

The importance of youth snow safety education

By Jack Foersterling, Powder

Every year, our sport progresses as new ski and binding technologies emerge to enable us to go bigger and faster, while new lifts bring us to higher peaks and steeper terrain. But with these rapid advancements in technology, one thing remains constant. Skiing is, and always will be, an inherently dangerous activity to take part in.

That's why, over the last decade, there has been an increased emphasis on education and safety within the ski industry. For many, this can be seen in the increasing number of adult skiers getting their Level 1 avalanche safety certification or taking other various safety courses. Others, however, are looking to take on the issue from the ground up, focusing their attention on an often overlooked demographic of the ski population—the youth.

“The biggest risk today is that there are so many amazingly talented kids going out there with little to no snow education,” said Chris Anthony, a professional skier and the founder of a nonprofit, Chris Anthony Youth Initiative Project, that focuses on the younger generation of skiers.

Read the whole story

Letter: How to combat unruly VHR renters

To the community,

In recent years much has been written about the battle locals are waging against VHRs that destroy the peace of their neighborhoods. Although I have read most of what has been written, the following is a perspective I have not seen.

As an owner of long term rentals, I know if there is a problem at our property that, ultimately, the buck stops with me. Not with my property manager, but with me.

California Civil Code guarantees residents the right to the peaceful and quiet enjoyment of their homes. Several recent lawsuits have been settled in favor of citizens who have had the peace of their homes destroyed by a nearby party house or other disruption.

It seems that locals here who have lost their quiet homes because VHRs have taken over their neighborhoods, could consider this alternative to complaining endlessly to the rental agencies:

- Carefully document with video and photos the disruptions you endure.
- Call law enforcement and document that too.
- Buy a book on small claims court procedure so you know the proper steps to take to make a complaint.
- Learn who owns the VHR that is a problem by calling the Tax Assessors Office.
- File your complaint. There are no attorneys in small claims court so you don't need to worry about the costs of a regular lawsuit. You can be awarded up to \$10,000 for your damages including the stress and suffering you have endured. These complaints are being seen more and

more in small claims court. You won't be alone.

Perhaps if we hold responsible the owners of the properties that have invaded our neighborhoods, we will see a more serious effort to uphold California law and allow locals to enjoy their homes quietly, peacefully and lawfully.

It's time for VHR owners to stop hiding behind their management companies.

Carla Ennis, Tahoe Paradise

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

• PATH – Partners Against the Trafficking of Humans, Tahoe Youth & Family Services, and Live Violence Free are hosting the short movie “Human Trafficking – A Look Beneath the Surface” on Jan. 30. Afterward there will be a panel discussion about trafficking in El Dorado County. The event will be at the Duke Theatre at Lake Tahoe Community starting at 6:30pm. A \$5 donation benefits PATH.

• Holocaust survivor and South Lake Tahoe resident Leon Malmed on Feb. 21 will give a presentation about his life in hiding between 1940-45 in Nazi occupied France. The free talk will start at 6pm at the South Lake Tahoe Library on Rufus Allen Boulevard.

• SnowGlobe will be planting 200 sugar pins in the Emerald Fire area in the spring through the Sugar Pine Foundation and Waste Free Earth.

• The Bridgeport Winter Recreation Area on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest's Bridgeport Ranger District remains closed to over-snow vehicles due to lack of snow. Snow levels

must meet the minimum of 24 inches in order to open the area.

Truckee cross country skier an Olympic hopeful

By **Giuliana Rende**

TRUCKEE – When asking homeowners and visitors what they love most about Tahoe Donner, one might expect them to start with praises for the majestic scenery, the convenient accessibility and the huge array of activities and programs. Yet, what you're more likely to hear from both long- and short-term residents is that it's the people. The personal connections. The chance to unplug from their devices, and swap their online "communities" for a real-life community, taking place in real-time, with real people.

Tahoe Donner residents are bonded together under one powerful passion – love for the outdoors. And no one understands the strength of this community and its bond better than Hannah Halvorsen.

