EDSO going after porch package thieves

El Dorado County sheriff's deputies are taking a proactive approach to stopping what has become a regular crime – stealing packages from porches.

Undercover detectives will be delivering bait packages filled with fake electronics and GPS devices to residences across El Dorado County. The county is partnering with the U.S. Postal Service in this operation.

The tracking device will allow detectives to find where the package goes.

Detectives are asking the public to report any unusual behavior.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Washoe Meadows wins suit against State Parks

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Golf Course's footprint will not be expanding any time soon. This is because Washoe Meadows Community prevailed in court against California State Parks.

Nearly six years to the day after the **initial lawsuit** was filed in Alameda Superior Court, the First District Court of

Appeal this month upheld the lower court's **April 2015 decision** which in effect ruled the environmental documents are invalid.

This means State Parks, which has owned the 777 acres that comprises Washoe Meadows State Park and Lake Valley Recreation Area in Meyers since 1984, must start over with its desires to revamp the Upper Truckee River in that location, and put on hold its desire to move some of the golf holes across the river.

To make the state's plans work would have meant reclassification of some of the land. Downgrading actual State Parks land would have been unprecedented.

El Dorado County officials had protested the state's plans as well.

The appellate court said, "The public was not provided with an accurate, stable and finite project description on which to comment," which is required by law. The draft environmental impact report "did not identify a proposed project but described five very different alternative projects."



Washoe Meadows State Park will remain as it is per a court decision. Photos/LTN file

State law through the California Environmental Quality Act demands that a preferred alternative be identified and studied in order for the public to have an opportunity to comment on the proposal and to bring transparency to the process. That didn't happen. While federal law is different and through the National Environmental Policy Act multiple options may be studied at once without a preferred alternative, the appellate court said, "California courts will not follow NEPA precedent that is contrary to CEQA."

The court further said, "In this case the differences between the five alternative projects was vast, each creating a different footprint on public land."

Lynne Paulson, who spearheaded the lawsuit with the backing of

the Washoe Meadows Community, said, “This reaffirms all the comments we had about this project from Day 1. Now we have to wait and see what other projects State Parks propose.”

While Paulson and others would like to celebrate this victory, now isn’t the time. “We are not done with our work,” Paulson told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Washoe Meadows Community will stay engaged in order to ensure a transparent process along with a project that benefits the environment and the general public by minimizing the destruction of what was set aside due to its natural resource values.”

Although the court made its decision on Nov. 15, Sierra District Superintendent Marilyn Linkem said she was unaware until *Lake Tahoe News* called.

“We are evaluating the court opinion,” Linkem told *LTN*. She would not say anything else, so it’s unknown what State Parks’ next move will be.

The park has never had a master plan. It also doesn’t receive much attention from the state or even the local Sierra District headquarters, though trails have been improved in recent years. Officials had said a planning document for the park could not start until the lawsuit was settled.

The golf course continues to operate on a year-to-year lease.

Tahoe National Forest photo contest winners announced

The winner of the 2017 Tahoe National Forest photo contest is “Celestial Wilderness” by Joseph Dondelinger of Foresthill.

Second place is “Dreamy Nights,” also by Dondelinger, and third place is “Mountain Biking Into the Light on the Lavezzola Creek Trail” by Jeff Barker.

The winning image was of Castle Peak in the moonlight. According to Dondelinger, he used an app on his phone to get the timing of the Milky Way just right. The second place image shows Duncan Peak Lookout at twilight. Third place shows a mountain biker on the Lavezzola Creek Trail.

To see the winning images go **online**.

Fire retardant use brings environmental worries

By Matt Weiser, Water Deeply

Chemical fire retardants are considered a vital wildland firefighting tool, helping to slow the spread of flames while ground crews move into position. But as their use increases, the harmful side effects of these chemicals are coming under increasing scrutiny.

The chemicals, usually dropped from low-flying aircraft, largely consist of ammonia compounds, which are known toxins to fish and other aquatic life. Studies have shown retardants can kill fish, alter soil chemistry, feed harmful algae blooms and even encourage the spread of invasive plants. Yet there is little regulation of their use, and no safer alternatives on the market.

