

VHR scam warning issued by Truckee

The increased demand for rental properties is often associated with an increase in criminals taking advantage of unsuspecting victims.

Truckee police officers are warning people that vacation rental scams are a common occurrence.

It usually begins by a suspect searching the internet for legitimate houses for rent or sale. The scammer then uses the photos of the home in the listing as well as the description to create a fake advertisement displaying the house as available to rent. These false ads are most commonly found on Craigslist, officers said.

The victim contacts the alleged owner, reserves vacation rental dates, and deposits money directly into the suspect's account. Upon arrival, the true homeowner is often very surprised, and the victim comes to the realization that they have been scammed.

In these types of scams, the victim typically loses between \$1,000 and \$2,000.

Scammers often use voice over IP (VoIP) phones or proxy servers for email correspondence from public places (often in foreign countries), making tracing the phone number or IP addresses and identifying the suspect nearly impossible. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is aware of, and is currently investigating these kinds of cases.

Truckee officers recommend people use reputable sources with verified business addresses, phone contacts, and employees. If paying for a deposit, use a credit card that has fraud protection. If the deal seems odd or unusual, find another

property.

Home owners should check the internet to see if their property is fraudulently listed for rent.

Owner of Caesars casinos plans IPO

By Todd Prince, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Vici Properties, the owner of Caesars Entertainment Corp. casinos and golf courses, plans an initial public offering of its stock to help pay down more than \$4 billion of debt and finance future acquisitions.

The real estate investment trust, created from Caesars' bankruptcy reorganization, will trade on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol VICI, according to documents filed Dec. 11 with the Securities and Exchange Commission. The documents did not give a time frame or offering size.

Caesars Entertainment is the parent company of Harrah's Lake Tahoe and Harveys.

[Read the whole story](#)

Temperature changes challenge

Tahoe's wildlife

By Jim Sloan

The pika is a small, furry mammal that lives in the harshest of places – in mountainous rocky areas where the snow is deep, the air is cold, and conditions are unforgiving.

The small-eared member of the rabbit family doesn't even hibernate, choosing instead to burrow into hay piles it builds beneath the deep snow and using its high metabolism and thick fur to survive.

But now the American pika is disappearing from vast stretches of the backcountry because of a new enemy: climate change.

A 6-inch mammal that can survive for months beneath massive snowpacks is disappearing in the face of increasingly hot summertime temperatures.

In a study published earlier this year in the journal PLOS One, researchers found that the pika has vanished from the rugged backcountry around Mount Pluto bounded by Lake Tahoe, Highway 89, and Highway 267.

It is the largest area of pika extinction reported in the modern era. Researchers said the extent of the die-off echoed "large-scale range collapses" that occurred after the last Ice Age.

From 2011 to 2016, lead researcher Joseph Stewart, a conservation biologist at UC Santa Cruz, scoured that triangle of land looking for pikas. He found plenty of old pika scat and used carbon dating to show how long the animal had occupied the area, but all signs of living pikas had disappeared.

"We knew that historically they occupied habitat all through that area," Stewart said. "But the living animals were no

longer there.”

Stewart says the pikas died out first in the lower elevations and then in the higher reaches of the 165-square-kilometer area because of increasingly hot summer temperatures. Pikas are sensitive to the heat; they can only survive for an hour in temperatures that are above 75 degrees. When the daytime temperatures are too high, pikas can’t get out and forage or die trying.

Although some pikas survive in other parts of the Sierra, Stewart predicts that their numbers will decline by 97 percent by 2050. Other studies have shown that the pika has disappeared from the Black Rock Range in Nevada and from Zion National Park.

And the American pika is not the only victim of climate change. Stewart noted that Belding’s ground squirrel and the alpine chipmunk are also suffering in the heat. The pika has disappeared from 15 percent of its historical habitat, but the Belding’s ground squirrel – which lives above 6,500 feet elevation between Lake Tahoe and Kings Canyon – is gone from 42 percent of its historic stomping grounds.

More troubling, Stewart says, is that many more species may be disappearing but wildlife managers are having trouble documenting the decline due to a lack of funds for monitoring.

“For these species that are vulnerable, we need baseline data on where they are now,” he said. “It’s totally feasible to develop that knowledge. We just need to put money toward the effort.”

The news of Stewart’s findings about the pika triggered a wave of media reports. *Discover* magazine, the *New York Times*, and many local and regional newspapers reported his findings. Stewart was surprised – this was his third paper on the topic – but hopes the public interest will convince people to help reverse global warming.

“It’s one thing to hear about polar bears suffering because of climate change, but when you hear about an animal that is much closer to you and that you have seen on hikes or trips into the mountains, it tends to resonate more,” he said.

Stewart notes other studies that show climate-related local extinctions have already occurred in hundreds of species around the world. A recent study that surveyed 976 species from tropical to marine habitats found that nearly half have suffered local extinctions.