Born and raised in Tahoe Donner, Hannah Halvorsen is a 19-year-old cross country skier on the U.S. Ski Team. She's a member of the 2017 World Junior Championships bronze medal-winning relay team, and has her sights determinedly set on representing the U.S. at the 2018 Olympic Games in PyeongChang, South Korea.

When talking with Halvorsen, it quickly becomes clear that she credits Tahoe Donner's warm community and world-class programs as integral parts in helping her get where she is today, and reaching her goals for the future.



Hannah Halvorsen of Truckee is a contender for the 2018 Winter Olympics. Photo/Provided

Where it all began

"My first introduction to cross country skiing was being pulled in the back of a sled by my parents at the Tahoe Donner Cross Country Center," Halvorsen says. Her successful career began not only on the cross country trails here, but also in the many places and programs throughout the community.

A big smile overtakes her face when she talks about getting up, snow or shine, every weekend for a family ski, hitting the trails not only with her parents and brothers, but also with the other kids and families in the community.

Halvorsen also talks fondly about her elementary school memories of attending the cross country after-school ski program, crediting it as a vital part of her development as a junior skier.

“The weekend family ski became constant, as did the people we ran into. The same people were always out there to a level of consistency that if we didn’t run into Mark Nadell we would ask him the following week where he was last Saturday,” Halvorsen said.

It was there that she began to form life-long bonds with other skiers who were also becoming passionate about skiing.



Hannah Halvorsen and her teammates celebrate their bronze medal at the 2017 World Junior Championships. Photo/Provided

Passion grows, talents flourish

Halvorsen continued her development as a competitive ski racer throughout middle and high school, spending countless hours training on and off the snow. She worked tirelessly, honing her cross country skills and her fitness levels to become a serious competitor on the international stage. According to Halvorsen, it was during this time that she quickly realized

the rare and valuable opportunity she had to be training at one of the world's premier Nordic ski training centers.

"Older teammates of mine who had traveled the world for racing would confidently name Tahoe Donner as the most spectacular place to cross-country ski. We could go for hours without repeating a single trail," Halvorsen said.

She recalls hitting the trails daily, often twice per day, for hours at a time. Her common routine was to start at the break of dawn doing hard intervals to Hawk's Peak before school, and then back to the trails after school, often training past sundown. In fact, Halvorsen estimates that she probably did several hundred evening recovery jogs around Lion's Leap.

From junior racer to Olympic hopeful

Throughout high school, Halvorsen continued to develop as a ski racer, and began reaching goals that proved she was on track toward realizing her Olympic dreams. In her sophomore year she qualified to represent the U.S. in Finland at the Under-18 Nations Cup, and in her junior year she competed in Sweden and Norway. In her senior year, Halvorsen qualified for and competed in the Youth Olympic Games in Lillehammer.

After graduating high school in 2016, Hannah was nominated to the U.S. Development Ski Team. She and her relay team went on to compete at the World Junior Championships in Park City, Utah, where they earned the first U.S. bronze medal in the event's history.

Just this past June, Halvorsen moved to Anchorage to join the Alaska Pacific University Ski Team and enroll as a psychology major. As much as she loves her amazing new surroundings, she is already eagerly anticipating her visits back to Truckee.

Support Halvorsen

Although Halvorsen is now a member of the U.S. Ski Team, her

ski training and travel are not fully funded. Halvorsen and her family are working to raise funds, and hoping that the Tahoe community can help. To donate, go **online**.

Opinion: Immortal California property taxes

From: Joe Mathews

To: California Association of Realtors

Re: Death and Taxes

Yes, all Californians eventually will die.

But why can't our property tax discounts live forever?

That's the question inspired by your glorious new idea: a ballot initiative to make our state's Proposition 13 property tax savings even more generous.



Joe Mathews

Your "People's Initiative to Protect Prop 13 Savings" is as Californian as the Golden Gate Bridge. It provides a concrete symbol of an undeniable reality: Limiting property taxes is the fundamental organizing principle of postmodern California.

