

Speed, slick road cause vehicle to roll



A vehicle hit ice on Highway 88 on Dec. 4 and slid off the road. Photo/Gary Cooper

The ski day ended before it even started for two people headed to Kirkwood on Sunday.

The vehicle they were driving in careened off the side of the road and flipped. The passenger was taken to Barton Memorial Hospital with non-life threatening injuries.

“As of right now it appears speed was an issue for roadway conditions,” an officer with the California Highway Patrol told *Lake Tahoe News*. He said the two were not from the Tahoe area.

This section of Highway 88 just past Caples Lake and before the ski resort is the same spot where there was a 15-car pileup last winter.

Officers and the driver of the vehicle used a rope to get from the vehicle to the road.

CHP warns people that even though roads in the Sierra may

appear to be dry, they could be icy, especially in shaded areas and around curves.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Lawmakers want to reform Calif. bail system

By Jazmine Ulloa, Los Angeles Times

California lawmakers next year will make it a top priority to reform the system through which judges award criminal offenders bail, saying courts across the state are punishing “the poor for being poor.”

Assemblyman Rob Bonta and state Sen. Bob Hertzberg said they plan to fire the first salvo Monday, when lawmakers descend upon the Capitol for the start of the 2017 legislative session. They will introduce bills stating the Legislature intends to enact laws that will reduce the number of people detained before trial and address the racial and economic disparities in the bail process.

The details of upcoming legislation are still under deliberation, but Bonta and Hertzberg said they have assembled a broad coalition of organizations and lawmakers from both sides of the aisle to tackle what they consider to be one of the most significant pushes – and likely one of the hardest battles – of the year.

Read the whole story

Tax refund scheme lands EDC woman in prison

Barbara Antonucci, an unlicensed tax preparer from El Dorado County, is going to prison for three years and six months.

She also must pay \$1,895,833 in restitution for conspiring to file false claims and filing false claims.

According to court documents, Antonucci and her co-conspirator, Sherry Taggart, 56, of El Dorado Hills, prepared tax returns for clients seeking to maximize their refunds from the Internal Revenue Service. In 2008, Antonucci began a scheme to obtain false refunds by preparing and filing false claims on behalf of clients with the IRS.

In total, including the period in which Antonucci operated the scheme by herself, the IRS issued more than \$1.8 million in illegitimate refunds from more than \$2.5 million illegitimate claims filed during the scheme.

In August, Antonucci pleaded guilty to conspiracy to file false claims and filing false claims.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Law requires USFS to increase

use of volunteers

By Kathryn Reed

President Obama last week signed the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act.

“The act places increased focus on the need for maintenance of the more than 158,000 miles of trails managed by the Forest Service. Specific details of how various requirements of the act will be implemented will be determined as the agency begins to explore and consider the most effective methods for addressing each component and requirement,” Babete Anderson, national press officer with the U.S. Forest Service, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

She said at this time it is too soon to know specifically how it will affect Lake Tahoe and the surrounding forests.

A main component of the legislation is for the Forest Service to partner with more organizations and volunteers when it comes to trail maintenance.

The Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit has been doing that very thing in recent years. Work with TAMBA to build bike trails is a primary example.

According to the American Hiking Society, “In 2013, the Government Accountability Office conducted a study of U.S. Forest Service trails that revealed a \$314 million backlog in trail maintenance and that only one-fourth of all Forest Service trails met the agency’s standards for trail maintenance. Having more miles of trails (158,000) than any other federal agency, the U.S. Forest Service trail maintenance backlog has been a significant concern to American Hiking Society and our members. This new law will help address the backlog, restore trails that are either closed or on the cusp of closing, and connect more Americans with their public

lands.”

This was a bipartisan bill in the Senate and House.

Truckee Community Christmas drives in motion

The Truckee Community Christmas senior program and toy, food and coat drives are all under way.

Collection bins can be found all over town for toy donations. Coats may be donated at Church of the Mountains in downtown Truckee, Mountain Hardware, Starbucks and Tahoe Forest Church on Hirschdale Road. Food items are being collected at local grocery stores.

Recommended food lists may be found at the collection barrels placed near the front of grocery stores. Look for the red, square Truckee Community Christmas logo, which marks items that directly go to local families in need. Program recipients have been identified by area agencies, schools and churches, and are screened and approved.

