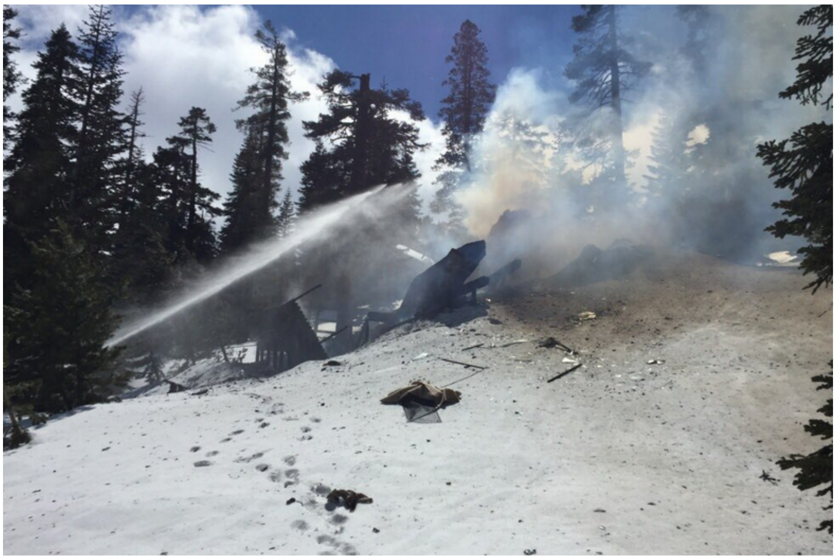
Kirkwood house destroyed in explosion



Firefighters extinguish a blaze in Kirkwood on March 31. Photo/CHP

A house in Kirkwood was totally destroyed today because of a gas line.

This was the second house to catch fire in seven days because of a gas line.

The March 31 incident leveled the house. It was on Dangberg Street, about a half mile from the March 25 explosion. In the first incident the house was only partially damaged.

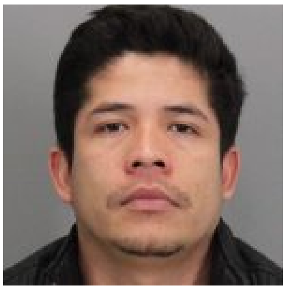
It is not known if anyone was injured in Friday's blast.

No one from Kirkwood Fire Department or Kirkwood Meadows Public Utility District was available to comment. What is causing the gas explosions has not been disclosed. Nor is it known if more houses are at risk.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

S. Tahoe man arrested in kidnap-assault case

A 30-year-old South Lake Tahoe man has been arrested in the beating that left another local man fighting for his life.



Alberto Ochoa

Alberto Ochoa was arrested March 30 in Rancho Cucamonga on charges of robbery, kidnapping and assault with a deadly weapon. He was reportedly driving the Subaru that had been stolen in South Lake Tahoe.

Ochoa is accused of binding and gagging a 43-year-old local man who was found at his Spruce Avenue residence March 29 by a co-worker. He had been in that state for at least 20 hours, officers said. The victim was still in stable condition March 31 at Renown Medical Center in Reno

The victim and suspect know each other, but exactly what their relationship is has not been disclosed by officers. Officers believe Ochoa acted alone.

“Our detectives are interviewing Ochoa right now. Hopefully, he sheds some light on this case,” SLTPD Sgt. Shannon Laney told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Ochoa was being detained at the San Bernardino County Jail on

$1 million bail.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Section of Hwy. 50 to honor fallen firefighter

Mikey Hallenbeck

The portion of Highway 50 from Mount Ralston Road to Echo Summit will now be known as the Firefighter Michael "Mikey" Hallenbeck Memorial Highway.

The 21-year-old Hallenbeck died in August 2015 fighting the Sierra Fire near Sierra-at-Tahoe. He was a wildland firefighter with the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. He also worked at the ski resort.

The Hallenbeck family plans to raise $9,000 toward the highway memorial signs. To contribute to the production and installation of the signs, the nonprofit Tahoe Fund is collecting donations **online** for the family. After choosing "Donate Now", select "I would like to make a donation to a project" in the drop down list, then select "Mikey Hallenbeck Memorial".

Douglas County working on mobile library

Books from Douglas County's library might have wheels one day.

The goal is to have a mobile library in 2018. It could deliver books and other library materials – even programs – to people who have a hard time reaching the physical library.

To date, the Library Foundation has raised $125,000. Another $15,000 is needed to purchase the vehicle, which would resemble a UPS truck.

Donations may be made to the Library Foundation, Douglas County Library, PO Box 337, Minden, NV 89423.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Scientists warn enormous floods may be more likely

By Krista Langlois, High Country News

In the late 1980s, a Japanese scientist named Koji Minoura stumbled on a medieval poem that described a tsunami so large it had swept away a castle and killed a thousand people. Intrigued, Minoura and his team began looking for paleontological evidence of the tsunami beneath rice paddies, and discovered not one but three massive, earthquake-triggered waves that had wracked the Sendai coast over the past three thousand years.

