SnowGlobe 2017 plans being solidified

By Kathryn Reed

While a contract has not been signed, most of the particulars have been worked out to ensure SnowGlobe, the three-day music festival, returns to South Lake Tahoe in December.

Lake Tahoe Community College is having a different role this year compared to the past. No longer will buildings on campus be used by the festival organizers. Instead, a tent will be set up at Bijou Community Park for the concert to run its administrative components from there.

The college parking lot will continue to be the drop off location for patrons coming via bus.

With the college and city being partners in the community ball fields consortium, the two entities together regulate what happens with the two new fields. Sod was put in this fall, so this will be the first time the three-day concert will be on the new fields. Last year it was just on the dirt. Prior to 2016 the concert was on the soccer field.

The college board at its meeting on Oct. 10 gave direction to staff to essentially finalize the contract. It should be before the board in November for a vote.

"As related to the field, we are making sure they are protected," LTCC President Jeff DeFranco told *Lake Tahoe News.*

There are three tiers to renting the ball fields. The least expensive level is for local nonprofits, then for nonprofits using it as a fund raiser, and the highest fee reserved for for-profit organizations like the Colorado-based SnowGlobe. DeFranco said the rental rate for SnowGlobe will be $50,000.

This is about double the price of the least expensive rate.

This will be year-seven for SnowGlobe in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Lesia Witkowsky

The city at a meeting earlier this year had wanted to implement an assessment per ticket that would be used for field maintenance. If a long-term contract were ever entered into, like promoter Chad Donnelly wants, this component could be part of that deal. Donnelly would like a 10-year commitment from the city.

The electeds have agreed SnowGlobe can come back in 2018, but beyond that they want to see how the field holds up. That assessment will come in the spring after the snow melts.

The college agreement, though, would be for just 2017.

The rental fee is strictly to be used for long-term maintenance, not any damage associated with the festival. Another part of the contract will deal with promoters being responsible for repairs.

“The other discussion was to ensure concrete requirements about demobilization,” DeFranco said. The board wants to put some “teeth” into the contract.

The college, city and residents were frustrated last spring as the site started to look dilapidated because remnants from the concert littered the area long after the promoters left town.

Opinion: California’s on a tax binge

By Dan Walters, CalMatters

California has been on a tax binge in recent months, enhancing its status—for better or worse—as one of the nation’s highest-taxing states.

Last year, California voters approved a big boost in cigarette taxes, from 87 cents a pack to $2.87, and extended for 12 additional years the nation’s highest income-tax rates on the highest-income residents.

Dan Walters

This year, the Legislature and Gov. Jerry Brown enacted a more than $5-billion-a-year increase in gas taxes and other vehicular levies to finance transportation improvements and imposed a new tax on real estate transactions to finance affordable housing.

Those increases, plus a slew of new local government levies and hikes in personal income and taxable retail sales, will raise total tax collections to just under $300 billion a year, or $50 billion more than they were just two years ago. The breakdown: Nearly $200 billion will go to the state and more than $100 billion to schools and local governments.

You won’t find those numbers in any central data repository. Rather, they are calculated from dozens of different sources, ranging from the state budget to tax authorities and reports from agencies that are empowered to impose specialized levies, such as payroll taxes on employers for unemployment insurance, taxes on workers for disability insurance or utility taxes to support the Public Utilities Commission.

It should also be noted that these are compulsory taxes, not fees. California’s state and local governments collect many more billions in fees tied to specific services, such as college tuition, hunting and fishing licenses, local utility services and admissions to state and local parks. Nor does it include such things as premiums for workers’ compensation insurance or earthquake insurance.

Those are important distinctions because taxpayers and even politicians often get taxes and fees mixed up. What’s called the “vehicle license fee,” for instance, is actually a property tax based on the value of a vehicle. And numerous political battles have been fought on the distinction because new state taxes require approval by two-thirds of the Legislature, while fees can be levied by simple majority votes or by agencies without any votes.

A 2010 ballot measure draws a sharp legal line between taxes and fees that became a major factor in this year’s struggle over reauthorization of California’s cap-and-trade system of regulating carbon emissions after the current program ends in 2020.

