

Douglas County program assists lonely seniors

The Douglas County Sheriff's Office in conjunction with Douglas County Social Services and a community task force will be starting Caring Neighbors on Jan. 11.

Trained sheriff's volunteers who have completed background checks will be calling on seniors who live in Douglas County. The client can have a phone call once or twice a week or whichever frequency they wish. The client can also sign up for uniformed DCSO volunteers to visit them briefly at their home.

The free program was designed to let the seniors of Douglas County know that they are not alone.

Referrals to the program can be made by the senior themselves, or a neighbor, relative, friend, or an emergency responder such as a fireman or sheriff's deputy. The referral will be followed up on and consent is required by the senior client.

For more info, call Douglas County Social Services at 775.782.9825.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- Psychic Rebecca Fearing will be at The Loft in South Lake Tahoe on Jan. 18 at 7:30pm.
- Young Adult Writers' Meetup: Jan. 7 and Jan. 21 from 3-4pm at the South Lake Tahoe Library. Meet with fellow writers for an afternoon of socializing, discussion, and

writing. Laptops available for use in the library. Snacks provided.

- TOCCATA – Tahoe Symphony Orchestra & Chorus' 12th WinterFest's Jan. 4 performance in Incline Village has been canceled. It has been rescheduled for Jan. 10 at 7pm.

- A **Go Fund Me** account has been set up for one of the families displaced in the New Year's Eve fire in Round Hill.

- Rage Again, a tribute to Rage Against the Machine, and A Perfect Tool, a tribute to Tool/A Prefect Circle, will play at Whiskey Dicks in South Lake Tahoe on Jan. 6. Must be 21. Tickets at the door are \$15. Doors open at 9pm

Fiscal oversight not top priority for EDC supes

By Kathryn Reed

It has been well documented that to get a job in El Dorado County it pays to know who is doing the hiring.

Last month the Board of Supervisors reviewed a list of contracts of \$64,000 or less signed by the chief administrative officer. According to board policy, these contracts are not approved by the supervisors, but instead they are reviewed by the board annually after the fact. The majority of the contracts were signed by former CAO Larry Combs.

Joe Harn, county-auditor controller, has been harping on transparency for years. Only now with Don Ashton at the helm of the county is there beginning to be some light shed on

favors done by previous CAOs.

Nonetheless, the electeds seem to care very little about what has gone on under their watch. Supervisor Brian Veerkamp appeared disgusted with Harn bringing the issue up again in December.

"I'm really here to briefly vent about the Prentice, Long, and Epperson contract which really is a text book example of a total lack of transparency and frankly poor financial management. This contract is in the CAO's budget but the contract administrator is county counsel. So, who's ultimately responsible for the work and the contract? I don't know. As far as I can tell, nobody," Harn told the supervisors. "Also, related to Prentice, we are talking about Alpine County's county counsel who the former CAO brought on board, which indicates, I suppose our former CAO concluded that there's not a law firm in our county that could provide these services, which I find hard to believe. What this is really about county officials hiring their out-of-county friends."

Not only are friends being hired, but they come on board at top dollar.

When former CAO Pamela Knorr had the same position in Alpine County she filed a claim for damages against that county for failing to provide a safe work environment. Knorr's claim states that her alleged grievances are supported by Ken Machold's investigative report. Machold is now an employee of the Prentice law firm. David Prentice of the Prentice, Long, and Epperson is the part time county counsel for Alpine County and Prentice approved a \$168,000 settlement/severance agreement between Knorr and Alpine County.

Mike Ciccozzi, who heads El Dorado County's legal department, is the contract administrator for the county's current contract with the Prentice law firm.

Former EDC CAO Terri Daly, a former Amador County employee, brought in her friend Martha Shaver, the former Amador County counsel as a consultant. Daly signed a contract with Shaver to review and update EDC's policies and ordinances. EDC paid Shaver \$50,000. No proposed update of the county's policies and ordinances ever came forward. In fact, the Board of Supervisors has nothing to show for this \$50,000 expenditure.

Beyond being fiscally irresponsible, these types of hires and contracts are impacting morale at the county.

Harn told the supervisors that county employees find it demoralizing when CAOs hire their out of county friends at the highest step.

Board policy says all employees hired by the CAO at the highest step must be reported to the board and the public annually. On April 13, 2016, Harn wrote the BOS and then CAO Combs saying the public reporting requirement was being ignored.

Combs, the former Sutter County CAO, hired two former Sutter County employees at step 5, the highest level. Those hires (the risk manager and assistant CAO) were never reported publicly as required by county policy. Both were friends of Combs'. Shawne Corley, the current assistant CAO, was hired at an initial salary of \$182,000 per year. Qualified longtime El Dorado County employees were never given a chance by the then CAO, according to Harn.

At the time, Harn told *Lake Tahoe News*, "The supervisors all say that they are for complete transparency, but the county doesn't comply with its own policies that require transparency."

Letter: Plow drivers need to do better

To the community,

My wife and I have been residents in Tahoma since 2001. For the last several years the snow removal/plow has done a questionable job of clearing our street. They do a fine job of either plowing us in or plowing us out of our driveway.

The plows have a drop gate that prevents snow build up in the opening to our drive. It is a simple technique that does not seem to be used. I personally went down to the yard where the plows are stored and spoke to several gentleman to discuss my concerns. I was told that they “always” drop the gate. Well I can tell you that every time it snows, I need to get my snow plow out and remove up to 4 feet of snow. (Tuesday) after the plow went down the street, I checked to see if the gate had been dropped. No way!

