tax (SALT) deduction, which, until now, has allowed taxpayers who itemize the ability to deduct their state and local taxes on their federal tax returns. The average California SALT deduction per claimant was nearly $39,000 in 2015, but the deduction is now capped at $10,000. California was the largest beneficiary of the now-reduced deduction, with tax filers claiming roughly $100 billion in 2014. This deductibility has softened the blow of our state’s punishing tax regimen and helped cover up the fact that our politicians have been shoving our taxes into the stratosphere.

Ted Gaines

With the capped deduction, coupled with California’s sky-high taxes, could California taxpayers lead another Prop. 13-like revolt and tear down the high-tax, high-spending edifice that so comfortably houses fat cat politicians and their political allies?

It’s this fear that’s led to the absurd, over-the-top howling about the tax bill, with embarrassingly apocalyptic rhetoric about this much-needed reform and the tired talking point that the Trump plan, by letting people keep more of their own money, was somehow “looting” the treasury. That would only be true if all money you earned belonged to the government and was doled back out to you by their grace. But that belief says much more about entitled legislators than the legislation itself.

The problem is not SALT deductibility, it’s the taxes themselves.

California’s top marginal tax rate of 13.3 percent is the nation’s highest, by far. Our state’s base sales tax rate of 7.25 percent is also the nation’s highest, and local add-ons push it above 10 percent in some cities.

Even those punitive rates might be tolerable if California delivered first-class infrastructure or schools, for example, but our roads are crumbling and our schools hug the bottom of the achievement curve. What exactly have California taxpayers been getting for their money, whether it’s deductible or not?

At the very least, SALT changes could spotlight the terrible bargain California taxpayers get and drag state legislators into an era of greater accountability.

But until then, California politicians will be working overtime to figure out an end-around on the President’s tax plan that will keep taxes high but allow continued SALT deductions, so they can pull the veil back over the people’s eyes.

I have a better solution and I’m going to introduce a bill to make it happen: Cut California taxes. By lowering our income tax rates, we could help people in every tax bracket keep more of their paychecks, spreading prosperity throughout the state.

Instead of investing time and energy scheming a way around the Trump plan, let’s take this opportunity to provide tax relief to California’s citizens.

Instead of complaining about deductibility, let’s take a page from the majority of states with far lower taxes and give Californians lower taxes themselves. Why not aim to add to the tally of the six states, including deep blue Washington, with no state income tax at all?

Letting people and businesses keep more of their money expands our economy and personal freedom. Trump knows this far better than California’s leading politicians, who will fight tooth-and-claw to keep state taxes among the highest in the country.

Here’s hoping they fail, and President Trump’s tax cut becomes the catalyst for a tax cut in the Golden State.

State Sen. Ted Gaines represents the 1st Senate District, which includes all or parts of Alpine, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Shasta, Sierra and Siskiyou counties.

All the money thrown at happiness is not working

By Mary Pilon, Outside

Today, there are happiness consultants, happiness coaches, happiness summits, and happiness workplace seminars, which in some cases may be mandatory for employees. There are more than 70 TED Talks tagged with “happiness” or related themes, with tens of millions of views. Amazon’s pages contain more than 100,000 hits for happiness literature as the self-help shelves continue to brimmeth over. Some companies have even enlisted in-house happiness experts, most notably Google’s Jolly Good Fellow, hired for the purpose of making sure employees report that they’re not just doing their jobs, but are doing them with delight.

Globally, wellness is a $3.7 trillion industry, according to trade group Global Wellness Institute, which estimates that the staggering sum includes everything from beauty and anti-aging ($999 billion) to wellness tourism ($563 billion) to nutrition ($648 billion). Yet despite the trillions of dollars, the branding, and the brassy platitudes, Americans remain among the most miserable people on earth.

Happiness in this country—if you were to even try to measure it—has plunged. In 2007, the United Nations ranked the United States as the third happiest nation in the world, but in 2017, it dropped us to 19th place.

Read the whole story

Brown proposes making it easier to track funding for needy kids

By Jessica Calefati, CalMatters

Gov. Jerry Brown’s landmark school funding formula would not only win more money under the state budget blueprint he released last week, but also be subjected to the sort of transparency and accountability lawmakers and advocates for needy kids have been seeking since its adoption almost five years ago.

The formula directs significant sums of extra cash toward districts with foster youth, kids learning English and students from low-income families, acknowledging that it costs more to educate them. It also gives districts power to decide how to spend their extra money to shrink the academic achievement gap between those groups of students and their peers.

But as I reported in a June investigation for CALmatters, the funding is almost impossible to track and the results so far have been underwhelming.

In a summary outlining his spending priorities, Brown acknowledged a few of his well-intentioned policy's shortcomings and proposed some fixes that he thinks will help boost the state's sagging academic achievement. He conceded for the first time that valid "concerns have been raised" about the policy's effectiveness. It's a stunning departure. Previously, the governor had been resistant to changing the formula.

"While many districts have seized the opportunities offered under the formula to better serve their students, others have been slower to make changes," Brown wrote.