The battle over whether the state's current sales of emission allowances, about $2.5 billion a year, are taxes or fees has rattled around the courts. To avoid any legal cloud due to that 2010 ballot measure, the post-2020 reauthorization was approved by two-thirds votes in both legislative houses. For purposes of this column, they are being counted as taxes.

So how does that $300 billion annual tax bill shape up in relative terms? While there are several ways to measure tax burden, the most equitable is total state and local taxes as a percentage of personal income, thus accounting for wide economic variances among the states and differing methods of allocating taxing authority between state and local governments.

California's $300 billion is 12.7 percent of the current estimate of Californians' personal income, $2.3 trillion. That could be the nation's highest relative burden, but up-to-date comparative data are impossible to find.

The Washington-based Tax Foundation periodically calculates relative taxation but its latest report uses 2012 data and doesn't include all of the minor taxes that this writer has charted. That report shows California's burden at 11 percent of personal income and sixth highest in the nation, with New York No. 1 at 12.7 percent, exactly California's current load.

Suffice to say that California's is at least one of the highest, right up there with New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, Wisconsin and Illinois, and markedly higher than those of other Western states. Alaskans, according to the Tax Foundation, have the lowest in 2012 terms, just 6.5 percent of their personal income, thanks to the state's oodles of royalties on oil extraction.

California's income and sales tax rates are at or near the top, as well. Of major tax sources, only its property taxes are relatively moderate, thanks to Proposition 13, the iconic tax-limitation measure adopted by voters in 1978.

However, those property taxes are not as low as Proposition 13’s critics would have us believe, because California’s property values are among the nation’s highest. Property values and the resulting tax collections have climbed sharply in recent years, thanks to a red-hot housing market and new construction.

Even with Proposition 13’s limit—1 percent of value plus the cost of local bond service—schools and local governments are receiving $64 billion a year in property taxes, more than 12 times as much as they were getting in 1978 after the measure passed. On a per capita basis, California property taxes are somewhere in the middle range of the states.

So: Are Californians’ taxes too high, or still not high enough?

California launched a so-called tax revolt with Proposition 13 in 1978, but the state’s politics have veered sharply to the left in recent years. Its voters have been inclined to approve new state and local taxes when given the opportunity—particularly levies that they don’t pay themselves, such as cigarette taxes (only 11 percent of adult Californians smoke) or income taxes on the one-percenters at the top of the income ladder.

The new political atmosphere emboldens some political factions, such as public employee unions, to propose other new taxes. At least a dozen tax hikes were introduced in this year’s legislative session, not counting numerous measures authorizing local government agencies to ask their voters for sales tax overrides.

Six of those passed. Assuming Brown signs them, they will continue the flurry of local tax measures that have been placed on ballots in recent years, many of them purporting to pay for enhanced police and fire protection but in reality needed to cover burgeoning pension costs for public-safety employees.

Income taxes are 70 percent of California’s general-fund revenue. Image via Flickr
California may be maxed out on income taxes. They now account for 70 percent of the state’s general fund revenue, and half of them are paid by those one-percenters, which may encourage at least some change residences to low- or no-income-tax states such as neighboring Nevada. The combined federal-state marginal income tax rate—that paid on the highest increment of income—is now more than 50 percent for the highest-income Californians.

Brian Sabean, executive vice president of the San Francisco Giants, told the San Francisco Chronicle recently that such taxation makes recruiting highly paid players especially difficult, along with AT&T Park’s reputation for unfriendliness to hitters.

“Let’s face it,” Sabean said, “How many free agents are going to come here? They’re not. For two reasons: the ballpark and the California taxes. That’s just a fact.”

Moreover, the state’s ever-increasing reliance on income taxes has made its revenue stream much more volatile, subject to sharp decreases during even mild economic recessions because the incomes of the wealthy are very sensitive to swings in equities and other capital markets.

There have been periodic efforts to reform the tax system to make it less volatile. But that would involve shifting some tax burden from the rich to middle-class taxpayers, which would be politically incendiary. Brown and other politicians acknowledge the need for tax reform but have shied away from the heavy political lifting it would require.

Sales-tax rates continue to climb, thanks to those local override measures, largely in quarter-cent increments. They're near or above 10 percent in many locales. But actual sales-tax revenue continues to flatten because of consumers' changing habits—buying more untaxed services rather than taxable goods and increasing internet purchases that are often untaxed.

