

Alpine County wins lawsuit filed by ex-worker

A decision came out this week in favor of Alpine County in a lawsuit filed by former Undersheriff Robert Levy.

Levy had sued the county, former CAO Pamela Knorr and county supervisors on grounds that they allegedly violated his First Amendment right to free speech, age discrimination, retaliation, and defamation.

Judge Robert Whaley with the U.S. District Court in Sacramento wrote, "Mr. Levy failed to demonstrate an intolerable working situation that would have forced a reasonable employee to have no option other than resignation."

Neither Levy's attorney Douglas Watts nor David Prentice, Alpine County's chief counsel, returned calls.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

LTCC not sure it wants SnowGlobe to return

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Community College is so frustrated with how long it took SnowGlobe vendors to clean up their mess that a future contract is in jeopardy.

"For me, the board and staff we take pride in the fact that is our front door. We had to drive in by it every day," LTCC

President Jeff DeFranco told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We would give tours to perspective students and have to explain what that was all about. We can't have that again."

DeFranco was referring to the mangled chain link fencing, portable structures and other debris left for months after the three-day music festival had long ended. **The crap left** on college and city property made the area look like a junkyard.

The contract said everything was supposed to be removed by Jan. 3. The reality is things remained on site into April. It took the city sending a threatening letter for the promoter to finally do something. (The city's contract say things must be removed as soon as possible, weather contingent.)

While South Lake Tahoe has a multi-year contract with promoter Chad Donnelly, which ends this year, the college has always been on a year-to-year contract. LTCC's facilities are instrumental to a successful event. The parking lot is huge. The physical education building and food services are other key components.



Damaged chain link fences remained for months after SnowGlobe. Photo/LTN

The college board of trustees this week heard a presentation about how the 2016 event went. Normally the annual recap comes in February, but that was impossible with evidence of the event still visible.

While DeFranco said it was too early to know exactly what language might be in a future contract – if there is a contract – he said wording to ensure everything is removed before winter quarter starts would be a biggie.

“Our facility was ready to go, but access and parking wasn’t because of SnowGlobe remnants,” DeFranco said. “Another big issue is any blight from SnowGlobe and how it reflects on the campus and community.”

Much of the discussion on April 25 centered on the lack of demobilization. January snowstorms prevented the timely removal of the perimeter fencing and other items. Apparently,

though, there was no contingency for this. It's not like snow in Tahoe in winter should surprise anyone, especially in January.

Donnelly is expected to be at a future LTCC board meeting to plead his case. This could be as soon as May.

While DeFranco said the college wants to be a community partner and help with tourist related events that drive the local economy, he said those pursuits will always be secondary to the college's main mission of being an institution of higher learning.

Ultimately it will be up to the five elected to decide if LTCC enters a contract of any kind with SnowGlobe. Things they are considering include:

- A larger damage deposit;
- Enhanced video surveillance;
- Limiting how the parking lot is used;
- Having the community play consortium have a contract for the use of the field;
- Establishing a wristband entrance fee for the consortium to offset the cost of maintaining the field. (The college and city are members of the consortium.)

Opinion: EDC supervisors need financial advisor

By Larry Weitzman

Sometimes repetition is a good thing. We did it in school to learn spelling and the times table, athletes do drills over and over again to create what they call muscle memory. Whatever it is, many people swear by it. So, I am going to repeat Jorge Santayana's perhaps most famous statement (or at least it is attributed to him): "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it."



Larry Weitzman

That oft quoted remark has failed to impress our El Dorado County Board of Supervisors and that was obvious at the first public budget meeting for the year 2017-18. The bottom line is our budget is out of control and is only going to get worse. Our roads are falling apart at an accelerated rate, and while the board pays lip service to this fact and claims it is a high priority (it is the highest priority of the county after public safety), they failed to do anything about it as they keep saying they have no discretionary money within the \$154 million of the discretionary budget and that includes our public safety budget. Eighty percent of that \$154 million consists of salaries and benefits. Of the total budget of about \$657 million, only that \$154 million is discretionary spending, i.e., the balance of the \$500 million is mostly money from state and federal programs and can only be spent as such.

For three hours and 40 minutes the budget was presented in a 25-page PowerPoint and for most of the meeting there were lamentations about our crumbling roads with no answers, except the one answer I have warned you about since the very ill-

advised 15 percent countywide raise for most employees except the sheriff's department, new taxes which were discussed at length at this board meeting. Most of EDC's fiscal problems are a direct result of that 15 percent raise. Without getting into a discussion of how the raises should have been made and distributed, that raise has cost the EDC over \$60 million (in additional salaries and benefits) and it is rising. Also, there has been some new hiring in the last four years as well, including the newly hired public "spin doctor" at a cost of \$150K annually.

