

Liberty working to remove hazardous trees

With an increase in the number of dead and dying trees in the Lake Tahoe region, Liberty Utilities has tripled the number of inspectors to identify trees that pose a risk to the utility's infrastructure. The inspection program and subsequent removal of hazardous trees are designed to reduce the risk of power outages, potential wildfires, and to comply with State regulations.

Liberty Utilities has been authorized by the California Public Utilities Commission to spend up to \$2.5 million each year on vegetation management programs in order to maintain the CPUC requirement to keep trees, branches and other vegetation surrounding utility infrastructure trimmed back to reduce outage risks. Liberty Utilities has increased its efforts this summer to go above and beyond its annual vegetation management program.

Tree inspectors are working along the 57-mile length of the utility's power line that serves the Tahoe City area. As high-risk trees are identified, another contractor will remove the hazards.

Any tree on private property that must be removed remains the property of the landowner. Liberty Utilities' contract crews will remove the tree limbs and dispose of them, but the tree log itself belongs to the property owner.

Crews will continue their work in the Tahoe City area throughout June and will continue working along the West Shore and other parts of the service territory affected by tree mortality as long as necessary.

Douglas County on path to revamp VHR ordinance

There will be a series of meetings in Douglas County starting June 18 about vacation home rentals.

The county is proposing making changes to the ordinance. Today the short-term rentals are only allowed at the lake. A copy of the draft ordinance is available **online**.

Proposed changes include allowing VHRs in the valley, creating better enforcement, increasing the permit fee, mandating bear boxes, limiting occupancy, changing parking requirements, and hiring Host Compliance.

A workshop will be conducted June 18, 5-8pm at Harrah's Lake Tahoe in the Sand Harbor III room.

The Planning Commission will address the topic July 10 at 9am at the CVIC Hall in Minden. At the same location on Aug. 2 at 10am the Board of Commissioners will discuss VHRS. Commissioners will also meet on Aug. 16 at 1:30pm at Harrah's, and again on Sept. 6 at 10am in Minden.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Increasing number in Calif.

Looking to move

By Liz Kreutz, ABC-10

While many people can't imagine themselves living anyway other than the Golden State, research shows an increasing number of Californians may be looking to move away.

According to studies done by real estate sites Realtor.com and Redfin.com, the housing crisis in California is driving people to search for homes outside the state.

So where are people looking? Realtor.com says most people are searching in Phoenix, Las Vegas and Prescott, Ariz. Redfin.com also say many people searching in Seattle.

Read the whole story

Series of fire safety events throughout Tahoe basin

Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team is promoting Lake Tahoe Wildfire Awareness Month throughout June. The mantra is: "Prepare Now! Wildfire Knows No Season."

There are several family-friendly events this month They include:

- South Lake Tahoe Fire Rescue's 5th annual Wildfire Safety Expo on June 9 from noon-3pm at the TJ Maxx parking lot at the Y.
- Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District, Tahoe Network of Fire Adapted Communities along with other partners will

have a Wildfire Community Preparedness Day event on June 15 from noon-3pm. The meet and greet event will take place at the Zephyr Cove Post Office on Elks Point Road.

- The Whispering Pines community of Incline Village will have a Shrub Crawl and Block Party on June 16. The community workday will take place from 9am to noon, followed by a pot luck from noon to 3pm with music, games and prizes.
 - The U.S. Forest Service and Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District want people to Learn S'More About Fire Safety and Fire Safe at Zephyr Cove Beach on June 27 from 4-6pm. There will be free s'mores for everyone.
 - North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District's annual Community Pancake Breakfast is June 30 from 8-10am at the main fire station located on Tanager Street in Incline Village.
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Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- On June 5 in Auburn, the Placer County Board of Supervisors will consider proposed improvements to Speedboat Beach in Kings Beach.

- Nevada residents and visitors are invited to Discover Nevada State Parks on June 9. Park visitors will receive free day use admission and free fishing (no license required) at all of Nevada State Parks.

- Barton Health is offering free sports physicals to middle and high school students on both sides of the South Shore, as well as Pop Warner and Lake Tahoe Community College athletes. This will be at South Tahoe High School's Blue Gym

on June 11 from 5:30-7pm. Dress in gym attire, and bring completed and signed history and consent forms. Forms may be picked up at school or from coaches.

