

The Pacific Crest Trail's shadow hikers

By Caroline Benner, High Country News

Against the backdrop of a desert sunrise, two human silhouettes exchange double high-fives. By 8am, a bouncing crowd of a couple dozen has gathered around a group of wooden columns emblazoned with the crest of the Pacific Crest Trail – the monument that marks the start of the 2,650-mile path.

These are “through-hikers,” people who intend to hike from the fence on the California-Mexican border, all the way to Canada. They hug, take pictures and scrawl breathlessly in the logbook: “Wow!! Wow!! Wow!! Let’s do this!” “Dreams come true!” On this spring day, up to 50 would-be through-hikers set out, focused on the hike’s first leg, 42 miles to the town of Mount Laguna.

On the other side of the monument, just across the border, other hikers are assembling, unseen by the recreationists. Every day, up to 50 people wait until the Border Patrol agent’s truck peels away from the border fence. Once the truck is out of sight, they’ll slip through and begin their own journey north. These are border crossers, and they are focused on simply getting to a road, where a driver will take them deeper into the U.S. Some dash 1,200 feet to where Highway 94 swings close to the border. Some hug the Pacific Crest Trail, making occasional short forays across it; others quietly join the hoopla at the monument and try to blend in with the through-hikers. And some hike a route that echoes the trail’s first leg, heading toward a pick-up point near Mount Laguna.

[Read the whole story](#)

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- The deadline to sign up for the Tahoe Tennis Classic is July 23. More info is available **online**.
- The annual Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit is Aug. 22 from 10am-noon at Valhalla. It's free, but people are asked to **register**.
- Douglas County Sheriff's Office has added two K9s to its ranks. Beny is from Slovakia and is a 1-year-old German shepherd. His partner is Deputy Adam Windsor. Bane is a 1-year-old German shepherd whose handler is Deputy Luke O'Sullivan.
- According to a Pew Research Center survey, 53 percent of millennials went to a public library or bookmobile in the last year. It makes sense because this is the generation that shares. Millennials out of all generations are the most likely to use a library, at least in the U.S.
- Here are the El Dorado-Tahoe and Sierra roadwork schedules from Caltrans for the coming week.

South Shore embracing National Night Out

National Night Out is Aug. 1, 4-8pm at the Environmental Science Magnet School in Meyers.

This is an annual community-building campaign that promotes police-community partnerships and neighborhood camaraderie to make neighborhoods safer, more caring places to live.

National Night Out is designed to enhance the relationship between neighbors and law enforcement while bringing back a true sense of community.

Locally, National Night Out is a partnership between El Dorado County, El Dorado County Sheriff's Department, California Highway Patrol, South Lake Tahoe Police Department, Barton Health, South Tahoe Refuse and Recycling Services, California Conservation Corps and Kiwanis.

People will be able to:

- Explore a SWAT vehicle
- Meet a K9 officer
- Climb inside a fire truck
- Get car seats checked
- Learn about the California Conservation Corp and American Red Cross
- Talk to El Dorado County Vector Control
- Prepare your family for emergencies.

Kings Beach installs varied streetlight banners

The North Tahoe Business Association has installed 15 original art banners on the streetlights throughout downtown Kings Beach.

The art banners are throughout the one-mile commercial core, interspersed between promotional-style banners.

The new art banners are the result of a call to artists issued by NTBA, inviting emerging and established artists, young and old, to submit their designs. Fifty-six art piece concepts of diverse subject matter, mediums and styles were submitted for jury selection.

The works represent art created by pre-kindergarten and elementary students from local schools, as well as by professional local and regional artists. The featured art banner artists are: Jude Bischoff, Mike Bond, Anastiscia Chantler-Lang, Jennifer Eyzaguirre, Sue Gross, Pamela Hunt Lee, Kings Beach Elementary School students, Kaio Martin, Cathy McClelland, Tahoe Expedition Academy Pre-K Class, and Carrie White.

Golf not the only sport being played at ACC



Steph Curry doesn't worry about a foul being called as he goes to block Joe Pavelski. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Multi-sport athletes used to be the norm in high school; not so any more. But the pros, well, they are showing that they aren't single sport wonders. Baseball, tennis, hockey and football players are in the top six spots after the first day of the American Century Championship.



It's a who's who of quarterback greats with Tony Romo, Alex Smith and John Elway. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

The three-day celebrity golf tournament at Edgewood Tahoe saw some familiar names in the running, with some newbies as well on July 14.