Under our Prop. 13 regime, the taxable value of every California home was set as of March 1, 1975 (when Olivia Newton-John won the Grammy for "I Honestly Love You"), or whatever subsequent date Californians first bought their houses. From that original base, the assessed value of a home cannot increase by more than 2 percent annually—no matter how much the actual value goes up.

In this way, Prop. 13 provided homeowners with an escalating discount on property taxes as the value of their homes rose. And groups like yours have made this subsidy the most heavily protected part of our state's finances. Californians will cut school funding, or local government services, and they will raise the state income tax or sales tax, but property tax savings are untouchable.

But something as fundamental as Prop. 13 can always use more protection. So your new initiative shores up a fundamental weakness: Homeowners don't get to keep their low property taxes forever. Tragically, they lose that discounted tax assessment once they sell their property and move on to a new home.

Fortunately, this is an outrage your initiative would address.

Your proposal would allow anyone over 55 to sell their California house and carry those same low property taxes to their next home, no matter the new home's market value, or its location in the state, or the number of moves they make. Your tax savings would follow you, not just your house, for as long as you live in California.

This historic change would represent, to borrow a line from President Abraham Lincoln, a new birth of freedom. Prop. 13 only protected older homeowners from being forced out of their homes by rising property taxes. Your Son-of-Prop-13 also defends the very opposite freedom; it mercifully frees older homeowners who might feel trapped in their homes by their own

unwillingness to surrender those property tax savings.

If your initiative passes, longtime homeowners will finally be free to sell their homes at the huge profit they've run up over the years, without losing their property tax discount in the process. Hallelujah!

(Yes, this would also create more commissions for Realtors, but I'm sure that's just a coincidence.)

No Californian in touch with the established values of our state could oppose such a proposal. But—forgive me—I must admit to one concern: Your plan does not go far enough.

So here I propose—very modestly—an amendment: Don't limit Prop. 13 protections just to those who are old and alive. To express the central importance of property tax discounts in our state, I propose that every California homeowner be entitled to property tax savings that remain yours even after you die.

It would be up to you—and your estate—how to exercise your immortal tax savings. After death, for example, you could transfer the property tax savings—as a whole, or divided up into pieces—to whomever you want.

Think of the children—especially children related to these longtime homeowners with all their equity. Under my proposal, that equity could be passed on without a reassessment that would make higher property taxes cut into your inheritance.

I recognize that not everyone in California will see the genius of my plan, or yours. For one thing, your plan would cost local governments \$2 billion, and mine would cost many billions more. For another, critics have argued that Prop. 13 is generational theft. Prop. 13 effectively reserves for older homeowners money that would be better spent on education, housing, and infrastructure so that California—with the nation's highest poverty rate—could live up to its image as a

state that defines a better future. Your and my proposals, by expanding Prop. 13's protections, would make this situation worse.

These critics mean well, but they don't recognize what our state has become. Don't they know that the old represent the fastest-growing demographic in our state (the proportion of Californians 65 and older should double by 2030)—while the number of children is in decline? So shy prioritize the education of the next generation, when old people are the future?

Sure, some people would call my idea extreme. Some people might suggest that I am prioritizing property tax savings over the idea of California as the state of the future.

Some people just don't understand what California is really all about.

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.

Inequality in the U.S. is getting worse

By Jonathan J.B. Mijis, The Conversation

Inequality in America is on the rise. Income gains since the 1980s have been concentrated at the top. The top 10 percent today take home 30 percent of all income, and control over three-quarters of all wealth. We have returned to the level of income inequality that marked the Great Depression of the 1920s and 1930s.

Who gets what in America continues to be impacted by a person's race, gender and family resources. What's striking, however, is how little people seem to notice.

Evidence from the International Social Survey Programme suggests that people increasingly think their society is a meritocracy – that success in school and business simply reflects hard work and talent. This belief is held most dearly by Americans, but citizens across the world are growing more convinced.

