

LTUSD's last day still an unknown

Lake Tahoe Unified School District still doesn't know when this school year will end.

The district is seeking a waiver from the state Department of Education regarding snow days. The district would like to not have to make all of them up.

The state had said a decision would be made this week. Now officials are saying it could be mid-May before a ruling is issued.

If the application is approved in full, then the last day of school would be June 16. The district is warning everyone that there is no guarantee the application will be approved in full.

Wildfire season could be bad with healthy vegetation

By Michelle Robertson, San Francisco Chronicle

California emerged from its five-year drought after heavy winter rains filled reservoirs and turned our golden hills green. But don't be fooled by the emerald hues. CalFire expects wildfires to burn just as fiercely as they did during drought years – if not more so.

The Eight-Station Index, a measure of Northern Sierra precipitation that helps determine statewide water levels, has

deemed 2017 the wettest year on record at 92.8 inches. With all that rainfall, California's wide open spaces are now covered with lush vegetation.

You'd think that would be good, but firefighters say you'd be wrong. More grass means more fuel for the flames.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- Eldorado National Forest and Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit are looking for people to serve on the El Dorado County Resource Advisory Committee. The committee is responsible for evaluating and recommending projects on or affecting federal land in El Dorado County. Applications and more info are available **online**.

- St. Theresa Catholic Church's religious education department is hosting a document shredding event to help prevent identity theft. It will be May 27, 10am-2pm in the church parking lot on Lyons Avenue in South Lake Tahoe. Suggested donation is \$5-\$10 per box. For more info, call 530.544.4788.

- Weather and snowy mountain roads have pushed NDOT's Highway 28 restriping project to May 1-4. Expect up to 30-minute delays.

- Douglas County Sheriff's Department has two new deputies – Grace Strachan and Dominic Lavezzo.

- May is National Mental Health Month. Studies show that nearly one in five people in California report needing help with a mental or emotional health problem.

Richard Jones – 1952-2017



Richard Jones

Richard T. Jones III passed away on April 23, 2017, at the age of 64.

He was a loving husband of Nora and they shared 40 years of marriage.

He moved to Tahoe because of his love for the beautiful lake. He made a point of seeing it every day. What he would say is, "I never get tired of looking at that lake."

He was recognized in town by his white Dodge truck and his signature white long pony tail.

He is survived by his wife, Nora; son Richard IV (Brittney) Jones; daughter Caitlin (Floyd) Miller; and eight grandchildren Nya, Graham, Landon, Zadan, Rylen, Cru, Liam, and one boy coming in July; as well as his sister Lynn (Ken) Rodgers.

A visitation is scheduled at McFarlane Mortuary from 5-7pm on April 28. The funeral Mass will be said at St. Theresa Catholic Church on April 29 at 9am, with the burial to follow

at Happy Homestead Cemetery.

Professional cyclists to impact Tahoe traffic

Next month's Amgen bike race is going to impact motorists in Tahoe.

California Highway Patrol and marshals will supervise and manage rolling stops of approximately 20 minutes at all intersections and street crossings. That includes 10 minutes prior to the procession arriving and the amount of time it takes for the racers to pass a given point.

On May 11 when the women ride around the lake starting from Heavenly motorists can expect Highway 28 from Spooner Summit to Stateline to be closed beginning at approximately 1pm. This will cause backed up traffic toward Carson City until it reopens at about 1:25pm.

For travelers planning to go from Carson City to Incline Village or North Lake Tahoe during the afternoon of May 11, consider taking Mt. Rose Highway.

Approximate times:

11:30am: Leaders arrive at Rubicon

11:42am: Leaders enter Tahoma

12:04am: Leaders turn right onto Highway 28 in Tahoe City

12:17pm: Leaders enter Carnelian Bay

12:27pm: Leaders enter Kings Beach

12:31pm: Leaders cross into Nevada

1:10pm: Leaders arrive at Spooner Summit

1:25pm: Highway 28 reopens to through traffic to Incline Village .

