

Calif.'s skyrocketing costs prompt exodus of residents

By George Avalos, San Jose Mercury News

Living in San Jose, Kathleen Eaton seemingly had it all: a well-paying job, a home in a gated community, even the Bay Area's temperate weather.

But enduring a daily grind that made her feel like a "gerbil on a wheel," Eaton reached her limit.

Skyrocketing costs for housing, food and gasoline, along with the area's insufferable gridlock, prompted the four-decade Bay Area resident to seek greener pastures – 2,000 miles away in Ohio.

Eaton is far from alone. During the 12 months ending June 30, the number of people leaving California for another state exceeded by 61,100 the number who moved here from elsewhere in the U.S., according to state Finance Department statistics. The so-called "net outward migration" was the largest since 2011, when 63,300 more people fled California than entered.

Read the whole story

Judge gives Caesars OK to pursue reorg plan

By Tracy Rucinski, Reuters

The casino operating unit of Caesars Entertainment Corp can

begin seeking creditor votes for a plan to exit its long and contentious \$18 billion bankruptcy, a U.S. bankruptcy judge said in court on Wednesday.

A confirmation hearing will begin on January 17, 2017, two years after the company filed for Chapter 11 protection.

The bankruptcy of Caesars Entertainment Operating Co (CEOC) has been rocked by creditor accusations that the nonbankrupt Caesars parent looted its operating unit of choice hotel and casino assets before the latter's January 2015 filing for Chapter 11 protection.

Caesars is the parent company of Harrah's and Harveys in Stateline.

Read the whole story

Letter: Don't build the loop road

To the community,

Building the loop road using the triangle alternative will negatively affect the community. The loop road may reduce travel time and pollutants, but benefits it may provide don't make the cost, removal of families and businesses, and the negative effects on businesses worth it to the community.

The triangle plan would reroute traffic away from the casinos, connecting Highway 50 and Pioneer Trail, possibly reducing travel time and making the area safer. Supporters theorize that reduced time in traffic may reduce pollutants entering the lake, but many locals feel that these benefits don't

outweigh the negatives of the plan.

Construction of the loop road will negatively affect the community through increased taxes and the cost of removing homes and businesses. Construction of the loop road will cost \$70 million to \$80 million and affect 90 dwelling units and eight businesses, forcing the affected families and businesses to relocate. The government will give reimbursals, which are often weighted in the government's favor, and may lead to property owners getting less than the true value of their properties.

Businesses along Highway 50 not being removed will be affected negatively by the rerouting of traffic around the tourist area. Businesses along busy roadways tend to see 50 percent more sales than those on quieter roads. This decreased exposure will lead to businesses closing, some of which play a large role in the city's economy. The likely failure of businesses makes the road seem more and more like it will only negatively affect the community.

Alternatives to the loop road that could accomplish the goals of the loop road in a cost effective way exist and need to be considered before the construction of the road.

Charles Filce, South Lake Tahoe

TDPUD helping residents conserve water

Truckee Donner Public Utility District is putting on a series of seminars aimed at helping community members save water, money and have beautiful landscaping.

Landscape and gardening experts will host the seminars on June 28, July 19 and Aug. 30 at 6pm at the Truckee Donner PUD Board Room, 11570 Donner Pass Road.

On June 28, Eben Swain from the Truckee River Watershed Council will discuss lawn conversion options and river friendly landscaping designed to improve landscaping and reduce its impacts on the Truckee River Watershed.

On July 19, Jana Vanderhaar of Verdant Connections will share smart landscape practices that save resources and save energy, which ultimately means saving money.

On Aug. 30, Bonnie Turnbull of master gardeners of Lake Tahoe will talk about water-wise landscaping with tips and tricks to save water and money without watching the garden turn brown.

Attendees may walk through the Patricia Sutton Conservation Garden, which features native and drought-tolerant plants, alternatives to turf, a reclaimed redwood lumber bridge, hardscaping, mulch and weed barrier exhibit and water efficient irrigation.