- Gregorio Marangi is Douglas County Sheriff's Department's newest deputy.

- Zephyr Cove Library on June 6 at 4pm will be showing "The Incredibles" (rated PG). The movie and popcorn are free.

Grow unique edibles to wow your guests

By Melinda Myers

Make your next gathering one to remember by including a few unique vegetables on the relish tray, as a side dish or for dessert. Your guests will be "wowed" not only because you grew your own ingredients, but because of the unique shape, color or flavor of the vegetables you serve.

Create a memorable dining experience with attractive edible containers adorning the patio, balcony or deck. Include a few Candle Fire Okra plants in large containers to create a tropical feel. The dark green leaves, hibiscus flowers and colorful red pods make a striking display in a container or the garden.

Surprise guests with roasted Candle Fire okra and Candyland Red currant tomatoes. Roasting okra eliminates the slime that prevents many from eating this unique vegetable. And don't discard any overripe pods, use them in flower arrangements to

dress up any event.



The uniquely shaped Mad Hatter sweet red pepper has a refreshing citrusy floral flavor. Photo/All-America Selections

Allow your guests to harvest their own greens, herbs and cherry tomatoes to toss into their salads or season their meal. Use Prizm kale as a vertical dark green accent in your containers. Then add a contrasting ornamental leaf lettuce like Red Sails, long lasting vibrant Red Kingdom Mizuna (Japanese mustard) and edible flowers like calendulas, nasturtiums and pansies. The new Patio Choice tomatoes produce up to 100 yellow cherry tomatoes on an 18-inch plant. Plant it in a container for a splendid display then watch as guests harvest fresh tomatoes from your centerpiece.

Dress up the table, indoors or out, by using a few potted herbs as centerpieces. Include Dark Opal Basil with dark purple leaves and compact Dolce Fresca in a simple container or more decorative pot to create a splendid display. Just

place a pair of garden snips on the table and let your guests flavor their meals.

Make any meal special with a Bok Choy Frittata. Your guests will be impressed when you create this popular dish from your own homegrown ingredients. Asian Delight Pak Choi (or Bok Choy) is slow to flower so you will enjoy season-long harvests. The mild flavored tender white stems and textured dark green leaves look good in containers, the garden and when served fresh in a salad, frittata or stir fry.

Serve a colorful platter of sliced tomatoes with the Chef's Choice series of red, pink, orange, yellow and green fruit. The globe shaped beefsteak tomatoes have the perfect balance of acid to sugar. Their disease resistance, productivity, yield, flavor, color and performance made them winners in the nonprofit All-America Selections national trials.

Stuff a few of the uniquely shaped Mad Hatter sweet peppers with cheese. Your guests will enjoy the beauty and refreshing citrusy floral flavor of this three-sided red pepper. The vigorous plant produces an abundance of fruit, so you'll have plenty to use fresh in appetizers and salads throughout the growing season or pickled for future enjoyment.

