Opinion: A time to remember those who died for the U.S.

Memorial Day is often called the kick-off to summer. The real meaning of today goes much deeper.

Memorial Day is about honoring those in each branch of the military who have died for the United States.

As much as it's easy to say war is not necessary. It is a reality. People have been dying for this country for close to 250 years. They die every week.

The names of these men and women whose lives are cut short are seldom mentioned unless they are from the town where you live. But they were a daughter or son, a mother or father, a niece or nephew, a sister or brother, a friend.

South Lake Tahoe has had its share of recent losses – Pfc. Brandon Williams, 21, died in October 2006; Sgt. Tim Smith,



25, in April 2008; Spc. Garrett A. Hart, 21, September 2011.



Tim Smith's family remembers him every day with this memorial in the Al Tahoe neighborhood of South Lake Tahoe. Photos/LTN

Walking through Happy Homestead Cemetery tells a story about this areas rich military history. Men and women here have been and continue to serve in the military. Some serve during times of peace, others during war, or other conflicts.

Lake Tahoe News believes a debt of gratitude is owed to the people who today serve on a voluntary basis. And we can't forget about those who were told they would serve or face the threat of being jailed.

How many of us have the courage to wear one of those uniforms? It's a small percentage of the overall population.

As you gather with friends and family today, take a look around. Many families are without someone today because they were killed in action, a training mission or some other circumstance. They did die fighting for our freedoms.

Yes, we all suffer loss, but would we be willing to die for our country?

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Ceremonies:

• 11am, Happy Homestead Cemetery, South Lake Tahoe.

• 11am, El Dorado County Veterans Monument, Placerville.

El Dorado County youth plans to swim from Alcatraz to SF

By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

A girl from the tiny community of Lotus, El Dorado County, hopes to make a big splash by becoming one of the youngest people to swim from Alcatraz to San Francisco on Memorial Day.

Nine-year-old Jordan Freer will enter the water from a boat with 350 adults competing in an organized swim near the famed island in San Francisco Bay about 8am on Monday.

About 1.5 miles later, if all works out the way as planned, young Jordan will have made her way through the cold, salty waters to a beach at the Presidio. Her father, Tom, will be swimming right next to her.

Jordan has been on a swim team since she had been 4 years old. To prepare for Monday’s swim, she has been training at Folsom Lake.

Read the whole story

5-day cycling event goes through parts of Tahoe

Cycle the Sierra is an annual cycling event that takes place between the Gold Country and Lake Tahoe.

This fully supported, five-day tour starts June 23 and takes riders 300 miles beneath granite peaks, through evergreen forests, into alpine hot springs, to Lake Tahoe, over the fourth highest bridge in the United States, to the site where gold was discovered starting the California Gold Rush, and through numerous unique and historical communities along the way.

Each day is 50-70 miles.

At night cyclists camp under the stars. Camps feature a beer garden, stage with live music, food, massage therapists, yoga sessions, bike mechanics and 300 other cyclists.

For more information, email info@cyclethesierra.com or call (530) 320.1625.

California lawmaker proposes

limiting out-of-state, foreign students at UCs

By Tanya Caldwell, New York Times

A California lawmaker is proposing to limit the number of international and out-of-state students who can enroll at University of California campuses.

The 10 campuses that make up the U.C. system — including selective universities like Berkeley and the University of California, Los Angeles — would be prohibited from enrolling more than 10 percent of non-Californians as members of the freshman class. The proposed California Students First Act, which was introduced by Senator Michael J. Rubio, a Democrat from Shafter, Calif., would also cap undergraduate enrollment of nonresidents at 10 percent.

The measure, which was introduced last week, would ensure that California students had a "fair shot" at attending the public universities, Mr. Rubio said, "and not be turned away simply because a wealthy student from the East Coast or abroad shows up with a checkbook in hand."

In the fall of 2012, international and out-of-state students made up more than 23 percent of the freshman class on U.C. campuses, more than double the 11.5 percent of non-Californians who enrolled in 2009. In contrast, more California students are applying to these state universities, competing for seats on the U.C. system campuses.

Read the whole story

Venus Transit viewing at Sand Harbor

Space Science for Schools in collaboration with Sand Harbor Nevada State Park are sponsoring a free public astronomical viewing of the last Venus Transit of the solar disc this century.

The event in the past was used to establish the size of the Solar System and measurements of the size of the Sun and Venus.

Specially equipped telescopes for solar viewing will be provided by Space Science for Schools to follow this epic event.

The event is June 5 from 5-7pm at Sand Harbor.

For more information, click on the flyer.

Official start to summer fire season starts Monday

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

The 2012 “fire season” will officially begin at 8am Monday, and fire officials urge residents, especially those living or recreating in rural areas, to use caution.

The state’s final snow survey May 1 found the snowpack water content is only 40 percent of normal. From January though April, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

crews responded to more than 800 wildfires, more than 2 1/2 times the approximately 300 the agency responded to during the same period in 2011. This year's number also exceeds the five-year average of more than 600 wildfires for January through April, said Terri Mizuhara, spokeswoman for CalFire's Amador-El Dorado Unit.

So far this month, she said, Cal Fire crews have responded to numerous small fires; several in Amador and El Dorado counties have been escaped-debris fires, Mizuhara said.

