

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- Sammy Hagar will be at Harveys on Aug. 26 at 7:30pm.
 - According to AAA, two-thirds of Americans are concerned about potholes on local roadways.
 - Tahoe Donner Golf Course will open May 13.
 - South Tahoe Association of Realtors is hosting a breakfast on May 17 at 9:30am at Lake Tahoe Golf Course in Meyers with a presentation by Carl Hasty on the proposed loop road. Cost is \$15. To RSVP, email STAOR@STAOR.org.
 - South Shore children are encouraged to apply for Camp Sunrise, a children's bereavement camp. The free camp serving ages 7 to 14. It runs June 24-26 at Galilee Camp and Retreat Center. Applications are **online**. The deadline to apply is May 20.
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League needs volunteers for Snapshot Day

On May 14 the League to Save Lake Tahoe will organize the year's largest single-day, hands-on citizens science effort to capture a snapshot of the water quality health of South Shore streams feeding into Lake Tahoe.

The League will host Snapshot Day on the South Shore with support from Lahontan Water Quality Control Board, South Tahoe Public Utility District, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and the Tahoe Resource Conservation District.

South Shore monitoring will complement efforts happening simultaneously throughout the Truckee River Watershed from its tributaries upstream of Lake Tahoe to its end at Pyramid Lake in Nevada.

All ages and experiences are welcome. No pets allowed. At the South Shore location, organizers will provide a light breakfast and lunch to all volunteers.

Gather at 9am at Lake Tahoe Community College. League staff and trained team leader volunteers will provide an overview for the day's activities. No prior experience is needed. Participants will then work in teams to head out into the field to test the water quality of their assigned streams and rivers all across the South Shore.

To volunteer, contact Savannah Rudroff at 530.541.5388 or protect@keeptahoeblue.org.

Tahoe water district sues Douglas County

By Kathryn Reed

Water customers at the lake say they are suing Douglas County because they are being forced to subsidize another water company, which is against state law, and therefore they are being discriminated against.

"If the county means what it says and every water system must stand on its own, then they need to split Uppaway from Cave Rock," Brett Tibbetts told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We are

subsidizing their \$1 million tank and their operation system. That is illegal under Nevada law.”

Tibbetts is one of 50 people named in the lawsuit. He and the others are customers of the Cave Rock/Skyland Water System, but make payments into the Cave Rock/Uppaway Enterprise Fund.

Douglas County District Attorney Doug Ritchie did not return multiple calls.

In 2010 the county was looking at consolidating all the public water districts, but opted not to because of perceived inequities. Four years later the thinking changed to having the lake consolidate without the valley. It progressed to the point where twice the commissioners approved such a deal.

The final vote, though, had them reversing course and that is where things stand today – fractured.

“Despite the county’s adopting a policy of each community’s standing on its own to pay for its water system, the county continues to lump together a select portion of the ratepayers in the Cave Rock/Skyland System (i.e., those ratepayers in the disadvantaged communities) in a manner in which these selected ratepayers subsidize the Uppaway System since it has such a small base of ratepayers,” the court filing says. “This is in direct violation of the county’s policy that each community water system must stand on its own. And it is discriminatory against the ratepayers in the disadvantaged communities since ratepayers in the Skyland System and ZWUD [enterprise funds] have no similar responsibility to subsidize the Uppaway System.”

There are four public water entities in the county at Lake Tahoe – Cave Rock, Zephyr Woods Utility District (ZWUD), Skyland and Uppaway. But they aren’t completely separate. Cave Rock and Skyland are one operating system, meaning they use the same pipes and intake systems from the lake, as well have a shared water filtration-purification plant.

Rates are a different matter. Per a county decision, Cave Rock and Uppaway customers are together in an enterprise fund, meaning they share expenses/revenues. These water customers pay \$195 per month, which is one of the highest rates in the basin.

(Cave Rock Water System includes residents from Cave Rock Estates, Hidden Woods, Lakeridge, Lincoln Park, Bedell-Lyons, as well as a few others.)