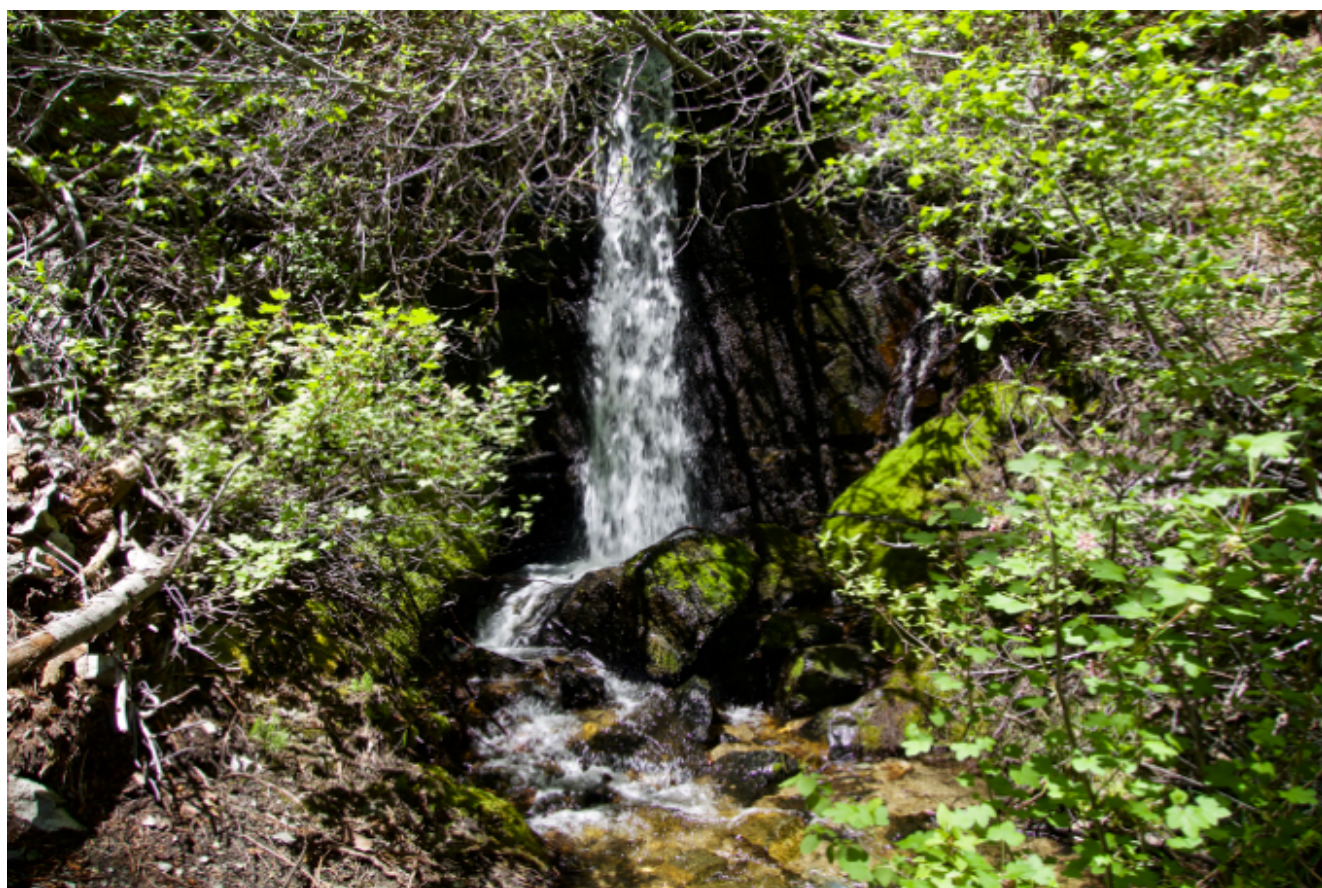
End the evening with a surprise. Serve each guest their own watermelon for dessert. Mini Love watermelon packs lots of sweet flavor into individual size fruit. Or brighten their dessert plates with a slice or two of Gold in Gold. This eye-catching watermelon has a yellow rind with golden stripes. The orange-gold flesh is crisp and sugary.

With just a little planning, you can plant unique and beautiful edibles in your garden and containers this season. Then find fun ways to include these in dishes shared at potlucks, meals for family and friends, or as a snack to enjoy on a summer afternoon.

Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books,

including “Small Space Gardening. “She hosts the Great Courses “How to Grow Anything” gardening DVD series and the nationally syndicated “Melinda’s Garden Moment” TV and radio segments.

Genoa Falls dances from the rugged brush



Genoa Falls at about 10-feet-high tumbles from the mountainside. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

GENOA – There is something about a waterfall that always brings a smile to my face even it isn’t very big. Something about the magic of Mother Nature; showing who’s boss, mixing

up the contours of the landscape. I'm never disappointed.

A week ago eight people and two dogs set off to see the Genoa Falls for the first time. Considering it was a holiday weekend, we were pleasantly surprised not to come across that many people.

This is the time of year when hiking at lake level is still iffy because you don't have to go up far in elevation to still hit snow. That is why starting lower is a safe bet.



Vibrant snowplants just off the trail. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The distinctive yellow flowers of mule's ear are already sprouting on the Carson Valley side of the range. Snow plants are in their glory.