The data show a surprising pattern: The more unequal a society, the less likely its citizens are to notice. Paradoxically, citizens in some of the most unequal countries think theirs is the paragon of meritocracy. How can we explain this phenomenon?

Origins of inequality beliefs

In my dissertation research, I explored the idea that people's beliefs originate in their childhood experiences.

My research suggests that people in more socioeconomically and racially diverse environments are more likely to appreciate how life outcomes are shaped by structural factors such as race and wealth – that is, the ways in which a person's family wealth, gender or skin color may impact their chances of getting into college or finding employment.

However, increasing levels of income inequality and segregation mean that modern-day Americans are growing up in less economically diverse environments than in the 1970s. Consequently, people on either side of the income divide cannot see the breadth of the gap that separates their lives from those of others. As the gap grows wider, other people's lives are harder to view. Rising inequality prevents people from seeing its full extent.

I asked 300 respondents in an online survey to explain why a

person graduates from college or drops out; what makes for success at work; what keeps a person out of trouble; and what may land a person in jail.

People typically explained these outcomes in terms of meritocratic factors: Being smart gets you into college, working hard earns you a promotion and being polite to the police may save you from a speeding ticket. In the words of one respondent, "I think people are mostly capable of getting what they want out of life. If they don't, they either didn't try hard enough or are too lazy, unmotivated or whatever."

But respondents were not blind to how structural factors can shape life outcomes. They recognized that some schools better prepare their students for college; that family contacts can help you get that good job or promotion; and that living in a poor neighborhood means you're on the police radar. As one person put it, "I think that in a lot of cases, outcomes are determined by privilege and race... or a lack thereof."

When I looked at respondents' explanations in light of their own background, I discovered a telling relationship: People who grew up in more socioeconomically or racially diverse environments were more likely, by about 20 percent, to explain life outcomes in terms of structural factors. Conversely, people who grew up in homogeneously rich or white neighborhoods saw success in meritocratic terms.

Learning about inequality

To look more closely at how people learn about inequality, I studied a nationally representative sample of 14,000 students across 99 U.S. colleges. I asked students about racial inequality and meritocracy as freshmen, and then again in senior year. Would students grow more convinced about meritocracy over their college years, or did they come to understand inequality in structural terms?

About half of students held on to their original beliefs about

inequality. Some 30 percent developed a structural understanding of inequality, while 20 percent came to see things more meritocratic. Their beliefs were shaped by three key factors: college setting, interactions with peers from different backgrounds, and their roommate in the dorms.

In racially homogeneous and exclusive college settings, students developed a more meritocratic view of inequality in the U.S.

Conversely, those who frequently interacted with students from another racial group became more concerned about racial and income inequality, and more critical of meritocracy. Students paired with a roommate of a different race also developed a better understanding of the structural sources of inequality.

Meritocracy, empathy and solidarity

My research suggests that how we see and explain inequality drives our empathy and solidarity with others. We feel for people who we understand are facing hardship by no fault of their own. We have less sympathy for those whose situation, we think, is caused by poor choices or a lack of effort.

As such, our beliefs about inequality are the starting point for our politics and our policy views on criminal justice, the welfare state and income redistribution.

If we want our young citizens to develop a better understanding of the world they live in, we need to create conditions for more interaction across socioeconomic and racial lines, at school, in college and in the neighborhoods where they grow up. We can do this by ensuring access to preschool for all income groups; stepping up the effort to desegregate public schools; and considering roommate assignment and other cost-free measures to increase diversity in college life.

It would take a major intervention to bring actual

opportunities in line with the American Dream of social mobility. The next generation's choices will shape tomorrow's America. It is up to us, however, to decide what world this generation grows up in, and through what prism they come to see their society.

Jonathan J.B. Mijs is an assistant professorial research fellow at London School of Economics and Fellow in Sociology, Harvard University.

Severe flu brings medicine shortages, rising death toll in Calif.