Stewart says one hope for slowing the loss of species is to use targeted gene flow, in which animals from warm-adapted populations of a species are translocated to populations that don’t yet possess these genetic adaptations to withstand warmer climate conditions.

“But a far simpler and more economical solution than trying to save each species individually is to rein in and reverse climate change,” he said.

*This article is republished from the winter 2017 edition of **Tahoe In Depth**.*

Opinion: CalPERS about to bury taxpayers in more debt

By Daniel Borenstein, Bay Area News Group

Brace yourself taxpayers: CalPERS is about to bury you deeper in debt.

The nation’s largest pension system is expected to adopt a funding plan this week that anticipates shortfalls during the

next decade and then banks on exceptional investment returns over the following half century to make up the difference.

It's an absurd strategy designed to placate labor unions, who want more public money available now for raises, and local government officials who are struggling to make annual installment payments on past debt CalPERS has rung up.

Read the whole story

Teacher training report: California earns a D+

By Sharon Noguchi, Bay Area News Group

California ranks below 31 other public-school systems and earns just a D-plus in ensuring teacher quality, according to a new report aimed at spurring states to improve teacher preparation.

The Washington, D.C. based National Council on Teacher Quality's 2017 State Teacher Policy Yearbook evaluated and graded states on teacher preparation, evaluation, compensation and other factors that contribute to successful teaching. Since its last survey in 2015, the nonprofit, non-partisan council found that California and most states stagnated in their progress.

In an emailed response Tuesday, California Board of Education President Michael Kirst called the organization that produced the report "an advocacy group with its own arbitrary criteria for state grades."

Read the whole story

2017 may be best holiday shopping season in years

By Anne D'innocenzio, AP

Shoppers who are feeling good about the economy and spending more than expected on items like kitchen gadgets, toys and coats could make this the best holiday season in several years.

That's good news for retailers, some of which have had few reasons of late to be merry. But there's no question that stores need to keep adapting to how people shop as spending moves online.

Customer sentiment could shift again based on how they feel the tax overhaul is affecting them. Tax cuts mean some shoppers may have more money in their pockets, but they could opt to save it instead of spend it.

[Read the whole story](#)

Who to watch in the 2018 Winter Olympics



Mikaela Shiffrin is a favorite for the women in alpine skiing.
Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

By Jennifer Calfas, Time

From a 17-year-old snowboarding star to a gold-medal-hungry women's ice hockey team, Team USA's athletes competing in the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in PyeongChang, South Korea, are looking to make a mark.

The official roster for Team USA will not be finalized until weeks before the 2018 Winter Olympics start Feb. 9, but the first competitors in the 15 Winter Olympic sports have already been chosen – and they each bring a unique story to the games.

Maame Biney is a 17-year-old who already made history as the first black woman to qualify for Team USA's short track speedskating team. Making his return in 2018, Gus Kenworthy is a freestyle skiing star who could become the first openly gay

male athlete to compete at a Winter Games. And Chloe Kim is a 17-year-old snowboarding phenom who is the favorite to win gold in the sport for Team USA.

Read the whole story

Top 10 causes of death in the Silver State

By Brian Duggan, Reno Gazette-Journal

Like Americans nationwide, Nevadans were more likely to die from heart disease or cancer in 2016 than other causes.

But one cause of death in the Silver State stands out compared with national trends: suicide. The number of suicides increased by 13 percent from 2015 to 2016, according to data provided by the Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health.

The other top causes of death in Nevada are often diseases that affect the elderly or stem from risky life choices – like poor diets, alcohol and drug abuse.

Read the whole story

Letter: Asking for help with

SnowGlobe noise

Publisher's note: *This letter was sent to the South Lake Tahoe City Council, city manager and media.*

Hi all – I hope you all had a nice holiday.

I'm writing this letter because I have seen quite a few articles online mentioning that the SnowGlobe noise is anticipated to be louder than last year because of the lack of snow.

I was wondering if I could ask the city manager and/or council to be proactive with this situation and have the promoter turn the noise level down.

If you know it's going to be louder than previous years, why not turn it down ahead of time instead of waiting for people to complain. Again, be proactive instead of reactive.

I've included the press in this email because I want it noted that someone thought ahead and asked the people in charge to do something about an issue they see coming.

I know email tonality is a tricky thing and I want to express that I want this email to come across as asking you to do something, not telling you to do it.

Thanks for your time.

John Spinola, South Lake Tahoe

STR to recycle Christmas trees

It's time to turn that Christmas tree into mulch.

South Tahoe Refuse will pick up trees with zero decorations on them on customers' regular trash pick up days between now and Jan. 8.

Trees cannot be taller than 6 feet. If they are, cut them down to size.

Flocked trees cannot be recycled.