This trail that begins on the outskirts of Genoa is a bit steep at first. More than one person complimented the trail builders. It's single-track almost all of the way as the switchbacks wind their way up about 1,400 feet.

A mix of hardpack dirt and loose rock fill the trail. While I'm not big on using poles, I was glad I had them for the

ascent, and especially for the descent. My footing slipped in a couple places and the poles kept me upright.



Switchbacks are necessary to ease the steepness. Photo/Kathryn Reed

It's understandable why signs recommend cyclists and equestrians stay off this trail – it's the verticle. Still, that didn't deter a couple mountain bikers who passed us. Fortunately, we all shared the trail respectfully.

It doesn't take long until sweeping views of the Carson Valley come into view. With the moisture we had in May, it was still amazing how verdant this farmland is. Living in Tahoe it's easy to forget how lush areas can become with rain.

There was a little bit of water at times for the dogs, but definitely bring some along for them. Wiley had no problem plopping himself down in the water that ran from the falls. It was like a private bath for him.

The tree canopy provided plenty of shade, which was a good thing. While I was in shirtsleeves, I wish had been in shorts.

We turned around at the waterfall, but the trail kept going.

There are longer loops. The trail hooks up with the Tahoe Rim Trail at 13.4 miles from the parking lot. Our out and back was just shy of 6 miles total.



Plenty of lush green grass for the cattle in Carson Valley.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

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Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, take Highway 50 east to Stateline. Go right on Kingsbury Grade. Go left on Foothill Road. Go left on Carson Street. The road dead ends at the Genoa Canyon Trailhead.

Opinion: California is second best

By Joe Mathews

Be first if you like. But in California, it's better to be second best.

This is the larger truth at work in the Golden State's June 5 elections. Because the top two finishers in each race advance to the November runoff election, almost all campaigning and TV ads are designed to put a particular candidate in second place.



Joe Mathews

This fixation with finishing second isn't limited to our elections: Californians highly value second place in civics, arts, and technology.

Take Silicon Valley. Our tech industry used to run on the idea of the "first mover advantage"—the belief that whatever startup moved first into a space was likely to win.

But now "first mover advantage" is considered a myth. The evidence suggests that you'd rather be second in pursuing an idea— "a fast follower" in common phrasing—if you want your technology to succeed in the marketplace.

Ryan Holmes, founder and CEO of Hootsuite, noted on Medium that Microsoft came up with a tablet a decade before the more

successful iPad debuted, and that Snapchat pioneered disappearing images and other features, only to see Facebook co-opt its ideas.

“Ultimately ... it’s not who’s first to market but who’s best to market,” wrote Holmes. “As a second-mover, you benefit by having a clear, real target in your sights First-movers, by contrast, are forced to drive looking in the rear-view mirror.”

Being first is also no guarantee of reputational advantages. Uber, the ride-sharing leader, is widely distrusted, while Lyft, which trailed behind, is often celebrated. Fly-by-night news sites may get information up first, but you can better trust publications that do a better story later. Is it significant that California’s most distinguished newspaper, the *L.A. Times*, is moving from a first-rate downtown location to a smaller city named El Segundo? Its name, meaning “The Second,” nods to the city’s history as site of Standard Oil’s second big California refinery. (El Primero was in Richmond.)

Being second also makes you less of a target. The paparazzi go a lot easier on second-tier action star Keanu Reeves than on Tom Cruise. And there may be greater cachet in being second banana. Keith Richards is cooler than Mick Jagger. The Second World War is better understood than the first. The Dodgers are California’s most successful baseball franchise, but, with their expensive tickets and TV rights too costly for cable operators to show their games, you’re better off being a fan of the second-tier Angels.

And while people love to hate California’s biggest city, Los Angeles, who doesn’t love to love our state’s second most populous municipality, San Diego? If you believe the marketing, San Diego is “America’s finest city.”

As a whole, California—while maintaining that it’s a global leader—is actually No. 2 in some important measures. We’re the

second most diverse state (Hawai'i is tops). A recent study ranked our economy as the second best among American states (behind Washington). On the down side, we're second among states in number of people per house (behind Utah)—a reflection of our housing shortage.