For more info, call 530.582.3931.

Nev. measures on energy, medical equipment draw support

By Megan Messerly, Las Vegas Sun

Groups wanting to restore more favorable rates for rooftop solar customers, break up NV Energy's monopoly and exempt

certain kinds of medical equipment from taxation each submitted signatures by a Tuesday deadline in an effort to qualify their respective measures for the November ballot.

Backers of the various initiatives were required to submit signatures to county clerks across the state by 5 p.m. Tuesday to begin the signature verification process. Each initiative must draw 55,234 signatures from Nevada voters to qualify the ballot.

Should the three measures qualify, they will join two other initiatives on the November ballot. Question 1 aims to expand background checks on gun sales and transfers throughout the state, while Question 2 would legalize recreational marijuana.

Read the whole story

Tahoe Douglas fire chief to make last call

By Susan Wood

STATELINE – The longtime firefighter/paramedic remembers the day as if you had asked him where he was during 9/11.

It was June 24, 2007.

After 31 years, Tahoe Douglas Fire Chief Ben Sharit will retire at the end of the month, capping off countless memories of his time spent rescuing people and property. One of those times is the Angora Fire nine years ago.

Sharit was returning to the basin from vacation, crested Brockway Summit and noticed the strong winds.

"This was a big concern," he said.

As a battalion chief at the time, he knew his forestlands were dry, and the combination seemed dangerous.

"I sent the whole department," the 54-year-old told *Lake Tahoe News*. That's 15 firefighters on a given shift. Within 45 minutes, the agency was backfilled from other agency firefighters in three out of four stations.

"I'll never forget it," he added solemnly.



Tahoe Douglas Fire Chief Ben Sharit retires on June 30.
Photo/Susan Wood

It wouldn't be the first time Sharit had come to the rescue, in particular on behalf of the Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District.

Two years later, the Nevada fire agency was taxed yet again with more of a long-haul challenge by enduring and surviving the recession. Tahoe Douglas Fire's budget was cut by \$1.6

million. He found a way to whittle expenses through the normal attrition of staff leaving – without laying off firefighters. The Zephyr Cove station that was reduced to an ambulance is now fire-staffed through grant funding that Sharit secured.

It's times like these that show why Sharit has gained widespread respect among his underlings, peers and community members like those he knows in the Tahoe Rotary Club.

Since "Ben knows everybody," according to fellow Rotarian Erik Watada, there's even a "Ben" burger at Watada's Neighborhood Burgers on Kingsbury Grade.

Sharit's even-keel demeanor has served him well in his career.

After "being around a lot of firefighters" as a child, his best friend who worked for CalFire introduced him to the adrenaline-induced world in his younger years. Sharit started out as a paramedic, logging five years in busy Oakland, where he admits to seeing it all. The stories are so abundant it was hard to single one out. He studied fire science in the East Bay.

Once he discovered the natural beauty of Lake Tahoe, Sharit knew he was destined to come and stay here.

"I wanted to live in the mountains and get out of the busy city," he said. He developed an inner peace that made him feel at home with staying calm in stressful situations.

Enduring the multi-year drought could put grey hairs on any firefighter's head in the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range.

He's responded to his fair share of structure fires, vehicle extrications and lived through tragic losses on the job. He's also delivered a number of babies in cars, homes and restrooms. And the thought of operating the district's bomb squad robot put a gleam in his eye.

"You can't get riled up," he said, while chatting at his Round Hill station desk. Although he has just a few days left to work, his desk is still covered with papers. Awards and other recognition-type décor line his shelves, Tahoe photographs adorn the walls and a marker board posted in his office indicates things to do. Items such as "engineer test" and "audit" have been checked off, leaving the unchecked "retire" on the bottom of the list.

At home, the chief holds a long list of "honey dos," quests to "see the world" and visits in waiting to spend time with his three children and four grandchildren.