To make an online donation, find out where collection bins are located, how to volunteer and more, go **online**. For questions, call 530-587-2757.

Commission on Aging seeks members

The El Dorado County Commission on Aging is looking volunteers to be part of the group.

The commission plays an advisory role to the Area Agency on Aging, the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors and the cities of South Lake Tahoe and Placerville on matters of interest to senior residents.

Commissioners need to be able to drive throughout the county to meetings, and represent the commission throughout the county at various meetings and events.

Applicants are being sought from all areas of the county. Preference will be given to those applicants who are 60 years and older.

For an application, contact Jan Haney at 530.642.7276 or at Janice.haney@edcgov.us, or for more info, contact Gerri Grego at 530.545.2839.

USFS to upgrade Taylor Creek area

By Kathryn Reed

Improvements to the ecosystem near Taylor Creek as well as the physical structures is expected to begin in May.

The work will be done in phases across multiple years, and all

work is dependent on funding.

Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit Forest Supervisor Jeff Marsolais signed off on the decision last month.

Changes from the original proposal include eliminating work on the Fallen Leaf Dam and old Lucky Baldwin Dam. This is because of their complexity. Work on the dams will be looked at in the future as separate projects.

“... the selected alternative will begin restoring ecological processes and functions in Taylor and Tallac creeks and the greater wetland-marsh area by eradicating or controlling aquatic invasive species, improving hydrological connectivity of the swales and creeks, and upgrading infrastructure to guide public use and protect natural resources. The project will also enhance existing recreational facilities and infrastructure, and enhance opportunities for universally accessible, non-motorized access,” the decision says.

This area of the South Shore encompasses about 2,600 acres. Taylor Creek Visitors Center and Baldwin Beach are part of the project area.

The Forest Service acknowledges that this area has become neglected, has thousands of dollars of deferred maintenance that needs addressed, and that the habitat is degraded from overuse. The Rainbow Trail often floods.

Restoration efforts at Taylor Creek Visitor Center would include upgrading the stream profile chamber to meet contemporary building codes and reconfiguring the Rainbow Trail to reduce impacts to the stream environment zone, such as raising sections of trail or replacing them with boardwalks.

The current center was designed in 1960s. Bats and mice infested the upstairs. While that problem was taken care of long ago, the area cannot be used.

A price tag on all of the work has not been calculated. A previous estimate of just replacing the visitor center was seven figures.

New Year's bash benefits High Fives

The Squaw Valley Prom, a fundraiser for High Fives, is Dec. 31 starting at 8pm.

The event will take place in the Olympic Valley Lodge. The 13th annual prom has an '80s theme and guests will be ringing in the new year back to the future style.

Tickets are \$100 per couple and \$200 stag (single). Only 400 Couples tickets are available. They are available **online**.

Tahoe bear activity slows as hibernation begins

By Paul Nelson, KTVN-TV

Anyone living in the Sierra knows there are precautions to take in order to keep bears away from their homes, cars and garbage dumpsters. Now that the temperature is colder and the snow has started falling, it's time for bears to take their long, winter nap.

“Bears should be either denning up and actually in the den, hibernating, or preparing to do so,” Chris Healy, Nevada Department of Wildlife spokesman, said.

Bears normally begin hibernating between Thanksgiving and Christmas, and this year does not appear to be any different. NDOW collects data from 18 collared bears in the Lake Tahoe Basin and the Sierra Front, which shows their activity is slowing down.

Read the whole story

Bomb sniffing dog keeps South Shore safe

By Susan Wood

ROUND HILL – “Find it, find it, find it,” Battalion Chief Todd Moss said, while running around the Round Hill fire station.

He wasn’t looking for his socks.

Instead, the Tahoe Douglas firefighter was giving out instructions to his dog Gunner, who acted like there was a leftover turkey stashed on the engine in the garage or behind the exercise machines in the living room.

His nose went into overdrive at the cabinets in that room as well as in the kitchen. And the 4-year-old chocolate Labrador retriever thought nothing of stretching out on his hind legs to get a higher vantage point.

He was searching for explosives. For training purposes, it was just a sack of suspicious powder. With a snout able to pick up

scents 40 times better than humans, the canine gets his target.