Taxable retail sales equaled 60 percent of Californians' personal incomes during Brown's first governorship four decades ago; today they are well under 30 percent and still falling. Sales taxes were the state's largest revenue source during Brown 1.0; today, at just 20 percent of general-fund revenue, they are a very distant second to income taxes.

A fight may be coming over whether to tax commercial and residential properties differently.
As pro-tax groups and their political allies seek more revenue, the big battle looming on the horizon is likely to be over Proposition 13. Unions and other liberal groups have yearned for decades to repeal, or at least modify, the property-tax limit, and legislation to do that has been introduced from time to time.

A fight is most likely to involve a "split roll" that would keep Proposition 13's benefits for homes but allow taxable values and taxes to increase for commercial property. Pro-tax groups believe that blue-state voters could be persuaded to take that route, but the groups haven't been willing, yet, to test the theory with a ballot measure.

Business organizations would throw big money against a split-roll measure, if it surfaced. One of the key points would be whether rental homes and apartments would be considered residential, and retain Proposition 13's protections, or commercial, and lose them.

A successful split roll drive would generate billions of new dollars each year—how many is impossible to say because of the unresolved rental-property factor—and would probably make California No. 1 in tax burden, if it’s not already there.

DCSD considers options besides selling KMS

Douglas County School District’s board of education wants professional input regarding what do with the shuttered Kingsbury Middle School site.

While the district is in the process of getting it reappraised, and that information should be available by the end of the month, selling the property might not be the only option.

When the board met Oct. 10 staff was directed to find a real estate consultant who could help with exploring alternatives.

“They talked about whether the district should enter the rezoning process to see if would make the property more marketable,” Superintendent Teri White told *Lake Tahoe News.*

As it stands now, any new owner would have to go through the regulatory process to have it zoned for their intended purpose.

There’s also the possibility the district could retain ownership and lease the property to someone. This would be dependent on the income covering the district’s liability and other expenses.

KMS is likely to be back on the November agenda, as the appraisal should be available the. At that time the board is expected to vote to put the property back on the market.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Calistoga evacuated, fire death toll at 23

The fires in the Wine Country continue to destroy homes and businesses. Photo/CalFire

By Ryan Lillis, Molly Sullivan And Marjie Lundstrom, Sacramento Bee

Wildfires continued to lay siege to huge swaths of Northern California on Wednesday, forcing the evacuations of thousands from iconic Wine Country towns like Calistoga and destroying thousands of homes and businesses in what Gov. Jerry Brown said was one of the worst fire events in state history.

Nearly two dozen huge fires had burned 170,000 acres since Sunday, and firefighters were bracing for heavy wind gusts through Thursday afternoon that they feared could wreak havoc after years of drought.

“We are literally looking at explosive vegetation,” CalFire Director Ken Pimlott said Wednesday, as 8,000 firefighters worked for the third straight day trying to corral fires that have killed at least 23 people and left hundreds missing. “These fires are burning actively during the day and at night, when you would expect the fire to subside.

Read the whole story

Study: Climate change could bring earlier Sierra runoff

By Rebecca Ash, UCLA

California has taken a wild weather ride over the past two years: A historic drought finally came to an end, and the winter of 2016–17 was the wettest winter in decades. Meanwhile, recent studies have projected that climate change will turn up the heat by up to 10 degrees in the Sierra Nevada mountains by the end of the century.

In a study published Oct. 10 in the Journal of Hydrometeorology, UCLA climate scientist Alex Hall and colleagues predicted that by the end of the 21st century, the runoff midpoint for snow and rainwater — the time of year by which half of a year’s precipitation leaves the mountains as runoff — could be an average of 50 days earlier than it is now, and 90 days earlier in some locations. The finding could have serious implications for the state’s water infrastructure, which was not designed to handle such a major shift, according to Hall.

Understanding runoff timing would allow California water managers to better plan for the future.

Read the whole story

Jeff Harkins – 1954-2017

Jeff Harkins

Jeffrey Scott Harkins, age 63, passed away in his Los Osos home on Sept. 30, 2017.

Jeff grew up a surfer in Manhattan Beach in Southern California and graduated from Aviation High School in 1971. At 18 years old, he was honored as the youngest business owner in Manhattan Beach partnering in a motorsports company.