Former Major League pitcher Derek Lowe took top honors on Day 1 with 25 points. (The ACC uses a Stableford format for scoring.)



Mardy Fish sizes up his putt on hole 10. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Right behind him are Mardy Fish (24) and Joe Pavelski (23). Tied for fourth are Aaron Rodgers, Mark Mulder and John Smoltz, each with 22 points.



It's like a receiving line between the holes 17 and 18 for ex-linebacker Brian Urlacher. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Pairings on the first day are usually based on some commonality the players share. It was a multi-generational quarterback trio with John Elway, Tony Romo and Alex Smith. Former Braves' pitching stars Greg Maddux, John Smoltz and Tom Glavine are a regular threesome. The Bay Area was represented by Steph Curry, Aaron Rodgers and Pavelski playing together.



With the Broncos quarterback situation not solidified, maybe John Elway, left, would like to lure Aaron Rodgers away from Green Bay. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Deborah Edwards of Scottsdale, Ariz., was cognizant of where Elway was – she got hit by a ball two years ago at this tournament by an errant drive of his on the 17th hole. To this day she can feel where it hit her on the right side of her head.

On Friday, it was *Lake Tahoe News* photographer Carolyn Wright who walked off the course with a shiner thanks to Curry. He went up for layup on the 17th hole and ran into her.



For the uninitiated, it would be hard to know Steph Curry and Aaron Rodgers are in a golf tournament. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Curry, Rodgers and Pavelski were having fun shooting hoops before teeing off. Rodgers was much better at throwing passes to the throng of spectators in boats lining the course than he was with sinking that large round ball into the net.

After teeing off, Curry ran a pattern resembling a wide receiver, with Rodgers stepping back in the pocket to deliver a perfect spiral to a sliding Curry. It's not every day you get grass stains playing golf.



Charles Barkley replaces dad in the family portrait. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Charles Barkley, who is well known for his anti-Warriors rhetoric, is well beyond his prime as a basketball star. Still, he was sauntering a bit after teeing off from the 10th hole. This is a huge change from a few years ago – pre-hip surgery – when he could barely get around.

On Friday he was playing to the crowd; “stealing” hats of young fans and posing for family pictures. Even though he is a perennial cellar dweller, the crowd loves him.



NBC sportscaster Kathryn Tappen signs an autograph as Charles Barkley takes the boy's hat. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Barkley was recognized on the 10th hole by the firefighting community for his generosity to the Angora Fire relief efforts. In 2007, he gave \$100,000 and toured the burn area; two years later he donated \$90,000. Last month marked the 10-year anniversary of the fire that leveled 254 houses on the outskirts of South Lake Tahoe.



Large galleries follow the more popular players. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Today most of the pairings are based on how the players did Friday. One notable exception is that Curry (23rd place) and Romo (20th) will be playing with Justin Timberlake (53rd). Curry and Timberlake are two of the players who get special security provided by Douglas County sheriff's deputies. Some of these superstars come with their own security and have an entourage of people.

Deputy Chris Wiggins was with Timberlake on July 14; standing guard making sure fans behaved themselves.



Entertainer Justin Timberlake, center, is playful on the course. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

"He usually doesn't need us. He has his own people," Wiggins told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We walk every hole with them."



Marshall Faulk chips the ball out of the sand on hole 18.
Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Fans do the same thing – some following a particular player on all 18 holes, others are perched in one spot waiting for everyone to come through.



Tom Glavine and Greg Maddux on their way down the fairway of hole 17. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Hole 17 is the busiest, with the crowd several people deep on the sand and grass. This is party central. While golf is usually a quiet sport, not so on this hole. It was almost comical as the official put his hands up for the spectators to hush as the players tee off only to have the music blaring from the speakers.



Ex-Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo is favored to win the tournament. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

The American Century Championship – it's not your ordinary golf tournament.

Opinion: EDC energy program fleeces seniors

By Larry Weitzman

Another “legacy” instituted by former El Dorado County CAO Larry Combs, which is running rampant in our senior community like a bad disease, is the PACE program. PACE is the acronym for Property Assessed Clean Energy. It is also known as the

HERO program which acronym means Home Energy Renovation Opportunity.

Whatever you call the program, to seniors on a fixed income it is mostly a Supervisor Created Access to (senior) Money or SCAM.