Uppaway has 31 customers who use groundwater. Physically, there is no connection between this water system and Cave Rock. Cave Rock/Skyland has 516 customers who get their water from the lake.

“We are not trying to come down on Uppaway. We would have been fine with consolidation,” Tibbetts said. “We are saying the way it stands today is unfair and illegal.

“We think they have been hypocrites,” he said of the county commissioners.

The crux of the matter is the plaintiffs want to be treated fairly and for the county to follow the law.

“We are open to any number of ways to solve it. We just don’t want to be the only ones at the lake that are discriminated against when it comes to subsidizing another water company,” Tibbetts said.

EDC sheriff told to slash

budget by \$4 mil.



Dwindling ammunition supplies at El Dorado Sheriff's Office could affect training. Photo/LTN file

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County supervisors appear to be putting the hiring of a public information officer and swimming pool over fully funding the sheriff's department.

There is a \$7 million budget deficit for the fiscal year that starts July 1. Instead of recommending cuts, the board last week told acting CEO Larry Combs what to spend money on that is not currently in the budget.

On April 26 the electeds agreed they want a PIO, road maintenance and to pay the debt for the new public safety facility, along with money for Placerville's pool and other

items.

It's Combs' job to appease the electeds.

But at no time during that meeting was the possibility of slashing the sheriff's budget by \$4 million brought up. In fact, Combs still has not spoken directly with Sheriff John D'Agostini, even though the sheriff has requested a meeting. It was an analyst in the CAO's office who told the finance guy in the sheriff's department about the cuts.

"We have not increased anything in the six years I've been here," D'Agostini told *Lake Tahoe News*. "It seems every time there is a shortfall, they ask for the money from us. I am tired of being the Bank of El Dorado County."

Combs also isn't returning *Lake Tahoe News'* call. And without information from that office it's unknown how the entire deficit will be erased, let alone money found for what the supervisors want to fund. (Legally, the county has to have a balanced budget. Using reserves is not a sustainable, long-term solution.)

"I'm hoping the CAO's office gives me a call and we can work this out instead of them digging their heels in," D'Agostini said.

Supervisor Sue Novasel also didn't respond to an inquiry from *LTN* about the sheriff's budget and what her priorities are for the overall budget.

Cutting positions would be one option for the sheriff. Each position, on average, is about \$125,000/year. This includes all benefits. This coming year he wanted to hire a detective, technicians and deputies to the tune of \$1.6 million. Not funding those still leaves a \$2.4 million hole.

The sheriff's department had to make cuts for this fiscal year. Ammunition is one thing that is not fully funded, so the

sheriff no longer has the supply on hand that he prefers. Regular trainings and certifications require the officers fire their weapons.

Part of his request for the upcoming fiscal year was funding to get the stock of bullets back to a level he deems responsible.

"I'm frustrated right now," D'Agostini said.

Most years the budget is being worked on almost year-round. Not so this year. Department heads are usually notified at the beginning of the year about potential cuts. This gives enough time for thoughtful decision-making. Combs didn't employ this strategy. It doesn't help that Combs works part time, lives in Auburn and is essentially a temp worker.

Opinion: Calif. preschool spending a big conflict

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

In the broadest sense, this year's version of the annual budget wrangle pits Gov. Jerry Brown, who wants to keep a lid on spending and build budget reserves, against his fellow Democrats in the Legislature, who want to spend more.



Dan Walters

The sharpest skirmish is likely to be over demands to ramp up spending on a confusing welter of “early childhood” programs that serve nearly a half-million children now and cost about \$3.5 billion.

Brown proposes only token increases in spending on child care and preschool programs, while urging the Legislature to shift to a voucher system for the former and combine several programs into block grants for the latter.

Read the whole story

U.S. workers putting more money into savings

By Suzanne Woolley, Bloomberg

Retirement savers are upping their game: A record 13.6 percent of 401(k) participants raised their savings rate during the first quarter this year. Overall, employee contributions, combined with employer matching funds and profit sharing, rose 12.7 percent to reach another record.