By Soumya Karlamangla, Los Angeles Times

So many people have fallen sick with influenza in California that pharmacies have run out of flu medicines, emergency rooms are packed, and the death toll is rising higher than in previous years.

Health officials said Friday that 27 people younger than 65 have died of the flu in California since October, compared with three at the same time last year. Nationwide and in California, flu activity spiked sharply in late December and continues to grow.

The emergency room at UCLA Medical Center in Santa Monica typically treats about 140 patients a day, but at least one day this week had more than 200 patients – mostly because of the flu, said the ER's medical director, Wally Ghurabi.

[Read the whole story](#)

Dense blob has kept California weather dry

By Dale Kasler And Ryan Sabalow, Sacramento Bee

Think of it as a dense blob of air. When it parks itself over the Pacific Ocean, it can act like a wall – and prevent rain and snow from reaching Northern California.

When meteorologists say a “high pressure system” or a “ridiculously resilient ridge” is keeping the West unseasonably dry, this is what they mean.

A series of persistent high pressure systems over the Pacific factored heavily in the five-year drought that ended last spring. The latest high pressure system produced one of California’s driest Decembers on record, left the Sierra Nevada snowpack woefully thin and raised fears of a drier-than-average winter. Although the system appears to be fizzling out, allowing some precipitation to hit California this week and next, the outlook for the rest of winter remains uncertain.

Climatologists say California is essentially at the mercy of high pressure systems.

Read the whole story

Calif. gas prices highest to start new year since 2014

By Todd R. Hansen, Daily Republic

California motorists entered the new year paying the most for gasoline since Father Time ushered in 2014.

Those prices, according to AAA, are expected to fall in coming weeks – maybe.

The first week of 2018 saw the average price in San Francisco as the highest in the state at \$3.23, which is 33 cents higher than South Lake Tahoe, where the top price typically is paid.

Read the whole story

Road salt, other pollutants may disrupt circadian rhythms

By Jennifer Marie Hurley

Every winter, local governments across the United States apply millions of tons of road salt to keep streets navigable during snow and ice storms. Runoff from melting snow carries road salt into streams and lakes, and causes many bodies of water to have extraordinarily high salinity.

At Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, my colleague Rick Relyea and his lab are working to quantify how increases in salinity affect ecosystems. Not surprisingly, they have found that high salinity has negative impacts on many species. They have also

discovered that some species have the ability to cope with these increases in salinity.

But this ability comes at a price. In a recent study, Rick and I analyzed how a common species of zooplankton, *Daphnia pulex*, adapts to increasing levels of road salt. We found that this exposure affected an important biological rhythm: The circadian clock, which may govern *Daphnia*'s feeding and predation avoidance behaviors. Since many fish prey on *Daphnia*, this effect could have ripples throughout entire ecosystems. Our work also raises questions about whether salt, or other environmental pollutants, could have similar impacts on the human circadian clock.

Daily biological rhythms and the circadian clock

In studying how road salt affects aquatic ecosystems, the Relyea lab showed that *Daphnia pulex* can adapt to handle moderate exposures in as little as two and a half months. These levels ranged from 15 milligrams of chloride (a building block of salt) per liter of water to a high of 1,000 milligrams per liter – a level found in highly contaminated lakes in North America.

However, an organism's ability to adapt to something in its environment can also be accompanied by negative trade-offs. My lab's collaboration with Rick's began in an effort to identify these trade-offs in salt-adapted *Daphnia*.

In my lab, we study how our circadian rhythms allow us to keep track of time. We investigate how the molecules in our cells work together to tick like a clock. These circadian rhythms allow an organism to anticipate 24-hour oscillations in its environment, such as changes from light (daytime) to dark (nighttime), and are essential to an organism's fitness.

Rick and I hypothesized that adaptation to high salinity could disrupt *Daphnia*'s circadian rhythms based on recent evidence showing that other environmental contaminants can disrupt

circadian behavior. One important behavior in *Daphnia* that may be controlled by the circadian clock is the diel vertical migration – the largest daily biomass migration on Earth, which occurs in oceans, bays and lakes. Plankton and fish migrate down to deeper water during the day to avoid predators and sun damage, and back up toward the surface at night to feed.

