

Vuarnet, gold medalist at Squaw Olympics, dies

By Associated Press

Olympic skiing champion Jean Vuarnet, who helped pioneer the aerodynamic tuck position for downhill racers but suffered tragedy with the deaths of his wife and son in a doomsday cult murder-suicide, has died, the French Olympic Committee announced Monday. He was 83.

Vuarnet died of a stroke, a statement by the committee said.

The Frenchman won Olympic gold in the downhill at the 1960 winter games in Squaw Valley. Rejecting wooden skis, he was the first skier to win an Olympic gold on metal skis.

He was also the only competitor in that race to use the speedier low tuck position, squatting down with knees bent.

Vuarnet later lent his name to a successful brand of eyewear and was involved in the development of the Avoriaz ski resort in the French Alps.

Born in the Tunisian capital of Tunis on Jan. 18, 1933, Vuarnet grew up in the Alpine Morzine region of France

In 1995, Vuarnet's wife, Edith, and their youngest son, Patrick, were among 16 people who died in a murder-suicide involving the Order of the Solar Temple doomsday group.

French police discovered the charred remains of 14 victims – arranged in a star formation – in a forest clearing near the Alpine city of Grenoble. Two other bodies were found nearby.

Investigators said police officer Jean-Pierre Lardanchet and Swiss architect Andre Friedli fatally shot the others, doused the bodies with gasoline and set the

Lawsuit filed to stop Placer's Tahoe area plan

By Kathryn Reed

A lawsuit has been filed to stop the implementation of Placer County's Tahoe Basin Area Plan.

The approvals by the Board of Supervisors on Dec. 6 included the plan, environmental documents and green-lighted the 118-unit Tahoe City Lodge project.

The lawsuit filed Dec. 21 by the California Clean Energy Committee against the county names Kila Tahoe LLC, the developer of the hotel, as a party of interest. The group is supported by 45 North Shore residents in its quest to get the court to side with its beliefs.

CCEC contends the environmental analysis is not adequate, in particular CEQA – the California Environmental Quality Act.

Court documents state, "The county failed to describe and failed to focus on feasible mitigation for climate impacts of the area plan and in doing so failed to comply with the information disclosure provisions of CEQA. ... Then the county simply concluded that the extent of the emission reduction was unknown and that the impact was therefore significant and could not be mitigated. That process does not meet the requirement of CEQA that mitigation measures be discussed."

The lawsuit brings up the fact the county said it would reduce vehicle miles traveled by building bike trails. However, CCEC points out that in Placer's capital improvement plan road improvements take priority and that the bike paths are

underfunded. This fact, the plaintiffs contend, has the county saying one thing and doing another.

CCEC has been part of the process for months, having submitted comments on the draft and final environmental impact reports.

“If the respondent agencies are allowed to proceed with the project, irreparable harm will result to the environment and the public,” the lawsuit says.

Because of the holidays no representatives from either side could be reached.

The nonprofit California Clean Energy Committee is based in Davis. The group advocates on behalf of the public for energy conservation, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, sustainable transportation, smart growth and other conservation issues. CCED also filed a lawsuit last fall to stop the Martis Valley West project from going forward based on insufficient environmental review. That case is still in the courts.

Letter: Frustrated with traffic in neighborhoods

Publisher's note: Moya Sanders, who lives in the unincorporated area of El Dorado County in the basin, asked for the following exchange to be published.

To Whom It May Concern,

I live on North Upper Truckee Road leading from South Lake Tahoe to Highway 50 going south toward Placerville. The chain control on Highway 50 at the south end of Meyers is being bypassed by the cars going this way. The traffic enters

Highway 50 above the chain control area going up Echo Summit when it exits North Upper Truckee Road at the south end. This is a problem on North Upper Truckee Road because none of the side streets is plowed, so traffic stops in the middle of the road to chain up, causing accidents and backing up traffic.

Also there must be some liability to Caltrans or the city, if a car crashes on Echo Summit or can't move up the hill because they have no chains on even when they are required. There are no signs at the South Lake Tahoe city end of this road by the Y or by the only turn to put you back on Highway 50 at Sawmill Road. Not even a sign stating that there is no chain up areas on this road, or that the road is very windy and steep and dangerous covered in snow.

Response:

Thank you for your email. I have cc'd our county roads department. This is a serious problem that has no easy answer. The biggest problems are the new apps on cell phones and cars that tell drivers about our backroad access areas. In response to the issue, I convened a meeting last winter of all agencies including CHP, county roads department and sheriff, city of SLTPD, Lake Valley FD, the Tahoe Chamber and LTVA. We looked at several possible solutions, but could not come up with a completely adequate answer to this problem.

CHP stated that they would step up patrols for chain control – they are the only agency allowed to put up controls on any roads – when they had available manpower. Since the roads are public, our sheriff can not close roads to only locals or create roadblocks.