In response to the increased fire risk, CalFire's Nevada-Yuba-Placer Unit announced that it will increase staffing levels and is staffing many of its fire stations around the clock.

Read the whole story

TRTA looking for AmeriCorps volunteers

The Tahoe Rim Trail Association is looking for two people fill AmeriCorps summer of Service positions. The positions will run from June 7-Aug. 24.

AmeriCorps members will receive a $2,000 living stipend, a $1,000 education award, CPR and first aid training, and the opportunity to give back to trails.

The AmeriCorps member at the Tahoe Rim Trail Association will provide 300 hours of support assisting with volunteer trail work days, backcountry camps and other trail operations programs. Member will maintain inventory of field gear and tools, provide vehicle support, and provide logistical support

for the TRTA annual through hike and Youth Back Country Camps. Additionally, member will collect GPS data and improve GIS mapping of the trail.

Valid driver’s license needed.

For more information, call (775) 298.0186.

Deadline to apply is June 1.

California invasive weed problem could grow with budget cuts

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

It doesn’t take a botanist or even a nature nut to identify yellow star thistle along a favorite hiking trail. Every outdoor enthusiast has felt the familiar stab of introduction.

The invasive weed can reach 6 feet high with stiff limbs that seem to sprout daggers from every pore. Each arm is topped with a crown of inch-long spikes – and one showy yellow flower – that seem perfectly placed to stab a shoulder or poke an eye.

Yellow star thistle is public enemy No. 1 in the California weed world, found in every county but one and covering as much as 14 million acres. It is blamed for altering native landscapes, turning meadows into deserts and even killing

horses, which are uniquely vulnerable to a toxin in the plant’s leaves.

“Yellow star thistle is kind of like the state weed,” said Doug Johnson, executive director of the California Invasive Plant Council, a nonprofit research group. “There’s tons of it.”

A coordinated effort across 14 counties has made strides in recent years to keep star thistle out of the Sierra Nevada, one of the few California regions the weed has not yet penetrated entirely. But now star thistle appears poised to win that battle, too, with a powerful ally on its side: state budget cuts.

The Star Thistle Leading Edge Project was funded by the state Department of Food and Agriculture as part of its weed control budget totaling $2.7 million in 2011. The money funded county weed management agencies statewide, as well as coordination among Sierra counties from Plumas to Kern, which jointly drew a line at about the 4,000-foot elevation mark to combat star thistle.

All that money was cut from the 2011-2012 state budget cycle.

Over the past year, the Leading Edge Project cobbled together local and federal dollars, including grants from the U.S. Forest Service. But that money runs out next month. The project sought a $314,000 grant from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy to continue the work for four years. But it learned Thursday the grant will not be funded because the group failed to meet the application requirements.

The result? Weed experts say yellow star thistle could begin to crowd out native plants in the Sierra, becoming a common sight – and literally a thorn in the side – for hikers, cattle ranchers and other nature lovers who enjoy the mountains as they are, free of this prickly nuisance.

“Walking through it is totally miserable. It’s a terrible plant,” said Garrett Dickman, a botanist and biologist at Yosemite National Park. “I deal with quite a variety of nonnative plants, and I try to be professional about them. But I personally dislike yellow star thistle. I’ve been jabbed by it so many times. It’s a really easy plant to hate.”

Read the whole story

$25 mil. up for grabs from U.S. Department of Education

By Richard Perez-Pena, New York Times

School districts will be able to submit proposals for innovative educational programs this year to compete for federal grants of up to $25 million under a new national contest, part of the three-year-old Race to the Top program. Rules for the competition were to be announced on Tuesday by the Department of Education.

Like the department’s state-level competition for federal grants that preceded it, the program will require systems for measuring student progress and assessing teachers and administrators and will target low-income communities. Under the department’s rules, the schools included in each application must have at least 40 percent of students qualify for federally subsidized school lunches.

A spokesman for the department said it would look for programs that provide ways to tailor instruction to individual students.

“We need to take classroom learning beyond a one-size-fits-all model and bring it into the 21st century,” Arne Duncan, the education secretary, said in a statement.

The rules require districts to show how they will focus resources on “students facing significant challenges, such as students with disabilities, English learners and students affected by impacts of poverty or family instability.”

Read the whole story

LTN tidbit 27: Outside help completes the process



May is 31 tidbits about Lake Tahoe News month.

LTN tidbit No. 27:

There are a few people associated with *Lake Tahoe News* who don’t really want attention called to them. But we would be remiss if we didn’t in some way acknowledge their contributions.

Pat sends emails about typos, grammar and other problems with stories. The retired teacher living out of state is a great

copy editor. We just wish we could pay her to read everything before we published.

Joy, on occasion, alerts us to typos – especially when it comes to headlines.

Brenda is a fabulous business consultant.

Our attorney keeps things legal and will be the one in court when we seek adjudication.

A longtime local is our go-to person for historical references when our knowledge base stops.

Lisa Tolda, while she has not done a ton of photography work for *LTN*, is the key professional we call in for the big stories like last year's Tour of California. Even though the event didn't happen, her photos were outstanding.

Here is information about becoming a paid subscriber.