EDC needs to recognize and admit they made a mistake. While only one board member, Brian Veerkamp voted for it, and while the rest of the board is newly minted since then, this board has been warned of the impending disaster coming as a result of this raise. Once the board recognizes spending needs to be cut, then there is hope for EDC. And here's why.

Several other things transpired during the meeting worth noting. First, ACAO Shawne Corley who made the presentation, said that salaries and benefits, without considering raises, are increasing at the rate of 4 percent a year just because of step and merit increases and retirement contributions. And with the CalPERS pension crisis of a lowering discount rate and increasing unfunded liabilities, that is going to get worse. Additional CalPERS retirement contributions required from EDC alone will cost EDC over \$60 million over the next six years.

But then Corley said that for every 1 percent rise in salary and benefits, revenue must increase by 1.5 percent. If salaries go up 4 percent, revenues must go up 6 percent to keep pace with salaries. Revenues are not going up that fast. EDC is headed for a train wreck and very soon, perhaps as little as two years, considering CalPERS issues.

Meanwhile, there is no money to fix our dilapidated roads. Part of CAO Don Ashton's recommendations is to fund reserves

to board policy levels, \$8.5 million to general reserves, \$5.3 million to contingency and \$5 million to capital projects and deferred maintenance. About \$19 million in total savings.

As to the roads, Supervisor Sue Novasel was happy that the “loan shark” gas tax bill (SB1) passed the state, saying, “We specifically supported this bill ... it is somewhat of a solution from the state with \$6.9 million to be received, with \$2-\$3 million by November 2018.” Supervisor Michael Ranalli said SB1 was like a “plea bargain ... as we are desperate for that money, pushed against the wall.” Ranalli you made this bed by abandoning your promised conservative principles.

SB1 is the new gasoline and vehicle registration tax that will cost us effectively 200 percent interest. For every dollar we receive, we have to pay \$3. It’s like borrowing a \$100,000 on your home and having to pay back \$200,000 every year as interest. That is the effect of the new gas tax and Novasel and Ranalli are OK with that. Ranalli went on to say, “Roads as a priority are up there, I have a sense of urgency and willingness to solve our problem ... we need to find a creative way to deal with it.” You call SB1 creative? In fact, Ranalli voted to spend \$12 million on plush new digs for himself and now says roads are a priority?

Ranalli (and Novasel) and in fact the whole board was told two years ago that the budget was heading for a train wreck by this column and other county officials many times over. They were told spending was out of control and they were living on savings. They obviously didn’t listen.

Now to the worst part of the meeting, new proposed taxes. Here’s the current new list: Solid waste franchise fees, \$750,000. One of two new sales taxes, \$6,000,000. Motor vehicle registration fee increase, \$2.2 million and a 20 percent increase in the transient occupancy tax, \$500,000. That’s about \$220/year for a family of four. And this is on

top of the new SBI gas and motor vehicle registration tax that will cost a family of four about \$600 a year and probably a bit more for El Dorado County residents as we own more motor vehicles per capita.

While there was much talk of new (tax) revenues by the board members, especially from Ranalli, Novasel and Supervisor John Hidahl there is a ray of light as our capable CAO was directed by the board in addition to putting away the reserves of \$19 million above, to find \$300,000 for new district attorney facilities and more important to find \$2-\$3 million for road maintenance, plus a few other items. Finally, that will mean spending cuts of about \$4-\$5 million. Ashton knows how and what to do, but will the board be able to follow through? Ashton understands this is only the beginning, but you have to start somewhere. Now let's see if the board will follow Santayana's axiom so they will understand how they got to the edge of the cliff.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Feds eye private sector as tool to offset housing cuts

By Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson said Wednesday he expects to release a policy agenda within the next few months that delivers “bang for the buck,” partly by encouraging more private-sector collaboration.

In an interview with the *Associated Press*, Carson said he expects to advance public-private partnerships, extending low-

income housing tax credits and providing more opportunities for public-housing residents to get jobs at the buildings where they live.

“The biggest tools are the partnerships – public, private, nonprofit and faith community partnerships – which allow us to leverage those federal dollars, anywhere from 2, 3, 4, 5 to 20-to-1,” Carson said.