"It's been a great career, a great ride. I tell my guys it's not a job. It's a lifestyle, and you're on duty all the time," he said.

This lifestyle includes acting as a family in active summers and long winters.

And to top it off, the job comes with a long list of criteria of characteristics – intelligence, physical fitness, dedication, commitment and the need to help others. Oh, and incidentally, a candidate can't be afraid of heights or be claustrophobic.

The fire chief's biggest concern as he leaves is of course altruistic – "the safety and welfare of the firefighters and the people they serve." If that's not the sign of a good steward, it's hard to imagine what is because Sharit is dead serious when he insists what means the most to him.

And what will he miss most?

"The people – that'll be tough (to leave). You give so much after a long period. But now it's time to see my (grandkids') baseball games," he said, albeit admitting to projecting a possible temptation to respond to public safety calls while in retirement.

Nonetheless, Sharit plans to back up and relax from feeling like he needs to solve a problem in two minutes. And he'll enjoy sleeping normally again.

"You always sleep with one eye open," he said of being a firefighter.

Before he became chief, he quipped with friends and family members that he would call them during the night to see if they could be cognizant waking up from a hard sleep. He wanted them to know what the job was like. First and foremost, Sharit likes to share with the people around him. Those who work with him inside and out of the district appreciate the candor.

"You always know what to expect with him," Tahoe Douglas fire Capt. Kevin Green said, while pulling the engine into the Round Hill fire station.

Douglas County Sheriff Ron Pierini goes back decades with Sharit, and the two chiefs have crossed paths often to positive results.

"I found him to be an outstanding employee. He's a very ethical person – someone I can trust," Pierini said. "I'm going to miss him. I'm sorry he's leaving, but people move on, and I understand that."

The community is invited to Sharit's retirement party, slated at Harveys from 4-6pm on his last day – June 30.

The following day, Assistant Fire Chief Scott Baker will take over.

Opinion: Homelessness becomes a political issue

By Joe Mathews

How did homelessness suddenly become such a hot issue across California? There are many reasons, few of which have anything to do with homeless people.

Those reasons—economic anxiety, budget surpluses, tax schemes, housing prices, prison reform, urban development and politics—have combined to create today's "homeless moment."



Joe Mathews

For decades, homelessness has been a civic obsession in the Bay Area, with its progressive politics and generous homeless services. Now that homelessness hubbub is spreading statewide. To the surprise of many at the state Capitol, a \$2 billion bond to pay for housing for the mentally ill homeless became a central focus of this month's budget negotiations. Around the state, law enforcement officials have stirred the pot by claiming that measures to reduce the California prison population exacerbate homelessness.

In Los Angeles, which has the nation's second largest homeless population, a homeless emergency has been declared, and the biggest political fights in town are over city and county plans to ramp up spending on homeless services. In San Diego, with America's fourth largest homeless population, a leading

city councilman called for ending all homelessness by next year, a promise overshadowed by the city's installation of jagged rocks under a freeway to dislodge homeless encampments before July's baseball all-star game.

In Fresno, Mayor Ashley Swearengin just announced a plan to end homelessness in three years. In Sacramento, homelessness was a leading issue in this month's mayoral election. Orange County may appoint a "homeless czar."

Given this drama, you might expect homeless populations to be rapidly rising. But homeless counts (the accuracy of which is always debated) suggest homeless populations are flat, or in decline, in many California cities. So why the sudden urgency? The homeless are now more visible to the rich people who drive civic conversation. New restaurants and housing have brought wealthy folks into central-city neighborhoods and old industrial areas that once were havens for the homeless.

At the same time, anxiety about housing has never run deeper. The housing crisis of the previous decade cost many Californians their homes. California's total failure to build sufficient housing of all types has led to sky-high prices in this decade. For many, sleeping on the street no longer seems such a distant prospect.