Not only are savings rates up, but more people are saving in both a 401(k) and an Individual Retirement Account. That's according to Fidelity Investments' first-quarter analysis of the accounts of 13.9 million retirement savers, with assets of \$1.2 trillion, in the employer savings plans it administers.

Fidelity isn't unique in seeing a rise in saving. A recent Gallup poll found that two out of three Americans would rather

save than spend. The gap between the two camps is at its widest since 2001, when Gallup first asked the question, the report found.

Read the whole story

Rich newspaper owners: Industry saviors or foes?

By Brady McCombs, AP

SALT LAKE CITY – The *Salt Lake Tribune's* pending sale to the wealthy Huntsman family unshackles the newspaper from cost-cutting corporate owners and resolves crippling financial uncertainty – but it also raises concerns about whether the influential family will meddle in the paper's coverage.

The same question has come up after other recent newspaper purchases by millionaires – an emerging trend in a struggling industry.

Experts say it's too early to draw any definite conclusions about what the movement may mean for the future of U.S. newspapers. But early reviews are encouraging at three other major newspapers now owned by rich power brokers: the *Washington Post* (Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos), *Boston Globe* (Boston Red Sox owner John Henry) and *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* (Minnesota Timberwolves owner Glen Taylor).

These owners have refrained from interfering in coverage decisions while investing in the search for new audiences and revenue streams, said media analyst Ken Doctor.

Still, there are pitfalls, as evidenced by billionaire casino

mogul Sheldon Adelson's ownership of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, which has been besieged by problems since the family made the secretive deal last winter. And concerns linger over whether wealthy new owners will meddle in newspapers' ability to serve as independent watchdogs, especially if they are well-known for their political or religious views.

Paul Huntsman's decision to buy the *Salt Lake Tribune* came as welcome news in Utah. The *Tribune* had been struggling after a recently revised joint operating agreement with the *Deseret News* cut its share of profits nearly in half in exchange for an undisclosed, one-time lump sum to the company that runs the *Tribune*, Digital First Media.

As often is the case in Utah, religion is fueling some concern about how the Huntsmans will run the state's largest newspaper, which has an average weekday circulation of about 48,000.

The Huntsman family is Mormon, and the *Tribune* has long been a unique and independent voice in a state where more than half of residents and most lawmakers are Mormon. The state's other major newspaper, the *Deseret News*, is owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It still covers news and politics but focuses on faith and family issues.

Paul Huntsman, son of wealthy industrialist Jon Huntsman Sr. and brother of former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr., said in a statement last week he intends to preserve the *Tribune's* independent voice. He has declined to comment further on his plans.

Tribune publisher and editor Terry Orme said he doesn't expect to talk management plans with Paul Huntsman until the sale closes. But he is optimistic his staff will continue to get the green light to doggedly report on religion and politics while Huntsman puts his stamp on the opinion pages.

Others are leery. State Democratic Sen. Jim Dabakis respects the Huntsmans but worries a newspaper founded by dissident Mormons will lose its autonomy.

"I have serious concerns about this fabulous but astonishingly Republican, astonishingly LDS-loyal family getting control," said Dabakis, who had put together a group to bid for the newspaper. "We need this voice to be strong and to be unabashed, and to not play into the Republican narrative that so dominates our state's media."

The trend of rich, influence peddlers buying U.S. newspapers, which harkens back to the ownership models of the early to mid-1900s, has been propelled by bargain prices caused by industrywide declines in ad revenue and print readership.

New owners at the *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, and *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* are giving their employees breathing room while making investments to experiment with digital products and other initiatives, Doctor said.

"The private owners have provided the gift of more time, not unlimited time, but more time to try and figure it out," Doctor said.

Neal Justin, co-chair of the Minneapolis Star-Tribune Guild, said Taylor has employed a hands-off approach since he bought the paper in 2014 and brought stability to a publication that went through a series of owners that included a huge media company and a hedge fund.