In a 2001 paper, Minoura concluded that the possibility of another tsunami was significant. But Tokyo Electric Power was slow to respond to the science, leaving the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant unprepared for the 15-meter wave that inundated it in 2011. The wave resulted in a $188 billion natural disaster. More than 20,000 people died.

Earlier this year, when a spillway at the nation's tallest dam in Oroville nearly buckled under the pressure of record rainfall, the consequences of under-estimating flood risks were brought into sharp relief. Dams aren't built to withstand every curveball nature can throw — only the weather events that engineers deem most likely to occur within the dam's lifespan. When many Western dams were built in the mid-20th century, the best science to determine such probabilities came from historical records and stream gauges.

Read the whole story

USFS has money for projects in Placer County

The Nevada and Placer Counties Resource Advisory Committee is requesting proposals for natural resource improvement projects in the two counties that benefit National Forest System lands.

With the two-year reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act, approximately $240,000 is expected to be available this year for RAC-recommended projects.

Project proposals may be submitted by community-based organizations, tribes, individuals, or government agencies that are eligible for funding consideration with the Forest Service. They must demonstrate a benefit to National Forest System lands or resources, and must include a letter of support from the district ranger.

Proposals must be submitted by May 12.

Bill to ban dogs in Nev. bear hunting draws opposition

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY — Opponents of the use of dogs and GPS technology to hunt black bears testified for a bill Thursday to ban the practice in Nevada.

The Assembly Natural Resources, Agriculture and Mining Committee heard Assembly Bill 443, which would follow the lead of other Western states, including Washington, Oregon, California, Montana and Colorado, in banning the use of dogs to chase bears so they can be treed and shot.

GPS and other technologies have made the use of dogs even easier, since the animals can be located without significant effort.

Read the whole story

Tahoe water official to give talk

Madonna Dunbar, executive director of the Tahoe Water Suppliers Association, an organization of municipal water suppliers in the Lake Tahoe Basin, will give a talk in South Lake Tahoe on April 12.

Dunbar will explain which suppliers pump from the lake and how to protect the lake’s water quality for continued future use as a drinking water source.

The AAUW is sponsoring the free talk. It begins at 4:30pm in Lake Tahoe Community College’s board room.

Tahoe’s mad hatter is back

By Melissa Siig, Moonshine Ink

Look around your mudroom or closet or living room. How many hats do you have? If you are like most people, you have a lot. Trucker hats, baseball hats, flat billed hats, you name it – you most likely have one or two or three. And you probably have room for more.

That’s what Tahoe’s newest hat company, We the Trees, is banking on. Started in 2015 by bigtruck founder Kelsen Thompson, We the Trees takes a mindful approach to headwear. Thompson’s goal with his latest endeavor is to help people connect to nature and express themselves, and for him to get back into the business he loves.

Thompson, 35, grew up in Tahoe City and graduated from North

Tahoe High School in 2000. He learned to sew from his mother, whom he calls an incredible seamstress, and the first thing he made was a bag for his ice skates. He created his first hat in high school, hand stitching a small truck on the front. One day while he was talking on the phone, Thompson’s father, who owned a garbage company advertised simply as a “guy with a big truck,” doodled the image of the now iconic bigtruck logo, which features a truck with the bed lifted up – exactly as he would park it in their driveway. Thompson trademarked the logo in 2000.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Cheaper housing won’t fix the crisis

By Jerry Nickelsburg

This time of year, the swallows return to Capistrano, and I return to my birthplace, San Francisco, for the city’s annual pre-budget finance conference. For the last few years I have kicked things off with an economic outlook for the coming year, replete with a discussion of risks. This being San Francisco, naturally, I had to talk about the high costs of housing as one of the risks to continued economic growth.

On my way home, I thought of an SAT-exam like question. One of these things is not like the others: San Francisco, Cleveland, Hong Kong, Sydney, and Vancouver. I am going to take a wild guess and say that you, the reader, have chosen Cleveland.

You are right. But why? After all, Cleveland rocks, but just not in the same way as the other cities. One of the many ways it is different is in the cost of living. Demographia's just-released 2017 affordability study has Cleveland as one of the most affordable cities for housing, and each of the other cities in my SAT question as among the least affordable.

This suggests something important about the affordability crisis that has not, but really should, enter the discussion of housing affordability: the cities that we find most attractive are cities where housing is "unaffordable." In other words, the affordable housing crisis is not just about a lack of housing supply.

In my current city, Los Angeles, one hears over and over again that everyone is leaving because no one can afford to live here. This talk reminds me of the Yogi Berra homily, "Nobody goes there anymore. It's too crowded." Of course, exactly the opposite is true, and that truth is what should guide us in our housing policy.