LTVA and the chamber have tried to help by asking lodging properties to stagger check-out times and promote extra nights during busy holiday travel.

The app manufacturers have been asked to change/delete/add warnings in their apps to alert drivers, but no one has

received a response from this group to my knowledge.

I have asked and continue to seek any and all suggestions and would be happy to pass on anything that might help. We will continue to work on this problem.

Thank you again for your email,
Sincerely,
Sue Novasel, EDC supervisor District V

TJ Maxx cleaning up after fire, water damage

Shoppers at TJ Maxx in South Lake Tahoe got more than they bargained for on Monday night.

A fire that started in an upstairs mechanical room set off the sprinkler system at 6:59pm Jan. 2.

“For the most part there is a bunch of water on the floor. It’s more of a huge mess than anything,” Battalion Chief Tim Spencer told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The whole building was full of smoke when we got here.”

Spencer said a heater in the second floor room sparked the blaze. The fire itself did not reach the main store area.

A manager at the store deferred comment to the district office in Sacramento, which was closed.

The local store normally closes at 9pm. It’s not known how many people were in the store at the time the fire broke out. No injuries were reported.

The store will be closed until the damage to the merchandise can be assessed, the smell of smoke is removed, and the water and structural issues are handled. It is too soon to determine how long that will take.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

How Nevadans can better handle holiday debt

By Adam Candee, Las Vegas Sun

Packing on a little extra at the holidays goes well beyond the dinner table for many people.

And much like those pesky five pounds, shedding credit card debt often requires more time to shed than it took to acquire.

A recent analysis by Creditcards.com shows that Nevada falls just outside the top 10 nationally in credit card debt burden, measured by weighing average credit card debt held against a state's median income. The study ranked Nevada 11th overall with average credit card debt at \$5,620 and Nevada's median income at \$30,799.

The study assumed that 15 percent of income would go toward credit card debt. Using the national-average interest rate of 15 percent, it would take a Nevada resident 17 months and \$624 paid in interest to get out of debt.

Read the whole story

Spread by trade and climate, bugs butcher U.S. forests

By Michael Casey and Patrick Whittle, AP

In a towering forest of centuries-old eastern hemlocks, it's easy to miss one of the tree's nemeses. No larger than a speck of pepper, the Hemlock woolly adelgid spends its life on the underside of needles sucking sap, eventually killing the tree.

The bug is one in an expanding army of insects draining the life out of forests from New England to the West Coast. Aided by global trade, a warming climate and drought-weakened trees, the invaders have become one of the greatest threats to biodiversity in the United States.

Scientists say they already are driving some tree species toward extinction and are causing billions of dollars a year in damage – and the situation is expected to worsen.

“They are one of the few things that can actually eliminate a forest tree species in pretty short order – within years,” said Harvard University ecologist David Orwig as he walked past dead hemlocks scattered across the university's 5.8-square-mile research forest in Petersham.

This scourge is projected to put 63 percent of the country's forest at risk through 2027 and carries a cost of several billion dollars annually in dead tree removal, declining property values and timber industry losses, according to a peer-reviewed study this year in *Ecological Applications*.

That examination, by more than a dozen experts, found that hundreds of pests have invaded the nation's forests, and that

the emerald ash borer alone has the potential to cause \$12.7 billion in damage by 2020.

Insect pests, some native and others from as far away as Asia, can undermine forest ecosystems. For example, scientists say, several species of hemlock and almost 20 species of ash could nearly go extinct in the coming decades. Such destruction would do away with a critical sponge to capture greenhouse gas emissions, shelter for birds and insects and food sources for bears and other animals. Dead forests also can increase the danger of catastrophic wildfires.

Today's connected world enables foreign invaders to cross oceans in packing materials or on garden plants, and then reach American forests. Once here, they have rapidly expanded their ranges.

While all 50 states have been attacked by pests, experts say forests in the Northeast, California, Colorado and parts of the Midwest, North Carolina and Florida are especially at risk. Forests in some states, like New York, are close to major trade routes, while others, like in Florida, house trees especially susceptible to pests. Others, like New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Maine, are experiencing record warming.

"The primary driver of the invasive pest problem is globalization, which includes increased trade and travel," Andrew Liebhold, a Forest Service research entomologist in West Virginia. "But there are cases where climate change can play an important role. As climates warm, species are able to survive and thrive in more northerly areas."

The emerald ash borer, first found in 2002 in Michigan, is now in 30 states and has killed hundreds of millions of ash trees. The gypsy moth, discovered in 1869 in Boston, is now found in 20 states and has reached the northern Great Lakes, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Native bark beetles have taken advantage of warming conditions

and a long western drought to rapidly range from Mexico into Canada. An outbreak in Colorado spread across 3.4 million acres of forest from 1996 to 2013, according to the Forest Service, and in California 100 million-plus trees have died in the Sierra Nevada since 2010.

Though small, bugs can easily overwhelm big trees with sheer numbers.