Jeff also operated a chandlery business at the Santa Cruz Marina, and worked as the Tahoe Keys Marina manager for several years, until he started a general contracting business in El Dorado County.

In 1988, Jeff married Judi McCallum in South Lake Tahoe, where they later gave birth to daughter Kelly and son Corey.

Jeff was a loving husband, father, son, brother, uncle and friend. He will be sorely missed by his surviving family: children, Kelly and Corey; brother Bruce (Terri) Harkins; sister Kim (Mike) Stickler; niece Macall (Keaton) Andreas; nephews Blair and Skyler Harkins, Sean and Micah (Molly) Stickler.

Family and friends are invited to a celebration of life on Oct. 14 from 2-5pm at 1578 7th St., Los Osos.

Letter: Douglas Rotary gives back at B&B

To the community,

As an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization, Bread & Broth greatly values the many partnerships that have developed over the 28 years that it was been feeding the needy in the Lake Tahoe South Shore community. These partnerships involve volunteering, donating food and funds and sponsoring Monday Adopt A Day of Nourishment dinners.

Beginning in August, the Douglas Rotary Club began hosting the first of five Adopt A Days and on Oct. 2, hosted its second meal. Over the course of the five sponsorships, the Rotary Club will be helping B&B to feed over 500 meals to individuals who attend B&B’s Monday meal at St. Theresa Grace Hall. The generosity of the Rotary Club members and their commitment to bettering the lives of food insecure members of our community is very much appreciated and lauded by B&B.

Representing the Rotary Club members at the dinner were Randy Butler,

Ellen Dauscher, Penny Echan, Keith Endlich and George Sariego. According to B&B volunteer, Gail Clair, they were a joy to work with. "Working at Bread & Broth was so inspirational and gratifying," wrote Dauscher. "It serves a great need in our community. We would all be happy to help again anytime.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Hall of Fame quarterback Y.A. Tittle dies at age 90

By ESPN

Y.A. Tittle, the Hall of Fame quarterback and 1963 NFL MVP, has died. He was 90.

His family confirmed to LSU, where Tittle starred in college, that he died Sunday night at Stanford Hospital near his home in Atherton.

Known as "The Bald Eagle" as much for his sturdy leadership as his prematurely receding hairline, Tittle played 17 seasons of pro football. He began with the All-America Football Conference's Baltimore Colts in 1948 and finished with the NFL's New York Giants. He played 10 years in between with the San Francisco 49ers but had his greatest success in New York, leading the Giants to three division titles in four years in a remarkable late-career surge.

Tittle at one time had an ownership stake in Ski Run Marina in South Lake Tahoe. His grandson, Mike Deleat, still lives on the South Shore.

Read the whole story

Experts: 'Dice was really loaded' for wildfires

Entire neighborhoods in Santa Rosa have been reduced to ash. Photo/CHP

Publisher's note: ***The smoke blowing into the Lake Tahoe Basin and Truckee on Oct. 11 is from the Wine Country fires.***

By Stuart Leavenworth, Sacramento Bee

A cascade of extreme weather events fed Northern California's wildfires that exploded Sunday: Unusually high winds blew flames through unusually dense and dry vegetation, which sprang up following last winter's heavy rains and then were toasted by months of record hot temperatures.

"The dice was really loaded because of the big wet winter," said Park Williams, a California native and a research scientist at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory at Columbia University. "That set up the West with a lot of fuel to burn, and this summer has been exceptional in terms of dryness."

Scientists such as Williams say California is especially prone to wildfires, in part because of the state's dense population, which makes it easy for sparks to be ignited and turn into raging fire storms. But this week's blazes also show the fingerprints of climate change, he said, a harbinger of what the West should expect in the years to come.

Read the whole story

Grant to help DCSO with enforcement

Douglas County Sheriff's Office has received a $65,000 grant from the Nevada Department of Public Safety, Office of Traffic Safety to participate in joining forces traffic safety campaigns during the coming year.

This is a multi-jurisdictional statewide effort to increase safety on Nevada's roads by increasing enforcement and awareness of traffic laws. The goal is to reduce crashes and saves lives by focusing on impaired driving, distracted driving, seat belts, speed and pedestrian safety.

The money will be used from now through next September on beefed up enforcement.