In California, state firefighting crews have applied 15.3 million gallons of chemical fire retardants so far this year,

according to data provided by CalFire, the state's wildland firefighting agency. That's a new record, and double the amount used just three years ago.

Read the whole story

Legalization a boon to more than just pot markets

By Chris Kudialis, Las Vegas Sun

Legalization of marijuana in eight states – including Nevada – in last year's election has opened the floodgates for pot businesses to make money.

That's according to more than a dozen business owners whose products are both directly marketed at buyers in the pot sector, and in similar industries such as farming and plant cultivation.

"Let's put it like this: A rising tide takes all ships," said Stuart Titus, CEO of San Diego-based General Hemp. "It's incredible to see the growth in the industry."

Read the whole story

Caltrans sign installations

to cause delays

Caltrans is replacing three overhead changeable message signs with new advanced variable message signs. The new signs will be installed in the following locations:

- Interstate 80 westbound – Truckee – Donner Pass Road/Highway 89
- Interstate 80 westbound – Davis – Pole Line Road bridge
- Highway 50 eastbound – El Dorado Hills – Latrobe Road.

Full freeway closures are scheduled for:

- Midnight Tuesday through 4am Wednesday on westbound Interstate 80 in Truckee between Highway 89 and the Donner Pass Road
- 10pm Dec. 3 to 2am Dec. 4 on westbound Interstate 80 in Davis between Mace Boulevard and Richards Boulevard
- Midnight Dec. 4 to 4am Dec. 5 on eastbound Highway 50 in El Dorado Hills just east of the interchange with Latrobe Road.

Motorists are encouraged to plan ahead for delays or use alternate routes. California Highway Patrol officers will be escorting traffic through the full closures using rolling blocks of traffic with full closures anticipated to be less than 30 minutes.

The new AVMS signs have increased energy efficiency, offer more options for messaging and offer higher visibility to provide motorists with real-time information for safe and efficient travel.

Squaw Valley creating on-mountain dining experience to match its legendary terrain



Dining with a view is what the Terrace at the top of the Squaw's tram is all about. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

OLYMPIC VALLEY – November skiing is always something to be thankful for in the Sierra because Mother Nature seems to be so fickle in the fall.

Out of the last five years, this is the most terrain Squaw Valley has had open this time of year. It's obvious there has been a ton of natural snow coming down based on what is in the trees and the rocky chutes. Snowmaking guns are keeping the

more popular routes open so they don’t get skied off in between storms, and until there is a solid base.



All the runs off Shirley Lake are open. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Over the weekend it was a bit like spring skiing with the conditions being slick in the morning and softening up as the day progressed.

While the mountain isn’t open top-to-bottom just yet, there is a mix of terrain available to satisfy all ability levels. Eleven lifts give access to 39 trails and 16 groomed runs. Tracks could be seen where skiers went off-piste. A small terrain park is open, too.



Squaw Valley’s rugged terrain is complemented by picturesque views of Lake Tahoe. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

High Camp, at the top of the tram, is going through a $1.8 million renovation that is expected to be finished by Christmas week. The last time any of the facilities here were updated was in 1991 – and it was showing in wear and dated offerings.

The Marketplace is open. This is where people can get grab-and-go food items – some healthy, some not as much. Courtney, the pastry chef, makes sweets fresh on a daily basis. Organic items are available, as well as edibles for vegetarians and those with wheat allergies. Gloves and goggles – items people may have left in the car or condo – may be purchased there as well.

This area used to be a larger retail area.



The Marketplace at High Camp offers prepackaged food, espresso and some retail. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

One level below is a space that had been underutilized, with few people knowing there was retail there. On Saturday it was packed with people eating food they had bought upstairs or had brought from home. Traditional tables are mixed in with more relaxing sofas. There's also a small alcove for little kids to play in.