To "improve student achievement and transparency," Brown proposes requiring districts to demonstrate a connection between their priorities and the way they spend the extra cash generated by their disadvantaged students. He also wants the state to start calculating and reporting the amount of extra funding each district receives.

An open report I wrote last March explained how tough it is to follow the money without any of that information.

But even as he called for state-level policy changes aimed at boosting achievement, Brown emphasized his belief in local control and struck a defiant tone when asked at a Capitol news conference about California's lackluster standardized test scores.

"Kids learn at home or in the classroom. When that door shuts, there's no legislator, there's no governor," Brown said. "So people who really want to help a school that's not performing, go to that school, go talk to that principal. That's the philosophy I want to promote."

"We're looking in the wrong place when we're looking at Sacramento," he added.

Democratic Assemblywoman Shirley Weber of San Diego has been fighting for fiscal transparency alongside other lawmakers and advocates for disadvantaged kids since Brown signed the formula into law in 2013.

In an interview, she said she doesn't want to "declare victory" until she's had a chance to review the proposals' details more closely, but that she's hopeful the policy might finally get fixed.

"A year ago, I told the governor that he needs to solve this transparency problem before he leaves office," Weber said. "At least now I know I wasn't hollering into the wilderness for 40 years like Moses or something. He was listening. I think this was his way of saying, 'I heard you, Shirley.'"

Carrie Hahnel, the deputy director of research and policy at Education Trust-West, a nonprofit advocacy organization committed to closing the achievement gap, shares Weber's cautious optimism.

On one hand, she said, it's exciting to see the administration recognize the concerns that advocates, researchers and journalists have expressed about the lack of budget transparency. But she called the language in the budget summary “weak,” noting that it doesn’t explicitly demonstrate any new commitments.

Hahnel’s organization and others will learn more about the proposal later this month when Brown’s Department of Finance releases detailed budget bill language. This spring, the proposal will be vetted by members of the state Legislature’s fiscal committees.

Many questions about the scope of the plan remain unanswered, but even still, Hahnel said the shift in tone is something to celebrate: “He’s finally acknowledging that something needs to be done.”

Nevada makes move to approve home pot deliveries

By Chris Kudialis, Las Vegas Sun

Just over six months after sales of recreational marijuana began in Nevada, the state’s Tax Commission on Tuesday approved permanent regulations to govern the industry.

The eight-member commission voted 8-0 in favor of adopting 258 pages of pot regulations, which replace temporary “early start” regulations put in place to govern the Nevada marijuana industry from July through the end of 2017.

Additions to the permanent regulations adopted this week include guidance for the state’s selection of recipients for 66 new pot licenses and allowance of home delivery.

Read the whole story

Future of Kings Beach center to be studied

North Tahoe Public Utility District's board of directors is trying to figure out how to keep the North Tahoe Event Center in Kings Beach solvent since the deal with **Laulima fell through** last month.

A task group consisting of members of the Recreation and Park Commission, district residents and up to two directors will be formed to provide suggestions for the continued operation of the center. The process to apply to participate in this group will be announced in coming weeks.

The task group will review current uses, operational costs, and revenue funding, as well as discuss possible future uses and funding sources.

The goal is for the task group to work no more than one year to reach consensus and a recommendation on providing financial solvency to the NTEC and the Recreation and Park Department.

In the meantime, the North Tahoe Event Center is operating as usual and accepting bookings.

Suspect in Lake Tahoe deputy-

involved shooting could face charges

By KRNV

The motive for an attack that led a deputy to shoot and injure a 47-year-old man early Sunday in North Lake Tahoe is still not clear, according to the Placer County Sheriff's Office.

In a statement released Tuesday, the sheriff's office said deputies responded just after 4am Jan. 14, to a rental home in Carnelian Bay on a report that a family member was acting strangely.

Two people were standing outside the house when the first deputy arrived, according to the sheriff's office, and they all went inside the house, citing the cold weather.

Criminal charges are pending against the suspect.

Read the whole story

Radon kits available to Calif. residents

The California Department of Public Health is offering free radon test kits to households in California throughout the month of January, or until supplies run out.

Radon is a naturally occurring, odorless, colorless, and tasteless radioactive gas, which results from the decay of uranium or thorium naturally present in soil and bedrock. Low levels of uranium occur widely in Earth’s crust and it can be found in all 50 states. Radon gas enters a house the same way air and other soil gases enter: from the soil around and under the home and through cracks in the foundation, floor or walls; hollow-block walls; and openings around floor drains, pipes and sump pumps. Radon has been detected in new and old homes, with and without basements. Homes with high radon levels can be fixed with simple and well-established venting techniques, reducing levels in the home by up to 99 percent.

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States, according to the Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion for Disease Control and Prevention. Exposure to elevated levels of radon increases the risk of lung cancer; the longer the exposure, the greater the risk. Because it cannot be seen or smelled, the only way to determine the radon level in a home is to test for its presence.

Limited test kits are available at Environmental Management’s South Lake Tahoe office; call 530.573.3450 for availability.