“They drain the resin that otherwise defends the tree,” said Matt Ayres, a Dartmouth College ecologist who worked on the Ecological Applications study. “Then, the tree is toast.”

Forest pests in the era of climate change are especially concerning for timberland owners, said Jasen Stock, executive director of the New Hampshire Timberland Owners Association.

“We’re dealing with pests we’ve never been around before, never had to manage around before,” Stock said. “It’s something we’re going to be dealing with forever.”

Urban forests, too, are at risk from outbreaks. In Worcester, Massachusetts, a city of about 180,000, an Asian longhorned beetle infestation in 2008 resulted in the removal of 31,000 trees.

“You would leave for work with a tree-lined street, and you come back and there was not a tree in sight,” recalled Ruth Seward, executive director of the nonprofit Worcester Tree Initiative. Most trees have since been replaced.

Though trees can die off quickly, the impact of pests on a forest ecosystem can take decades to play out. Dead hemlocks, for example, are giving way to black birch and other hardwoods. Gone are favorite nesting spots for two types of warblers, as well as the bark that red squirrels love to eat, Harvard’s Orwig said. The birds won’t die off, he said, but their ranges will be restricted.

"It's a great example of how one species can make a difference in the forest," Orwig said.

As pests proliferate, scientists seek to contain them.

Among the methods are bio controls, in which bugs that feed upon pests in their native lands are introduced here. Of the 30 states with emerald ash borer outbreaks, the USDA says 24 have released wasp species to combat them. Some scientists worry about introducing another pest; others complain they aren't effective because they can't eat enough of the fast-breeding pests to make a difference.

"With all bio controls, the hope is to create balance – balance between predator and prey," said Ken Gooch, forest health program director for the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Genetic modifications also offer promise.

On a research farm in Syracuse, New York, are rows of 10-foot chestnut trees tweaked with a wheat gene to make them resistant to chestnut blight, a fungus that came from Japan more than a century ago and killed millions of trees. Genetic engineering could likewise be applied to fight insects, said William Powell, a State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry professor directing the chestnut research.

An alternative strategy, also a slow one, is to plant trees 50 or 100 miles away from their normal range so they can escape pests, or adapt to a more favorable climate, said Steven Strauss, a professor of forest biotechnology at Oregon State University.

"Mother Nature knows best," he said. "It's assisted migration."

To stop the next pest from entering the country, researchers

like Gary M. Lovett, of the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies in New York, propose measures such as switching from solid wood shipping material that can harbor insects and restricting shrub and tree imports.

Nonetheless, Lovett said new pests are inevitable. "We have this burgeoning global trade," he said, "so we will get a lot more of these."

UPS expects 1.3M returns in one day

By Associated Press

Christmas is the season of giving, and January the month of returns.

UPS expects to deliver 1.3 million packages back to retailers on Jan. 5, celebrated by the delivery service, but no one else, as "National Returns Day."

Surging online sales have been followed by a surge of returns by air and if UPS is right, it will be its busiest returns day ever, topping last year's 1 million.

By the end of January's first week, the Atlanta company said Tuesday that it will likely have returned 5.8 million packages, topping last year's 5 million, which was also a record.

A survey by the National Retail Federation estimated that more than \$260 billion worth of merchandise was returned 2015.

Prescribed fire ops to resume in basin

If conditions are favorable, the North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District and the U.S. Forest Service may continue prescribed fire operations on Jan. 3.

Operations may take place near Tahoe City, Kings Beach, Carnelian Bay, and Incline Village.

To receive prescribed fire notifications, send an email to pa_ltbmu@fs.fed.us.

Smoke from prescribed fire operations is normal and may continue for several days after an ignition depending on the project size and environmental conditions.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- Lake of the Sky Outfitters in South Lake Tahoe is closing Jan. 31.
- Tryout for Tahoe's Got Talent on Jan. 8 from 9am-2pm at the Beach Retreat conference center in South Lake Tahoe. Music must be in MP3 format. The show will be Jan. 14 at 6pm. Call 530.541.6722 for more info.
- Barton Health's 2017 Health & Wellness Directory is available **online**.

· Check out this video of Jamie Anderson in Alaska:

Calif. plan makes water conservation 'a way of life'

By Darryl Fears, Washington Post

Here in the land of beauty and make-believe, it's important to keep up appearances. Tracy Quinn sees it whenever she walks her dog: sprinklers irrigating pretty green lawns and wasted water bleeding across sidewalks during the state's driest spell in centuries.

"It drives me crazy," said Quinn, a water policy analyst for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

But now California is preparing for a dramatic change in how its residents use water. A water management plan that could be finalized in January is designed to make conservation "a way of life."

The new plan would instead give each water agency a budget for how much water its customers are allowed to use. Each agency's allowance would be based on estimates from state officials of its demographics – population, economy, outdoor temperature, tree canopy and even the rate of water evaporation – to determine its need.

Read the whole story