Truckee grappling with dire housing situation

Publisher's note: *This is one in a series of stories about affordable housing in the Lake Tahoe-Truckee region. All articles may be accessed via the home page under Special Projects, 2017 Affordable Housing.*

By Linda Fine Conaboy

TRUCKEE – Affordable living spaces, including single family homes, rooms, sheds, apartments, trailers and anything else deemed inhabitable in Truckee and its environs are now non-existent, leaving the area in a state of crisis affecting not only individuals, but also the region's economy.

When one thinks about the immensity of this situation, it can be hard to digest the desperation of the countless numbers of people who are unable to satisfy one of the most basic of all human needs—a safe and affordable place to call home.



However, this phenomenon isn't new; it's a fact that the skids on these wheels have been in the greasing process for some time. The downward free fall is now full-blown reality, with the gap broadening between those who, for one reason or another enjoy the privilege that enough money

brings, and those who find they must hand over up to half of their take-home pay, in some cases, simply to enjoy the security of a roof over their heads.

The national recommendation is that housing costs not exceed 30 percent of annual earnings, at the outside.

It's important to keep in mind that the Sierra isn't the only place where all forms of robust recreational opportunities are available; and it's definitely not the only place where the gap between the rich and the not-so-rich is a problem.

A report generated by the town of Truckee notes that the housing puzzle is not new and has been under scrutiny since Truckee's incorporation 24 years ago.

Nevertheless, the status quo does not seem to be improving; in fact, now, consensus has it the crisis is genuine. Valuable time has seemingly been frittered away with no concrete solutions.

In view of this, it was clear that the time was ripe for responsible leadership—a chore assumed by the Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation, which stepped up, embarking on a long-term study of the situation, with results becoming available in summer 2016. Since then, TTCF and other stakeholders have been at work to engender consensus and create a plan of action.

TTCF generated a report titled "Truckee North Lake Tahoe

Regional Housing Needs Assessment,” which contained a comprehensive review of the area’s needs and demographics, with funding provided by Placer County, Truckee, Nevada County and the Workforce Housing Association of Truckee Tahoe.

In brief, the results of the poll showed:

- 55 percent of households have incomes classified as moderate or low
- 59 percent of workers commute to their jobs
- 47 percent commute out of the region to their jobs
- 4,000-plus new jobs are expected to be created in the region over the next 15 years
- Almost half spend more than 30 percent of income on housing; 26 percent spend 50 percent
- Rental rates are high, but there is little rental housing available
- 80 percent of the region’s 474 below-market housing units are in Truckee, all with waiting lists.



Housing in Truckee comes in a variety of sizes.
Photos/Linda Fine Conaboy

Putting a face to the problem

With these facts in mind, meet Elvia Esparza, a hard-working ex-Truckee resident, who is the office manager at Family Resource Center of Truckee.

Esparza, born and raised in Truckee, and husband Jose, have three children, all of whom now commute from Reno, daily, to work and go to school in Truckee. She says the mobile home they lived in at a park in town became too small as their family grew.

“I was born and raised in Truckee and I have four brothers, one twin sister and my mom. We are all very involved in our community (Truckee),” Esparaza told *Lake Tahoe News*. “As our family expanded, we were running out of space so we decided to look into purchasing a home in Truckee. We applied for the first-time home buyers program. We qualified for 10 percent of

the purchase price or up to \$40,000. We started our house search and realized that homes under \$400,000 were either way smaller than what we currently had or they were falling apart.”

After scouring Truckee for something to meet their needs, the Esparzas realized that they had to consider other options.

“My husband asked me if I would consider moving to Reno. I originally said no, but in all reality, this was going to be our only option. My husband told me that we have two options; we can stay in Truckee and get something that we will struggle to pay for and live stressed every day and not be able to do fun things with our children, or we move to Reno where we can afford a home and still have a great quality of life and enjoy activities with our kids.

“With no doubt I said yes. We sold our mobile home and purchased a home in Reno. We continue to commute to Truckee as I love this town; it is a great town to raise children in and I would love for my children to have the opportunity to be raised in this wonderful community. I hope in the future we will be able to move back.”

Although Jessica Gorton doesn’t live or work in Truckee (she works in Incline Village and lives and works her second job in Kings Beach), her story is representative of many younger people who reside in the area and are free-spirited, outdoor enthusiasts who struggle to be able to continue to live their dream in the region.