Polls reflect this fear, and politicians have seized on it. In an extraordinary public letter late last year, then-Santa Cruz Mayor Don Lane (now a councilman) urged bold experiments with the problem—and criticized his own previous inaction. "I am as responsible as anyone in this community for our failure to address our lack of shelter and our over-reliance on law enforcement and the criminal justice system to manage homelessness," he wrote. "I have been a direct participant in many of my city's decisions on homelessness. I have failed to adequately answer many of the questions I am posing."

Such self-criticism is easier when money is on the way. The

federal government has stepped up funding for homeless veterans. The state has approved a plan to borrow \$2 billion from a state fund for mental health services (funded by a tax on millionaires) to pay for housing for the mentally ill homeless.

This homeless moment has also created opportunities for clever political money grabs. Some LA County supervisors have asked the state to permit them to impose their own millionaire's tax to pay for more homeless programs. That money would free up other funds for other purposes—which is all the more reason to decree a homelessness crisis.

To be fair, much of this money will be spent on a strategy that has shown some success—providing permanent supportive housing for the homeless. But such housing is no panacea for a problem this complex. And today's windfall for homeless services is unlikely, in California's volatile budget system, to last. Even if it did, the disparate nature of the funding—incentives, borrowing matching grants—isn't efficient or sufficient to create the capacity to cover California's homeless populations.

In his acclaimed new book "Evicted", Harvard Professor Matthew Desmond argues that ending homelessness requires a much bolder stroke: establishing "universal housing" as a right, like the well-established right to public education.

Under Desmond's proposal, the government would issue housing vouchers to families below a certain income threshold so that they pay no more than 30 percent of their income on housing. Such rental assistance has a strong track record in some European countries, which don't suffer from American-style homelessness. In the U.S., universal housing via vouchers would cost \$60 billion, Desmond estimates—a fraction of the hundreds of billions spent subsidizing the housing of wealthier people via programs like the mortgage-interest tax deduction.

Universal housing is just the sort of idea that California should try—if our homeless moment is really about ending homelessness.

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

Handwriting still essential in keyboard age

By Perri Klass, New York Times

Do children in a keyboard world need to learn old-fashioned handwriting?

There is a tendency to dismiss handwriting as a nonessential skill, even though researchers have warned that learning to write may be the key to, well, learning to write.

And beyond the emotional connection adults may feel to the way we learned to write, there is a growing body of research on what the normally developing brain learns by forming letters on the page, in printed or manuscript format as well as in cursive.

In an article this year in the Journal of Learning Disabilities, researchers looked at how oral and written language related to attention and what are called “executive function” skills (like planning) in children in grades four through nine, both with and without learning disabilities.

Read the whole story

Douglas County may upgrade Pony Express Trail

Douglas County officials are pursuing a grant to improve the Pony Express Trail.

Representatives from the National Park Service approached the county last year about doing this. This month the Douglas County Commission agreed to apply for a technical assistance grant for the trail that is located primarily along the upper portion of the Old Kingsbury Grade Road just below Kingsbury General Improvement District maintenance yard to four miles west of the base of Kingsbury Grade.

“The county is always looking for opportunities to capitalize on outdoor recreation for enhanced quality of life and added visitor attractions,” Economic Vitality Manager Lisa Granahan told *Lake Tahoe News*.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

SLT contemplating leadership at airport

South Lake Tahoe officials are trying to figure out what to do without an airport manager.

Sherry Miller, who has been the director of the facility since 2009, has left for a similar job in Chico.

Ray Jarvis, who heads public works, is in charge for now. He oversaw the airport in Mammoth when he worked for that city.

“We’ll likely recruit for a new manager, but we had already reorganized all maintenance and ops staff to work under the new management and ops in public works, and all airport CIP projects go through public works as well,” City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Mark Carlson, (former finance director), had proposed eliminating the position as it currently is and changing it to a maintenance supervisor.”

With the reorg, it meant Miller had no staff – it was just her.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*