Larry Weitzman

Here's how this county program works. It allows home owners to borrow money for certain "energy saving" projects for their home. The cost for these improvements is borrowed from a county program at what they say is a competitive interest rate and its secured and assessed on to your property tax. With people who have been in their homes for some years (Proposition 13), have seen their taxes double, triple or more.

On top of that, these energy saving items are expensive, especially solar for seniors who don't make enough money to benefit from the \$7,500 federal tax credit. On top of that most seniors live in smaller houses that don't use much energy to begin with. In doing my research, a \$20,000 4 kWh solar system in optimum conditions will only produce about 600 kWh a month at best, which would save EDC seniors about \$120 a month or about \$1,400 a year. The other types of improvements might not even be noticed on your energy bills. And if you want a more efficient heating system, may I suggest a good sweat shirt.

With unsuspecting seniors who get told a line of bovine of how they are going to contribute to saving the world for their

grandchildren (remember it's always about saving the children) and the solar system will save them thousands of dollars a year and there won't even be a monthly bill, it will simply cost a few cents a day and you will pay it semi-annually on your property tax bill. The problem is the exorbitant interest rates some seniors are being hit with; so high that the loan interest will be double, triple or even quadruple the energy savings. It's a lose, lose situation.

But what happens can perhaps best be explained by a recent lawsuit filed in EDC over the PACE program. According to the complaint for damages filed on May 8, a salesman from a Rancho Cordova based company sold a lady who is 77 years old a bill of goods and promises. That the system would cost only \$200 a month, which would be paid for by energy savings from the solar panels and in fact she would get money back from her energy provider, PG&E.

So, what did they "sell" this senior? What I believe to be a 10kWh system for the princely sum of \$58,000. But that's only the beginning. Under the PACE or HERO program, the debt is assessed on the property taxes and therefore becomes a first lien on the property. What that means is if you had a first trust deed against the property like a home loan, it would be unlikely you could ever refinance that home loan as it would now be in second position against this new property tax lien.

With respect to the plaintiff's property which is a manufactured home on 10 acres in Somerset, it has had a property tax assessment of about \$250,000 for the last 11 years which was the exact assessment for the years 2014 and 2015 with an actual tax bill of \$2,651 for both years. But for the year 2016 the tax assessment is \$300,246 and the annual property tax has grown by \$6,041 to \$8,692 instead of what should be a tax of about \$3,000. This solar system is costing this unsuspecting woman \$500 a month in new taxes as payments on a \$58,000 loan. But it gets worse.

The interest rate being charged on this loan is about 9.25 percent (which considering today's interest rates of 4-4.5 percent would be considered "usurious") or of the \$6,000 additional in annual property taxes, \$500 is for the actual property taxes charged for the improvement and the balance is almost all interest on this loan. At this rate, it will never be paid off and the gross benefit from the solar system is at best \$200 a month. What this company did under the guise of the county PACE program is unconscionable. There are other legal issues involved with this legal matter, but not a subject of this column. This elderly woman's electric bill probably never exceeded \$200 a month to begin with.

I spoke with my county supervisor, Mike Ranalli, not of this case, but how the program lacked protections for seniors and unscrupulous salesmen. This program was snuck on to the board agenda (by Larry Combs) as an addendum, which was a last-minute add-on to the regular agenda, and I doubt that anyone thought of the ramifications and did the proper vetting to protect our residents of El Dorado County, especially our rapidly growing population of seniors. Ranalli certainly didn't as he praised the program saying at the board hearing on Sept. 15, 2015, when it was approved (the vote was 5-0 on a motion seconded by Ranalli) that: "I am totally in favor of the PACE program, it helps property owners and the benefits are really great."

I have knowledge of the high-pressure tactics of the solar and related industries. On any given day, I received more than two phone calls a day from different telemarketers trying to sell solar. This has gone on for years now. I have developed a good technique for short circuiting such calls and understand solar is no panacea to energy, far from it. But that doesn't stop them from calling over and over again. Seniors might be lonelier and will accept attention from anyone, including high pressure sales people and therein lies the problem. And that problem is exemplified by the aforementioned litigation.

Our board did nothing to safeguard our seniors and other residents and should have known better as I am sure they are besieged by the same sales pressure telemarketers almost daily.

Placer County also has a PACE program, but at least that board had the foresight to put some safeguards in place. For any person acquiring a PACE financed solar or related energy system or improvement which has a cost less than \$60,000, it must be signed off by an official in the treasurer's/tax collector's office. If the system exceeds \$60,000, up to \$500,000, it must be signed off by a committee within the tax collector's office and if the system were to exceed half a million dollars, the entire Board of Supervisors have to approve it. This litigation would probably not be happening if such a minimal safeguard was in place here.