Given what we know about circadian function, it would be logical to assume that exposure to pollution would not affect an organism's circadian rhythms. While circadian clocks can incorporate environmental information to tell the time of day, they are heavily buffered against most environmental effects.

To understand the importance of this buffering, imagine that the timing of an organism's day length responded to environmental temperature. Heat speeds up molecular reactions, so on hot days the organism's 24-hour rhythm could become 20 hours, and on cold days it might become 28 hours. In essence, the organism would have a thermometer, not a clock.

Adaptation to pollution affects key circadian genes

To determine whether clock disruption is a trade-off to pollutant adaptation, we first had to establish that *Daphnia* is governed by a circadian clock. To do this, we identified genes in *Daphnia* that are similar to two genes, known as period and clock, in an organism that serves as a circadian model system: *Drosophila melanogaster*, the common fruit fly.

We tracked the levels of period and clock in *Daphnia*, keeping the organisms in constant darkness to ensure that a light stimulus did not affect these levels. Our data showed that the levels of period and clock varied over time with a 24-hour rhythm – a clear indication that *Daphnia* have a functional circadian clock.

We also tracked the same genes in populations of *Daphnia* that had adapted to increased salinity. Much to my surprise, we

discovered that the daily variation of period and clock levels deteriorated directly with the level of salinity the *Daphnia* were adapted to. In other words, as *Daphnia* adapted to higher salinity levels, they showed less variation in the levels of period and clock over the day. This demonstrated that *Daphnia*'s clock is indeed affected by pollutant exposure.

Daphnia and other plankton are among the most abundant organisms on Earth and play critical ecological roles.

We currently don't understand what causes this effect, but the relationship between salinity levels and decreased variation in the levels of period and clock offers a clue. We know that exposure to pollutants causes *Daphnia* to undergo epigenetic regulation – chemical changes that affect the function of their genes, without altering their DNA. And epigenetic changes often show a gradual response, becoming more pronounced as the causal factor increases. Therefore, it is likely that high salinity is inducing chemical changes through these epigenetic mechanisms in *Daphnia* to suppress the function of its circadian clock.

The broad effects of circadian clock disruptions

We know that environmental conditions can affect what the clock regulates in many species. For example, changing the sugar that the fungus *Neurospora crassa* grows on changes which behaviors the clock regulates. But to our knowledge, this study is the first to show that genes of an organism's core clock can be directly impacted by adapting to an environmental contaminant. Our finding suggests that just as the gears of a mechanical clock can rust over time, the circadian clock can be permanently impacted by environmental exposure.

This research has important implications. First, if *Daphnia*'s circadian clock regulates its participation in the diel vertical migration, then disrupting the clock could mean that *Daphnia* do not migrate in the water column. *Daphnia* are key consumers of algae and a food source for many fish, so

disrupting their circadian rhythms could affect entire ecosystems.

Second, our findings indicate that environmental pollution may have broader effects on humans than previously understood. The genes and processes in *Daphnia*'s clock are very similar to those that regulate the clock in humans. Our circadian rhythms control genes that create cellular oscillations affecting cell function, division and growth, along with physiological parameters such as body temperature and immune responses.

When these rhythms are disrupted in humans, we see increased rates of cancer, diabetes, obesity, heart disease, depression and many other diseases. Our work suggests that exposure to environmental pollutants may be depressing the function of human clocks, which could lead to increased rates of disease.

We are continuing our work by studying how the disruption of *Daphnia*'s clock affects its participation in the diel vertical migration. We are also working to determine the underlying causes of these changes, to establish whether and how this could happen in the human brain. The impacts we have found in *Daphnia* show that even a simple substance such as salt can have extremely complex effects on living organisms.

Jennifer Marie Hurley is an assistant professor of biological sciences at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.