Read the whole story

Dugard shares her story with high school students

By Denise Crosby, Aurora Beacon-News

They came to see the survivor, of course.

The Little Theatre at East Aurora High School on Tuesday afternoon was overflowing with students from the Survivor Literature classes who wanted to hear firsthand how Jaycee Lee Dugard lived for 18 years as a prisoner in the backyard of her kidnapper and rapist.

Of how she gave birth to two daughters – not only managing to live through almost two decades of imprisonment and, at times, unimaginable sexual torture, but to later find forgiveness and normalcy.

First, however, Dugard wanted to hear from the East Aurora kids.

Read the whole story

Centennial Dam project could affect 3 Sierra rivers

By Sage Sauerbrey, Moonshine Ink

Two of Truckee/North Lake Tahoe's nearest west slope Sierra watersheds are on track for a profound change in the coming years, with the planned construction of a 275-foot dam about 45 miles down the road from Donner Summit.

The Centennial Dam project is an effort by the Nevada Irrigation District to create more water storage and combat climate change, and would dam the last 6 miles of publicly accessible, free flowing water on the Bear River.

The dam's environmental and cultural aftereffects would not only be felt on the Bear River – where it would inundate 25 homes; many important cultural sites for the local Nisenan tribe; a popular campground; and habitat for more than 100 rare, threatened, and declining plant and wildlife species – but also on the South and Middle Forks of the Yuba, which currently lose up to 80 percent of their total volume to diversion canals that bring water into the Bear River watershed.

Read the whole story

Committee talking about opening Nev. power market

By Ben Botkin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY – Nevadans may one day be able to shop around for their electrical provider, weighing options like the cost and source of the power.

The Governor's Committee on Energy Choice held its first meeting Wednesday to look at ways to make that happen, including recommendations for potential policies or new laws needed to open up the retail electric market in Nevada.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- In *U.S. News'* best high school rankings Whittell came in No. 1,389 in the country and No. 12 in Nevada. South Tahoe High, North Tahoe High and Truckee Tahoe High schools were not ranked.
- Volunteers are needed for the May Tour of California women's bike race in Lake Tahoe. Go **online** for details.
- Douglas County Sheriff's Department is having an open house May 10 from 5-7pm at the DC Judicial Building, 1038 Buckeye.
- "The Beckoning Silence," about one of the most tragic ascents of the notorious Eiger North Face, will be shown for free May 25 at 7pm at Unity at the Lake, 1195 Rufus Allen

Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

• Bike Habitat 's 10th anniversary is being celebrated with the free Tour of Carson City Bike Ride and lunch on May 7 starting at 9am at Fuji Park. For info, call 775.267.5053.

Agencies stocking cutthroat trout in Sierra lakes

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife will start releasing pilot peak Lahontan cutthroat trout into Truckee area waters to give Sierra Nevada anglers the opportunity to catch some trophy-sized trout in a year or two.

Last week CDFW received a shipment of cutthroat trout eggs from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's hatchery complex in Gardnerville. This is the second shipment of eggs in the last two years and is part of a joint effort between the agencies.

The pilot peak Lahontan cutthroat trout is a lake form of cutthroat trout. This particular strain is native to the Truckee River basin and is known for their aggressive feeding behavior and large size.

Stocking of the sub-catchable size fish from last year's eggs will begin as early as next week and will continue as the snow melts. Lakes to be stocked include Echo, Fallen Leaf, Donner, Boca, Prosser, Stampede and Webber.

Expansion of sports betting in Supreme Court's hands

By Jay Caspian Kang, New York Times

In the early 1990s, Bill Bradley, the New Jersey senator and former New York Knick, argued several times in front of Congress that legalizing sports betting would dehumanize athletes and lead to the rampant corruption of children. This was no cynical political crusade; Bradley was a true believer.

Bradley helped push through the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act in 1992, all but banning sports betting outside Nevada and driving a growing industry that employed hundreds underground.

As it turned out, the country's millions of sports gamblers didn't share Bradley's concern for the sanctity of athletes like Bill Bradley or the children who might grow up to be just like him. In practical terms, the Sports Protection Act has mostly failed, and gambling has effectively grown to be an inescapable part of big-time sports.

Sometime in the next four months, the Supreme Court is likely to decide whether to hear an appeal by Gov. Chris Christie and the state of New Jersey that would essentially let states determine whether to allow sports betting within their borders.

Read the whole story