Behind this area is the Terrace Buffet and Bar with its

expansive views down to the village and out to Lake Tahoe. The multitude of windows beckons photo opportunities. The 180-degree seating – which is still in pieces – is the most scenic dining spot on the mountain.



Comfortable seating has been added as a place to chill or eat without being in a restaurant. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Gone are the half booths. In their place will be round tables near the windows, with seating for four and two at rectangular tables. The old green carpet it gone. The flooring is now shades of brown.

The wood has been refinished to the point it looks new. A couple of the old brass railings have been made to look antique-ish.



Lance Crafts is in charge of the entire High Camp lodge. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

The bar is the focal point. With it dropping down, the bartenders and their bottles don’t impede the view. Lance Crafts, manager of High Camp, said the smoked old fashioned is something to experience.

The portable buffet stations will offer a variety of food choices – some hot, some cold.

Chef Andrew Gregory, who is in his second year at Squaw, oversees the various kitchens. He said the renovation of the entire High Camp operation is energizing him as well as his team.



Chef Andrew Gregory wants to do more than provide skiers and snowboarders with delicious food. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

“We are going to elevate the food and the service,” Gregory told *Lake Tahoe News.*

While burgers remain one of the most popular entrees, don’t expect only traditional ski resort grub. Gregory was raving about a pappardelle pasta dish as well as the Sierra cassoulet and the authentic po’ boy sandwich.



The granite bar at the Granite Bistro looks out onto the pool area. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Nearby is the Granite Bistro, which replaces the poolside restaurant. The footprint is the same – as is the location – but the interior will make it look like it's been built from scratch. This dining/drinking spot will be the last to come on board. It's been gutted pretty much to its foundation and supporting beams.

The old wood bar has been replaced with granite. A stack of granite tabletops is one corner. This gray motif matches perfectly to what's out the windows – Squaw's rugged mountains and the Granite Chief Wilderness Area.

The food here will be served more family style, and the space allows for people to bring in their own food. The smoked pheasant soup is returning and is recommended. This is where the burgers are, as well a salmon, steak, charcuterie and cheese boards.



The Granite Bistro should be open by Christmas. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Two chairlifts will be installed to bring ambiance and a unique place for people sit and eat.

However, cooking just for skiers or those sightseeing via the tram isn't enough for everyone.

"The chef and I are pushing for nighttime dinners. It's such a magical, unique place," Crafts told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Having on-mountain evening dinners would elevate Squaw's dining experiences to a level that is rare for Tahoe area ski resorts. Most close the doors when the lifts stop running. CEO Andy Wirth hinted their dream might be realized.

STHS teacher placed on leave for unknown reasons



Paul Kushner

For the second time in five years South Tahoe High School math instructor Paul Kushner has been placed on administrative leave.

In 2013 it had to do with him looking at inappropriate websites of scantily clad women while he was at work.

No one in the district is saying why the tenured teacher is out this time or for how long. He is on paid leave.

Kushner also directs the choirs at the high school, which are almost always only comprised of young women.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Opinion: A dilemma has parked in Placerville

By Larry Weitzman

Placerville has a major ongoing problem. Illegally issued

parking tickets, and it’s not like they didn’t know. Because the 2000-01 El Dorado County Grand Jury considered the legality of how parking tickets were issued, to say the city “fathers” didn’t know, is like saying “I didn’t know it was illegal to steal,” which may be exactly what the city of Placerville is doing, stealing from you if you pay those nasty parking tickets.



Larry Weitzman

Some background. During that 2000-01 Grand Jury term an investigation was done with respect to private contractors issuing parking tickets and their validity. For a parking citation, which is an infraction, to be valid, according to California Vehicle Code Section 40202 it “must be issued by a peace officer or person authorized to enforce parking laws” and such a person is further described as the “issuing officer.”

Because the California Legislature in CVC 40200.5 expressly allows cities to contract with private companies to process parking citations, which is a process that takes place after the issuance of the parking citation, by clear inference, it means that cities (and other local jurisdictions) must have express legislative authority for private contractors to issue citations pursuant to California law. There is no such express legislative authority, for California General Law cities, which P’ville is.