In many things, being second is worth celebrating. The city of Stockton is happy—after surviving municipal bankruptcy—to be ranked as the second-most fiscally solvent city of the 75 largest cities in America. (Stockton's budget surplus is now more than \$3,000 per resident.) And California, according to consulting firm McKinsey, has the second lowest smoking and prisoner recidivism rates in the country.

Of course, when you're choosing a candidate for a job or high political office, you want to support the best. But California's top two system incentivizes people to select their second choice.

For example, say you're a Democrat who wants your party to win back the U.S. House of Representatives and serve as a check on President Trump.

If Gavin Newsom is your first choice for governor in this month's election, you might be better off voting for a different Democrat—like Antonio Villaraigosa, even if you don't like him much—so that he can finish second in the June election. That way, two Democrats would advance to the November election under the top two. That would likely lower the turnout of Republicans in November, and thus make it harder for California's Republican members of Congress to hold on to their seats in November.

The same holds true for a Republican who prefers the second-leading Republican contender for governor, Travis Allen, over John Cox, who according to polls has the best chance of getting into the top two. Vote for your top preference, and your party is probably less well-off.

Frustrating, yes. But this is how decision-making works in a state devoted to settling for second best.

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.

Cheating workers out of wages is easier than ever

By Elizabeth C. Tippet, The Conversation

Jara Neal Willis, a nurse at a hospital in Texas, usually clocked in a few minutes before the start of her shift and stayed late whenever her patients needed help. Her lunch breaks were often cut short by requests from doctors, patients or their families.

Willis and her colleagues, however, claimed they were not paid for those extra few minutes worked before and after their shifts. Or for working during lunch breaks.

It wasn't because of mischievous gremlins falsifying their time cards in a backroom, but settings in the software the hospital used to track comings and goings. Two features alone, "rounding" and "automatic break deductions," could result in the loss of up to 44 minutes a day – or \$1,382 a year at the federal minimum wage.

Timekeeping software was the focus of a study I co-authored last year documenting how it could be used to facilitate wage theft.

But it left a lingering question: Did companies actually use these features to shortchange workers? Based on my review of

hundreds of lawsuits like Willis', the answer is yes – and it's just the tip of the iceberg.

Wage theft gets a tech upgrade

“Wage theft” is a shorthand term that refers to situations in which someone isn't paid for the work. In its simplest form, it might consist of a manager instructing employees to work off the clock. Or a company refusing to pay for overtime hours.

A report from the Economic Policy Institute estimated that employees lose \$15 billion to wage theft every year, more than all of the property crime in the United States put together.

That report, however, focused on workers being paid less than the federal or state minimum wage. Our 2017 study, which was based on promotional materials, employer policies and YouTube videos, suggested that companies can now use software to avoid paying all sorts of hourly workers.

Hundreds and hundreds

When an employee clocks in for the day – using a computer login, ID badge or phone – that employee's time log becomes a form of data.

I wanted to know if there was any evidence that employers have ever used rounding and automatic break deductions to change that data, to their workers' detriment. So I did what law professors normally do in such situations: I ran a search of legal opinions to see if there were any cases in which workers sought to reclaim wages lost through digital wage theft.

Before our study, I hadn't even heard of this practice, so I expected to find only a handful of cases. Instead, I found hundreds and hundreds of legal opinions involving digital wage theft. And this suggests there are hundreds more because, typically, for every case that results in a legal opinion many

more do not.

I decided to read a bunch to get a flavor for what employees were claiming and a window into how employers were using the software. I eventually stopped after wading through more than 300 cases, which are described in a study published in the American Business Law Journal.

The study's methodology does not support quantitative inferences about how often digital wage theft occurs or how much money U.S. workers have lost to these practices over time.

But what I can say is that this is not a theoretical problem. Real workers have lost real money to these practices.

Rounding away

Rounding – the functionality used to nickel and dime workers like Jara Willis – is a convenient way for companies to consistently reclaim employee hours.

Even though the software can precisely record the time an employee clocks in and out, the “rounding” functionality changes that time according to a preset increment. Companies argue they use it to increase payroll predictability.