Gunner searches for “explosives” under the watchful eye of handler Battalion Chief Todd Moss. Photos/Susan Wood

Gunner has recently completed his 120 hours of training to be a certified “explosive detection canine.” This means the work is just beginning. Moss will now log 16 hours a month practicing exercises with his four-legged companion.

“He’s a dog until it’s time to go to work,” Moss said as the canine stared at his master-handler. Gunner waits for the “squeaky” toy to come out as a signal it’s time for work. His reward? It goes without saying for a Lab – tennis balls.

Gunner will be used more often than what the public might think – but not for what one would think.

Post 9/11: If there’s a suspicious package, the fire

protection district has a robot complete with a camera. It's followed by a bomb squad crew member with an X-ray machine.

At times, Gunner may be used with Moss by his side. But Gunner – who always appears to stand at attention and willing to please – is more likely to be called out when buildings or venues need to be “swept” as in searched.

Bomb dogs have been brought out for events such as the summer concerts at the Harveys casino parking lot and across the street at the Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course for the American Century Championship.

Think of the Boston Marathon as a good example.

The squad had been recently contacted by the U.S. Secret Service during the election season from August to November, when then presidential nominees Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton had rallies in Northern Nevada, and Trump flew into South Lake Tahoe.



Gunner and Battalion Chief Todd Moss

UNR has an explosive detection canine, along with the Reno Police Department and Washoe County Sheriff's Department. Two make their office at the Reno Tahoe International Airport.

"With all these dogs, they make a task force," Moss pointed out.

Douglas County felt a need to have its first bomb dog instead of tapping into one miles away.

"We really use them," Moss said. "We wanted to be a contributor (in the task force)."

As an exercise that serves as a wake-up call, Moss made pipe bombs by emptying shells from a 12-gauge shotgun to show his comrades that "it doesn't take much to hurt you."

The U.S. Department of Defense spent \$19 billion researching the best way to detect explosive devices and came up with dogs as the answer.

Trainers expose the canines to the smells of different explosives and give them a reward.

Bomb dogs are more commonly known for their work in the field at war. More than 2,000 have been trained to sniff out explosives through handlers in the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq, the National Geographic reported. The Smithsonian estimated that about 10,000 detection canines are at work around the world.

When the opportunity to have a special bomb dog arose, Tahoe Douglas got lucky when a Carson City military family moving to San Diego donated Gunner because the handler had two other dogs.

The dog was free as well as the training, which would normally cost a department about \$14,000. Handler and master dog trainer Jim McNeil of the Washoe County Sheriff's Department donated his time to the effort and brought the dog to Moss.



Battalion Chief Todd Moss and Gunner always training and playing.

After 20 minutes of the first day of training at the vacant Kingsbury Middle School, the dog kept returning to Moss opposed to McNeil.

"I guess he's your dog," Moss recalled McNeil saying to him. Now McNeil has embraced the great uncle status.

"He's attached to me 100 percent of the time," Moss said, glancing at Gunner. The Lab, who Moss has had since June, remained focused on Moss with those deep, sincere eyes.

The mutual respect and love is obvious.

So how does a handler love a dog but remove oneself enough to do a job in which he sends his companion in harm's way?

"It's a job. We're trained to do what we do. We do it as safe as we possibly can. We put hours and hours in. Unfortunately,

(accidents) are a part of the job. We try not to think about it," Moss explained.

A Labrador retriever is an ideal dog as an explosive detection canine because they have a hunting drive. The drive to seek remains constant.

When it fades, Moss gives him a break that allows him to hydrate and regroup through a change in environment.

"We take as long as we need," he said.

Gunner may even be influenced by his handler's current attitude. The dog is keenly perceptive and knows when to be intense and when to be fun-loving.

"They have a better temperament for this work," Moss said.

How?

"Look at him," Moss said, laughing and pointing to Gunner lying down by his feet. The dog was warned earlier not to tear up yet another squeaky toy. He looked up sheepishly like a child.

He's presentable in an event setting too, as public safety agencies make appearances to show off all the "tools in the toolbox," Moss noted.

"He's definitely an added plus. We've always depended on other (handlers and their dogs). Now we're a part of (the team)," Tahoe Douglas Fire Chief Scott Baker said.

The district wants to collect donations for a temperature control unit for the truck bed Gunner rides in so he won't be cold out on the job.