I had to get my plow out and clear my drive opening. And if we have been out of town and return, we need to park in the street and plow away the “wall of snow” before I can enter my drive. If this happens at 12 midnight, it leaves a bad taste.

These employees are paid from our tax dollars and it seems that they would try to do everything to make the homeowners appreciate them rather than resent them. It is part of their job duties and responsibilities.

John High, Tahoma

Talk to focus on new California labor laws

Steven Gross and Aparna Reddy of Porter Simon will be giving a presentation Jan. 19 about California's new labor laws for 2017.

The talk is presented by the Truckee Chamber of Commerce in partnership with Sierra Business Council's Small Business Development Center.

It is from 8:30am-noon at the Truckee Airport. Cost is \$55 for chamber members and \$65 for non-members and includes light snack. For more information, call 530.587.8808 or email info@truckee.com.

Spooner reopens after snow, spinouts closed Hwy. 50

Spooner Summit between Carson City and Highway 28 was temporarily closed this morning because of multiple spinouts.

As of 8:43am Jan. 4 it had reopened.

"People were not following the chain or snow tire requirements," Meg Ragonese with the Nevada Department of Transportation told *Lake Tahoe News*.

At the time of the closure only the westbound lanes were shut down. It was still possible to get from the lake to Carson.

Trooper Dan Gordon with the Nevada Highway Patrol said there were not a lot of crashes, just a lot of people sliding off the road.

“The conditions right now are really, really bad,” Gordon told *Lake Tahoe News*. “With the amount of snow it is tough to keep the road clean.”

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Weather a problem for schools, driving

For the second straight day the weather has forced the closure of schools in the Tahoe-Truckee Unified School District. Washoe County school in Incline Village have also been canceled for Jan. 4.

A winter storm warning remains in effect for the Lake Tahoe Basin through 4am Jan. 5. Another 6 to 12 of snow could fall at lake level, with 1 to 2 feet above 7,000 feet.

The Sierra Avalanche Center has issued a warning for the backcountry from 4pm today through 7am Thursday.

For current road conditions, click on the state icons on home page of *Lake Tahoe News*. Law enforcement agencies are reporting multiple spinouts and accidents.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Snowy forecast balances sketchy water content



Frank Gehrke trudges through knee-deep snow Jan. 3 near Sierra-at-Tahoe to measure the water content. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

PHILLIPS STATION – While the water content of the Sierra snowpack is below average for this time of year, the October rains have reservoirs in California higher than most Januarys, especially considering the state is coming out of five years of drought.

No one is saying the drought is over, but the current situation and short-term weather forecast have officials

cautiously optimistic.

At the Jan. 3 snow survey on Highway 50 in the field near the entrance to Sierra-at-Tahoe the water content was 6 inches, which is 53 percent of average. Statewide, the average is 70 percent. This location is one of the lower ones in terms of elevation. As anyone who lives in the Lake Tahoe area knows, the snow line until now has been much higher.

It doesn't matter if the snow comes all at once or trickles in. The important thing is that the spigot stays on.

"We don't get piddly storms, we get big dumps," Frank Gehrke, who does the snow survey for the state Department of Water Resources, said. "January, February, March – any one of those can produce record precipitation."

For part of December this swath of land was more dirt than snow; proving things can change quickly.

The importance of the snowpack is that it provides water for people and farms downstream mostly in the form of runoff in the spring that is kept in various reservoirs throughout the state.

Lake Shasta, California's largest surface reservoir, is at 118 percent of its historical average for January. This is a dramatic improvement from 2016 when it was at 50 percent of its average. Lake Oroville, the State Water Project's largest reservoir, is at 91 percent of its historical average, while a year ago it was at 47 percent.

The series of storms lined up to descend upon Tahoe will keep adding to what was measured on Tuesday. However, it's not the snow depth that matters, but the water content. What has been falling the last few days is super light, making for incredible powder days, but it does not pack as much water content.

Opinion: Fed land transfer key to Calif. secession

By Robert H. Nelson, High Country News

Many Californians woke up the night after the presidential election thinking that they were living in a different country. A few felt so alienated that they publicly raised the possibility of seceding from the United States.

There is no constitutional way, however, to do this. But there is a less radical step that would amount to a limited secession and would require only an act of Congress. Forty-five percent of the land in California is administered by the federal government – including 20 percent of the state in national forests and 15 percent under the Bureau of Land Management. Rather than outright secession, California could try to assert full state sovereignty over all this land.

Until Nov. 8, California wouldn't have cared about this, but with the prospect of a Donald Trump administration soon managing almost half the land in the state, Californians may want to rethink their traditional stance. Otherwise, they are likely to face more oil and gas drilling, increased timber harvesting and intensive recreational use and development on federal land in the state.

Read the whole story

New direction for indoor growers – vertical

By Ginger Hervey, High Country News

Nate Storey looked out his window in China at agricultural workers laboriously threshing grain by hand.

“There has to be a better way to do this,” he thought.

It was 2001, and the Cheyenne, Wyo., native was working in a Chinese orphanage, trying to decide what he wanted to do with his life. At that moment, his vision crystallized: He would make food production more efficient.

Back in the U.S., he enrolled in the agronomy program at the University of Wyoming. For his doctorate in 2012, he designed a structure that turned indoor farming on its head – literally – by growing plants vertically in towers.

Read the whole story