The oft-made mistake is to suggest that housing is expensive because, as Demographia incorrectly puts it in its report, "Studies do not leave the slightest doubt that unaffordable housing is almost everywhere and every time caused by the same factor: housing supply restrictions." Well, these "studies," some of which are by very thoughtful people, leave plenty of doubt, and some of their authors ought to go back to Econ 101. Prices are not just a supply phenomenon but are rather an interaction between supply, what is available for sale, and demand, what people want to buy.

Clearly the people who live in San Francisco, Los Angeles and other cities on Demographia's list of cities with an affordability crisis could afford to live there. They just paid a larger portion of their income to do so. They could have moved to a more affordable place to live—Cleveland, for example. So those who say that housing prices are unaffordable are saying that, at lower prices, there would be more demand than supply. Let's explore the implications of this.

Cleveland is so affordable because many people find it less desirable (think “lake effect” blizzards). Indeed, half the population of Cleveland left over the past 50 years. The housing stock is more than ample for the people who want to live there. Which reminds me of the time I interviewed for a job in Buffalo, N.Y., right after graduation. Part of the pitch was, “Buffalo is a great place. It is so depressed that you can afford a really good house.” Somehow this did not seem like an endorsement of a community I wanted to move to.

The reason San Francisco is different is that it is a wonderful place to live. The scenery is spectacular, the climate mild, cultural amenities are abundant and in a very short time one can be in the Sierra for some incredible winter sports or at Mavericks for world-class surfing.

Edward Glaeser, in his towering work on urban economies, “The Triumph of the City,” said “vitality makes people willing to pay for space.” Glaeser, like many other urban economists, argues for more building, but the point repeatedly made by those who study urban migration is that exciting innovation (documented by UC Berkeley economist Enrico Moretti), natural amenities such as beaches, mountains and lakes (documented in the “superstar cities” study of Goyurko, Sinai, Mayer) and cultural amenities (as oft described by economist Richard Florida) attract people from declining to successful cities.

To be sure, San Francisco is not to everyone’s taste; some prefer the charm of a Louisiana bayou, and others the silence of a Minnesota winter. But given the housing stock, many more people want to live in San Francisco than can. An estimate in a 2015 paper by Moretti and the University of Chicago’s Chang-Tai Hsieh found that more affordable housing could increase San Francisco’s population by 100 percent or more. So there exists significant demand for San Francisco housing that a moderate change in zoning and building standards will not correct.

The population growth Hsieh and Moretti found means that today's locals in places where people want to live are going to have to write a check for the infrastructure to support them. This is an old story in a place like California. In 1967, one of Ronald Reagan's first acts as governor was to increase taxes dramatically, giving us Californians the highly progressive income tax system we enjoy today, and that Republicans everywhere rail against. The reason? Large-scale migration to the state had caused his predecessor, Pat Brown, to build infrastructure to support a burgeoning population, and as a result the state was running a structural deficit.

So what's happening in San Francisco—or Seattle or Austin, or any number of popular places where the cost of living is rising—is the market system doing its thing. The market increases prices to ration the available land through the cost of housing. And people economize on their consumption of housing by living in smaller quarters, sharing with roommates, or stacking up generations. And for some, the price is not worth the value they would receive, and they leave. That is how any market rationalizes differences between supply and demand.

What about those who are squeezed out of California (such as my kids, who moved to Colorado)? The dad in me says, "That's horrible, I want them down the block from me." But the economist in me says, "They do not value what Los Angeles has, relative to their life in a small town in Colorado, enough to sacrifice other things for it." Resources, when scarce, are appropriately allocated according to their value to those consuming them.

And what about our schoolteachers, firemen, police and city officials who struggle to live in the high-priced cities where they work? Here is the rub. When a place is really attractive and therefore really expensive—take Santa Barbara—many who perform valuable services live elsewhere, like in Ventura, 90 minutes away during rush hour.

Instead of wringing our hands about affordability in high-demand places, and trying to build enough to meet a worldwide demand that is difficult to satiate, we should be saying, “Great, we have a really successful city, but we also want to have a city with certain professional, service, and demographic characteristics,” and design housing policy targeted to that. For example, Santa Clara County built high-quality affordable housing that it rents to schoolteachers. It is a small program, but it is a good start. What doesn’t work are overly broad measures, such as directing developers to make 20 percent of their units affordable in exchange for building permits. Such policies generate homes for only a very few San Franciscans (while attracting ever-more newcomers who want to live there).

That is not to say we should ignore affordability. We definitely must pay attention to affordability, as we plan the cities we want to live in. But in doing so, we must pay attention not only to whether we have enough housing supply but also to the nature of the demand in places where people want to live. If we ignore demand, we risk creating urban nightmares—of crowding, traffic, long commutes and ill health—in pursuit of a successful and affordable city.

Jerry Nickelsburg, an economist at UCLA Anderson School of Management, writes the Pacific Economist column.