“Right now, I live in a shed. I know this probably shocks you, but it is true,” Gorton told *Lake Tahoe News*. “And it’s still \$600 a month plus a share of the utilities of the house it sits next to. The landlord converted it to a rentable room with heat and electricity, but I have to use the bathroom and kitchen in the main house, so the shed is really a bedroom.”

Gorton said she was desperate, and no longer wanted to live in

her car, which, she said, wasn't so bad since she got to camp and climb four days a week and save a lot of money for "cool" trips and more climbing gear.

"This might sound like a series of unfortunate events, but to be honest, it has become a bit comical," she said of her other housing adventures. "I now live very simply and all the things I own in Tahoe fit into a single carload. It's OK to laugh about it. I do. Luckily, living in Tahoe is a pretty great life, so if this is the worst I deal with, I suppose I still have it pretty dang great."



Truckee does not have enough housing, especially for the average worker. Photo/Linda Fine Conaboy

Looking for solutions

To date, there have been three public meetings in Truckee to

discuss the housing crisis—one in January, another in February and a final meeting in mid-April. *Lake Tahoe News* attended all three, and in each meeting, to some degree, several of the same points were made and rehashed.

Tony Lashbrook, Truckee town manager, and others at these meetings have deliberated all sorts of ideas, including the merits of constructing some sort of housing on public lands, which, they said, would require voter approval. They talked about modification of fees as well as the implementation of new laws to allow second units to be built on some properties and then exempt them from some of the imposed fees.

However, to its credit, and as reported by Lashbrook, Truckee continues to address the situation. Some of the steps the town has taken or is considering include:

- Plans for new housing—5,000 new homes since 1993
- Advanced planning for affordable housing
- Regulations modified to allow second units on properties
- Allowed for residential units above businesses
- Home buyers' assistance programs
- Set aside \$2.5 million as a housing reserve to provide housing for locals.

Lashbrook also cited some of the lessons learned as the town continues to address the housing crisis. They are, in part:

- Needed, 12,000 new housing units for locals
- Truckee is 6,000 housing units away from build-out
- Truckee must be careful to maintain its small town character

- Affordable housing units struggle for success
- Very few second units have been built, perhaps because of restrictions
- Maybe fees are too high and can be modified—construction costs include almost \$42,000 in building charges.

At the third and final public meeting, Lashbrook and others listened to input from various area businesses and interested parties and re-visited ideas put forth at previous gatherings.

They included modifying the impact fees with the intent to stimulate the construction of affordable housing; provide a fee amnesty program for the costs of building second units on some properties; approaching homeowners' associations to soften restrictions on second units; create stock building plans for second units, and pay the building permit fees for new secondary living spaces.

Additionally, there was talk of restricting the number of short-term rentals or curbing the time a space can be rented on a short-term basis. Additionally, the merits of providing more incentives to homeowners to rent to locals rather than listing spare rooms on Airbnb was tossed around.

It is apparent the quest for affordable housing continues for large portions of the population, a fact that is not lost on TTCF or other stakeholders including Northstar ski resort, which recently ponied up \$30,000 to help with the formation of the original Regional Housing Council and to offset the costs of the crisis.

According to Ashley Cooper, TTCF communications and grant manager, plans for the next steps will be rolled out at a meeting scheduled for this weekend. They include introduction of the Mountain Housing Council of Tahoe Truckee, the name chosen to replace the original Regional Housing Council.

Cooper told *Lake Tahoe News*, “Housing the people of our community is a top priority for the recently formed Mountain Housing Council of Tahoe Truckee. TTCF and other key stakeholders are committing time and resources to establishing a regional agenda to accelerate housing solutions.”

According to Cooper, the kickoff is scheduled for April 29 from 8-11am at Truckee High School and in addition to introducing the Mountain Housing Council of Tahoe Truckee’s members, the meeting represents the culmination of nearly two years of gatherings and discussions.

Reservations for the April 29 meeting are required and can be made by going **online**.

Opinion: Calif. gas tax should be canned

By Ted Gaines

Here are a few facts that should give pause to anyone supporting California’s new gas tax: Caltrans is overstaffed by 3,500 people, wasting \$500 million every year that could be going to roads; California diverts a billion dollars in “weight fees” into the general fund annually, which should also be paying for roads; Californians already pay some of the highest gas taxes in the country but have some of the worst roads, which points to an efficiency problem.