By now you have already figured out that P’Ville uses a private company, Espy Parking Service to issue parking

violations. P'Ville police officers do not issue parking violations. I have confirmed this fact with Placerville City Manager, Cleve Morris, that Espy Parking Service is the private contractor that does the job of parking enforcement including the issuing parking citations. The P'Ville city budget shows that the prior company, Banner Parking Service contract costs for the 2016-17 fiscal year is $143,828. Morris didn't know, off hand, the revenue from the tickets, but believes they are below $60,000 annually.

Making matters worse, EDC County Counsel Louis B. Green, around the time of the GJ investigation requested an opinion from the California Attorney General's office asking the question of whether a general law city can enter into a contract with a private security company authorizing the company's employees to issue citations for Vehicle Code parking violations?

On April 23, 2002, such an AG ruling was issued, No. 01-1103 answering this exact question. The ruling, which was five pages of legal reasoning, had the following conclusion: "A general law city may not enter into a contract with a private security company authorizing the company's employees to issue citations for Vehicle Code parking violations."

While AG opinions do not have the force of law, they are considered substantial authority which a court will usually rely on when making decisions. This AG ruling is much like a legal court ruling and the case law and legal reasoning upon which it relies on for its conclusion is quite clear. There is no authority within the CVC giving cities the ability to contract with private companies for the issuance of parking citations.

In a discussing the parking enforcement issue with, Cleve Morris, the P'Ville City Manager on about November 14, 2017, remarked that he has been doing it for years, even in other cities. He was unaware of the Attorney General ruling

“prohibiting” the practice.

In reviewing the financials of Placerville, it contracted with Banner Parking Service (now SP+), a private company, to enforce its parking regulations and issue parking citations at a cost of about $144,000 annually, which City Manager Morris, confirmed. The revenue is still being determined, but Morris thinks that it might be somewhere around $60,000 annually or less. That would equate to an average of four citations a day. If the Attorney General ruling is upheld by a court of law and a three-year statute of limitations is applied, the City would have to refund approximately $200,000 to people who paid the “illegally” issued citations. And there may be extensive legal fees as provided by the California private attorney general law.

Hiring perhaps two people to enforce the 60 hours a week (8 am-6 pm daily except Sunday) of when there are parking regulations and limitations in effect within the City might be less expensive than the cost of the $144,000 private contract and give the City much better control and more appropriate enforcement. At $17 an hour the cost would be about $1,000 a week which is about $52,000 annually plus 40 percent or about $21,000 for benefits. That is less than $75,000 annually. Even with 10 hours a week of supervision and administration, it would still come in at under $100,000 annually. And the law regarding the proper issuance of parking citations would be pursuant to the Attorney General opinion.

As with the Mitigation Fee Act litigation which I have written extensively about government either not following the law or being above the law, here is another cut and dry example of a government misdeed. They knew the law. It would be surprising to think that this parking issue wasn’t discussed at some government conference/junket. It was our own County Counsel who requested clarification via an AG opinion. Government chose to ignore it, thinking perhaps no one would notice. “Hey, we are the government we can do anything we want.” Their

ignorance is going to potentially cost Placerville taxpayers about a quarter of a million dollars, maybe more. It’s about time that consequences are enacted against government officials for such malfeasance.

We will see how fast this potential problem is rectified.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Study: 4.2M kids experience homelessness each year

By Leila Fadel, NPR

Marquan Ellis was evicted from his home in Las Vegas when he was 18.

His mother battled with a drug and gambling addiction while he stayed at his godmother’s house. But he couldn’t stay there forever.

He found his way to the Nevada Partnership for Homeless Youth where he enrolled in the independent living program.

He isn’t sure what he would have done if he hadn’t found that program: “I would have been on the street looking for someone to help, looking for my next meal, looking for my next shower, looking for my next place to sleep.”

Like Ellis, nearly 4.2 million young people experience unaccompanied homelessness in the course of a year, according to a study from Chapin Hall a research center at the University of Chicago.

Read the whole story