"To have somebody who is from the area, who cares about the area, who is invested in the area, it makes a difference," Justin said.

Adelson's acquisition of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* is not earning the same rave reviews as the others. Since the sale, the newspaper has seen resignations from a top editor, a handful of reporters including the longtime gambling reporter

and last week, a columnist who said he couldn't do his job after the new editor told him he couldn't write about Adelson.

Nevada political journalist Jon Ralston calls it an "ominous start" and said he expects more journalists to leave due to conflicts of interest covering a market where Adelson's business interests stretch widely.

"Almost any story that has to do with business, gaming or politics is going to touch Adelson," Ralston said. "There's no way this is going to be sustainable for any journalist with credibility."

But new *Review-Journal* editor Keith Moyer told attendees at a Society of Professional Journalists meeting last weekend that having a rich owner has its advantages. He said the newspaper is replacing old equipment, adding staff and forming an investigative team. He also said the newspaper's journalists may soon see a merit-based pay structure.

The Huntsmans, who operate a major cancer research center and whose name adorns university arenas and college programs, are among Utah's most influential families. The 78-year-old Jon Huntsman Sr. founded a roughly \$13 billion company that refines raw materials that go into thousands of products.

Paul Huntsman, who runs the family company's private investment arm, made a brief, unplanned visit to the *Tribune* newsroom recently to shake hands and say hello to staff in a gesture that was appreciated, Orme said.

"I'm not going to get worried," Orme said of the meddling concerns. "But I'm also not so naive as to think that there won't be conversations ... and perhaps even heated conversations. But that would be nothing new in what newsrooms and owners have grappled with it for a century."

Associated Press writer Michelle Rindels contributed to this report from Las Vegas.

Tourists spending big bucks in California



Tourists gather around the fire pit this winter at the Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

California's tourism industry is coming off its sixth consecutive record year, and South Lake Tahoe is part of that trend.

"We are looking at an industry that is about 2.5 percent of the state's economy," Caroline Beteta, Visit California president and CEO, said during a conference call this week. "This tremendous growth indicates that growth in the industry will continue through 2016 and beyond."

She was lauding the stats from the annual tourism report that came out this week with numbers from 2015.

Total direct travel spending in California was \$122.5 billion in 2015, which is a 3.4 percent increase over 2014.

“That could cover the state’s general fund for a year,” Beteta said.

The document includes South Lake Tahoe’s uptick in hotel taxes. In 2006, \$11.932 million was collected; with 2015 being the first year since then to top that figure. 2015 transient occupancy tax collections were \$12.708 million. In 2009, it dropped to an 11-year low of \$8.271 million.

More money was spent on domestic air travel – \$34.3 million, reflecting a 3.4 increase from 2014.

However, the international market remains a mainstay for California, especially Chinese travelers.

“That’s the fastest growing market I’ve seen in my career,” Beteta said. “When we entered that market we saw 899 percent growth in 10 years, and between 2014 and 2018 we’re looking at 65 to 70 percent growth. There’s about \$2.6 billion in overall spending coming out of that country.”

Sixty percent of the tourism dollars spent in the Golden State comes from other states or countries.

One thing state officials are worried about is currency fluctuations.

The report states, “The recent decline in the value of other currencies in relation to the dollar has reduced the growth of spending by international visitors.”

The tourism sector accounts for more than 1 million jobs. This is a spike of 3.7 percent compared to the prior year.

“That’s \$41.3 million directly into the pockets of employees,” she said.

When asked whether these jobs are primarily low-end entry level, Beteta said that’s not the case across the board.

“This is becoming more and more a career choice. That’s reflected in that more and more higher education institutions are offering programs and certificates in travel and hospitality,” she said.

Beteta also touched on how tourism jobs attract all ages, ethnicities and genders.