But better than the Placer system, not only could such a program be put in place where an impartial trained county official could analyze a PACE contract since the county becomes the free collector of the payment for such a program, but as to seniors, senior legal should be a requirement for signing off on any deals.

Combs, who pushed this program for approval without revealing the potential pitfalls, was the chairman of the Joint Powers Authority. This JPA makes a ton of money on this program. Can you say conflict of interest? PACE may have some good things, but it suffers by a lack of government oversight which is necessary as the government becomes the collector and could eventually foreclose on a customer's home with severe consequences. Is that what government should be doing, forcefully collecting debt for private businesses?

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

DraftKings, FanDuel cancel planned merger

By Philip Marcelo, AP

BOSTON – The two leading daily fantasy sports companies DraftKings and FanDuel have scrapped their proposed merger about a month after federal regulators sued to block it.

The two companies said Thursday they were moving forward separately in the best interests of their customers, employees, and investors. Neither directly addressed the federal government's concerns with the deal.

FanDuel CEO Nigel Eccles said in his statement that his company still believes the deal would have increased investment and product development, benefiting consumers and the broader industry.

[Read the whole story](#)

Nev. candidates declare their 2018 intentions

By Yvonne Gonzalez, Las Vegas Sun

Candidates for statewide offices are readying for a 2018 election season that's been brewing for months, with Democrats seeking to secure gains from the 2016 cycle.

With more than a year to go before the general election in 2018, races for the U.S. Senate and governor's office have already sparked attention. Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., is widely considered the most vulnerable Republican up for re-election nationally in 2018 and is the only GOP senator in the cycle who represents a state won by Hillary Clinton in 2016, and Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval is term-limited.

Heller has seen some backlash this year for his refusal to back GOP plans to repeal and replace Obamacare, saying efforts need to be made to protect Nevada and other Medicaid expansion states. Heller has held his Senate seat since 2011.

Read the whole story

Placer County expands help for homeless

Placer County is paying two nonprofit organizations to provide housing coordination services to residents who are at risk of becoming homeless or who have already become homeless.

They will provide case management, budgeting and moving help, furnishings, deposits, credit checks, rental preparation classes and more.

"As we make broad efforts to expand affordable housing for Placer County residents, these positions will provide focused, strategic support to people most in need," said Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery.

Advocates for Mentally Ill Housing Inc. and Volunteers of America Northern California and Northern Nevada Inc. will

provide housing coordinator services through at least June 2018 at a total cost of \$140,000, of which \$91,000 will come from the county General Fund and the rest from federal or state funds. The agreements can be renewed for an additional year.

Both agencies started providing housing coordinator services in October 2016 on a trial basis. In the first six months, two housing coordinators worked with 299 clients, 49 of whom secured permanent housing. Eight moved into transitional housing and 83 received case management services. The coordinators also conducted outreach to landlords, securing new support from seven landlords and supporting existing partnerships with another 20.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

31 EDC retirees make more than \$100,000/year

Thirty-one retired El Dorado County employees now rake in six figures in CalPERS benefits, with two people making more than \$200,000.

These defined benefits are practically bankrupting the county.

This is taxpayer money being paid to people who aren't doing anything for the county any more.

The county's unfunded obligation to its retirees is a major problem. In 1999 and 2000, against the recommendation of Auditor-Controller Joe Harn, the Board of Supervisors changed its contract with CalPERS, providing a significant increase in

retirement benefits to employees and dramatically increasing the county's unfunded obligation to CalPERS.

"CalPERS now acknowledges that the \$230 million unfunded obligation is grossly understated and will continue to grow because CalPERS continues to ask the county to make its retirement program payments using overly optimistic actuarial assumptions," Harn said in a statement. "In 2016, CalPERS informed the county that the annual amount due CalPERS will increase approximately \$4 million per year for the next three fiscal years. The cumulative negative effect on our budget over the next three fiscal years is \$24 million. This will make balancing the county budget and providing critical public safety and road maintenance services very difficult."

Harn released the numbers this week.

In 2011, only 16 retirees collected benefits in excess of \$100,000.

Sixteen of the 31 retirees worked for the sheriff's department, including two sheriffs. Other retired elected officials netting six figures are an assessor and a surveyor.

Many former county employees also received subsidized health insurance benefits, Harn noted.

Here is the CalPERS retiree list.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report