The preferred rounding increment in the cases I reviewed appeared to be to the quarter hour. So arriving to work at 8:53am would be rounded to 9, while 8:52 would become 8:45.

In theory, employees could even the odds when it comes to rounding by carefully timing their arrivals and departures. They could show up late or leave early, or punch in extra early or leave extra late.

But companies have two extra weapons to corral employee punches to work in their favor: policies and discipline. Yes, you could show up late or leave early, but then you'd be flagged for discipline under the attendance policy.

Sometimes employers in these cases further stacked the deck by prohibiting workers from punching in more than seven minutes early. Others actually “invited” employees to punch in up to seven minutes early, labeling it a “grace period,” as though it were an accommodation to workers.

Willis’ hospital, however, took a highly unusual approach to persuading workers to clock in during periods that favored the hospital. According to testimony from that case, supervisors labeled any employee who clocked in too early or out too late, thereby gaining minutes under the rounding system, a “moocher.”

One manager even posted “no mooching” signs with a picture of a cow and a time clock in the hospital hallway.

Working the odds

Rounding works the odds, sort of like a casino. And in fact, some of the cases I reviewed actually involved casino workers, perhaps because they are especially attuned to statistics and realize they’re on the wrong side of the equation.

In one case brought by casino workers, the plaintiff’s expert estimated that the 2,100 employees who opted into the lawsuit lost 87,710 hours over a five-year period, or roughly \$950,000 at their \$10.80 average hourly rate.

But the company’s rounding policy actually covered 28,000 employees. If those workers were similarly affected by the policy, that would have meant a loss of about 1.17 million hours, or \$12.6 million in wages the company was able to reclaim through the rounding policy over five years.

The case settled for \$450,000, about half of which went to attorneys’ fees. In other words, even though this particular company was caught, dragged through litigation and forced to settle, it still would have made a hefty profit from its rounding policy. That’s not exactly a deterrent.

Unpaid breaks

Employers also reclaim time through what is known as “automatic break deductions.” The software assumes that you took your full meal break, even if you didn’t.

In some workplaces, taking a lunch break can be difficult, especially for those providing patient care in hospitals and nursing homes. Studies of nurses suggest that they are completely unable to take breaks in about 10 percent of shifts and aren’t relieved of duty for meals and breaks in about 40 percent.

In the cases I reviewed, companies didn’t make it easy for workers to override the break deduction. Employees complained that they didn’t have authorization to do so and instead had to fill out an extra paper form. Or ask their supervisor for approval. Or both.

Companies even discouraged workers from doing so. A nurse received an “action plan” from her hospital after requesting too many break overrides. Rather than fixing the staffing problems that led to the missed breaks, the hospital recommended that she “keep snacks in her office.”

Outdated legal rules

So how did this problem come about in the first place?

These types of employer abuses are made possible by half-century-old rules that permitted rounding because at the time companies had to calculate hours by hand.

The outdated regulations assume that rounding will “average out” in the long term, essentially forcing workers to prove that they don’t – as in the cases I reviewed.

That leaves employers free to use rounding because it’s theoretically possible that it all might average out. And because collective litigation to recover lost wages requires

affected workers to “opt in” to a class action suit, only a small fraction of workers ever get their money back.

What’s more, the outdated regulations don’t even mention automatic break deductions. That leaves courts struggling to figure out what’s fair in cases where there often isn’t even an electronic record of the missed break.

This problem is not going away. As long as these regulatory loopholes exist, employers and software makers will find ways to exploit them. That means if you’re paid an hourly wage, you may very well be losing out.

Elizabeth C. Tippet is an associate professor at the school of law at University of Oregon.

NV Energy seeks to partner with 6 solar firms

By Ken Ritter, AP

LAS VEGAS – Nevada’s main electric utility said Thursday that if voters reject a statewide energy choice constitutional amendment in November, it plans to partner with six solar power development firms to buy enough power from projects to be built around the state to supply more than 600,000 homes,

NV Energy announced it would submit to the state Public Utilities Commission on Friday an energy resource plan to have projects on an Indian reservation near Las Vegas, two southwest of Boulder City, two in Washoe County and one near Battle Mountain serving customers by 2022, according to a company statement.

Read the whole story