Nesting falcons force closure of Donner trails

To protect nesting peregrine falcons, certain climbing routes on Donner Summit’s Black Wall are closed until mid-summer.

Each year, volunteers with the Truckee Donner Land Trust and Access Fund monitor Donner Summit climbing areas for nesting raptors. A peregrine falcon nest with chicks has been located at the recently conserved Black Wall climbing area.

Raptors are well known to nest in the area, and this year’s nest at Black Wall is in the grotto at the base of Rambo Crack in Cannibal Gully.

Volunteers will monitor the nest and lift the closure when nesting activities have ceased for the year. The nest has two eggs, and the female was incubating, thus they may fledge by mid-July. The female appeared more high-strung than birds in recent years, and is possibly a new individual, according to

officials.

The following routes are closed until further notice: Touch and Go, Hungover Hangover, Rat's Tooth, Empty Sky, Rhythm Killer, Pinball Junkie, Inner Recess, Rambo Crack, Space Invaders, and Bourbon Street.

Important to remember to be bear aware

By Carol Singleton

With an estimated 35,000 bears, California has a healthy and growing black bear population. In spring, hibernating bears emerge from their winter slumber and begin an almost perpetual search for food.

It is not uncommon for a black bear to consume up to 20,000 calories a day. Unfortunately, this search can sometimes lead bears into populated areas and conflicts with humans.

"A bear's nose is seven times better than a hound dog's, and it will lead a bear to anything that is edible or smelly," said Marc Kenyon, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's human-wildlife conflict expert. "Bears can smell meat drippings on your barbecue, dog food on your porch and candy in your sleeping bag. So if you live near or visit bear habitat, for your safety and the well-being of the bear, always keep your food and trash properly secured."

Once a bear finds an easy food source, it will return again and again to the same location, and if that food source is a neighborhood or campground, the consequences are not going to be pleasant. Not only can bears get sick from ingesting trash, they can also become dangerous as they begin to associate humans with food.

Bears that become habituated to human sources of food must be killed. Relocating habituated bears does not work. The bears ultimately return to the same neighborhood or another populated area and continue their bad habits – scavenging through trash cans, breaking into homes and even attacking domestic animals.

Although there have been no documented human fatalities from black bears in the state's history, attacks have occurred. In order to keep bears in the wild and people safe, CDFW provides the following Bear Aware tips for people living in or visiting bear country:

For residents:

- Purchase and properly use a bear-proof garbage container.
- Wait to put trash out until the morning of collection day.
- Don't leave trash, groceries or animal feed in your car.
- Keep garbage cans clean and deodorize them with bleach or ammonia.
- Keep barbecue grills clean and stored in a garage or shed when not in use.
- Avoid using birdfeeders.
- Don't leave any scented products outside, including non-food items like suntan lotion and candles.
- Keep doors and windows closed and locked.
- Consider installing motion-detector alarms and/or electric fencing.
- Keep livestock in secure enclosures.

- Harvest fruit off trees as soon as it is ripe, and promptly collect fruit that falls.
- Securely block access to potential hibernation sites such as crawl spaces under decks and buildings.

For campers and hikers:

- Use bear-proof trash cans whenever possible or store your garbage in a secure location with your food.
- Store anything smelly including food, pet food and toiletries in bear-proof containers or in an airtight container in the trunk of your vehicle.
- Clean dishes and store food and garbage immediately after meals.
- Clean your barbecue grill after each use.
- Never keep food, toiletries or anything with a scent in your tent.
- Never intentionally feed bears in order to attract them for viewing.
- When hiking make noise to prevent surprising a bear. Clap, sing or talk loudly.
- Travel in a group if possible.
- Pay attention to the surroundings and watch for bear signs, such as tracks or claw or bite marks on trees.
- Keep dogs on a leash.
- If you see a bear, do not approach it. Make sure it has an escape route.
- If you encounter a bear in the wild, back away slowly. Do not run. Raise your arms to look larger and speak in a calm, loud voice. Do not turn your back.

Carol Singleton works for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.