Ted Gaines

It's plain to see that the fake funding crisis used to push the new taxes through the legislature was really a crisis of political priorities. The money is there – without the new taxes – to pay for modern, smooth roadways up and down the state.

Still, the Legislature has a default position, and that's to pickpocket taxpayers and businesses at every turn. Hence the new tax to backfill the waste and diversions that should be paying for roads right now.

Gov. Jerry Brown, oblivious to the actual effect the bill will have on businesses and families, tried to deflect criticisms of the new tax's cost by noting that it will set back the average family about \$10 a month.

Are my rural constituents, who drive 45 minutes to get to the grocery store, supposed to be happy because of that average? Are my suburban commuters putting 80 miles a day on their cars supposed to be happy with that average? It will be meaningless to them, as they will pay hundreds of dollars more a year in gas taxes and registration fees to pay for roads that their tax dollars already could have and should have paid for.

Because of this government decision to raise gas taxes 12 cents a gallon, diesel 20 cents, and add an additional registration fee of \$25-\$175 on each vehicle (and that is just a partial list of the new charges), everyone in the state can expect to pay more for everything they buy, from school clothes to groceries to laptops. Not because the items are

better, but because California legislators are attaching a premium to everything with their relentless search for tax dollars.

These new taxes and fees aren't one-time charges. They go on forever under the current bill, and will start increasing, indefinitely, starting in 2020.

I want a first-class infrastructure for our state and am willing to pay for it, but not twice. That's what this cynical bill does to our citizens. It forces them to pay a second time for roads that their tax dollars already could have built. It's backfilling an imaginary shortfall to cover up government failure.

A state that can afford to waste tens of billions of dollars on the colossally expensive and worthless high speed rail is not a state starving for money. To California's majority party, though, every problem looks like a deficit and every solution looks like a tax. It's killing the middle- and lower-classes in the state.

Our state has the 48th-worst tax climate already, but this gas tax proves, yet again, that legislators can't leave unwell enough alone.

Sen. Ted Gaines represents the 1st Senate District, which includes all or parts of Alpine, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Shasta, Sierra and Siskiyou counties.

Whole Foods says it'll lower prices, but at a cost

By Julie R. Thomson, Huffington Post

Whole Foods Market, also known as the place where you can spend your entire life savings on a couple of bags of groceries, is working on cutting its prices – but that could affect the number of products it stocks on its shelves. This is a big shift for the company, which just a couple of years ago admitted to overcharging its customers.

The change is inspired by a continued drop in sales growth. One of the reasons sales are hurting is because other grocery chains are upping their organic options, cutting into Whole Foods' market. Another reason is because of the way the chain operates.

Whole Foods Market, unlike some other national grocers, operates regionally. Rather than centralize its products for purchase and distribution in one location, it works out of 11 U.S. regions.

Read the whole story

Chinese see Tesla's gigafactory as tourist draw

By Ray Hagar, Nevada Newsmakers

Nevada's Lt. Gov. Mark Hutchison recently returned from a 10-day TravelNevada trade mission to China.

One of his biggest takeaways is the Chinese – who make up the No. 1 foreign travel market for the U.S. – see the Tesla gigafactory near Reno as a major tourist attraction.

Hutchison said he saw so much interest in the Tesla gigafactory among the Chinese that he wants to talk to Tesla officials about official tours through the gigafactory. At 5.5 million square feet, the gigafactory is reportedly the biggest building in the world in terms of its physical footprint.

Lake Tahoe was also a big draw, Hutchison said.

Read the whole story

Nev. lawmakers line up against reviving Yucca Mountain

By Gary Martin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

WASHINGTON – Nevada lawmakers will testify before a House hearing this week in opposition of revising Yucca Mountain as a permanent nuclear waste site, the Energy and Commerce Committee announced Monday.

In advance of the hearing, Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval sent a letter to the committee noting the state's opposition based on "scientific, technical and legal merits."

Nevada's two U.S. Sens., Dean Heller, a Republican, and Catherine Cortez Masto, a Democrat, and the state's three congressional members from Las Vegas, also oppose restarting development at Yucca Mountain.

Read the whole story