Funding shrinking for the growing special needs population

By Michelle Cottle, Newsweek

What could really save Hillary Toucey's life is a personal-care attendant to help with her 7-year-old son, Eli. Dark-haired, fair-skinned, and fragile, Eli suffers from a raft of health problems: cerebral palsy, celiac disease, epilepsy, asthma, and what his mom calls "pretty severe" autism.

His speech is "kind of garbled"; he has leg braces and a wheelchair; seizures render him incontinent at night; and he has acute sensory sensitivities. He cannot bear to touch Styrofoam or the paper wrappings on crayons. Loud music sends him into a panic. When his first-grade class took a field trip this Christmas to see The Cajun Nutcracker, "we lasted three minutes," says Toucey.

Eli is extremely attached to his mother. Toucey spends as much time with him as possible, but since her divorce, the 32-year-old Louisianan has been attending nursing school in the hopes of escaping her hand-to-mouth existence. When her husband left in November 2009 (two weeks before their 10th anniversary and four days after Toucey had surgery for a thyroid tumor), he took the car with him. Toucey isn't sure when she'll be able to afford another one.

Eli's seizures and social issues make it all but impossible to leave him with a random babysitter. "There's only a handful of people he can be with," says Toucey. Having one of the state's personal-care attendants (PCAs) come in for 30 hours a week would make a world of difference: the attendant could take him to therapy, help him practice life skills like brushing his teeth and showering, watch him while Toucey studied. Maybe

then she could give more attention to her other kids: 11-year-old Jonah, himself diagnosed with Asperger's, who cries easily and doesn't have many friends; and Charlotte, "a perfectly healthy, wonderful, brilliant" 9-year-old who her mom fears will fall through the cracks. "I feel horrible," says Toucey. "I really have to carve out time for her." Toucey has been told that the PCA bureaucracy can take "forever," and she calls the agency constantly to make sure the process hasn't stalled. Taking care of the essentials is pretty much all she can handle these days. Says Toucey matter-of-factly, "I have no life."

Now and again, the spotlight falls on the challenges of raising special-needs children. In 2008 Sarah Palin captured public attention with her son Trig, who has Down syndrome. This election cycle, Rick Santorum did so with heartbreaking stories about 3-year-old Bella, who suffers from Trisomy 18. Dramatic parenting moments often take the spotlight: stories of diagnosis, acute health crises, surprise breakthroughs.

But for most parents, it's the day-to-day stuff that consumes them: the hours of therapy, the doctor visits, the financial pressures, and the grinding anxiety that comes with it all. It is a rough, often isolating road. And one that promises to become even more challenging as our society enters a new, more complicated era of caregiving. That era is coming in part because many of the medical and social advances that have improved the lives of special-needs individuals have also increased the burden of caring for them. For instance, people with Down syndrome were once lucky to survive to age 30; today, the average lifespan is 55. This presents parents (and society more broadly) with the challenge of somehow providing for an adult child decades after their own deaths, a situation complicated by the fact that the Down population develops Alzheimer's at a rate of 100 percent, typically in their 40s or 50s.

Read the whole story

STHS students plant rare yellow cress on shore of Tahoe

Nine South Tahoe High students, three scientists and one conservation coordinator spent part of Saturday planting 300 yellow cress on the beach at Edgewood Tahoe.

Edgewood Companies is participating in a volunteer program called the Tahoe Yellow Cress Stewardship Program and has been assisting with inventory surveys since 1979.



Tyler Meyers and Jocelyn DeLeon on May 19 plant yellow cress. Photo/Provided

The endangered plant only grows in Lake Tahoe.

The students – Leighton Cook, Jocelyn DeLeon, Tyler Meyers, Sam Burba, Nicholas Brogna, Kayla Owens, Larissa Gloutak, Jera Barney, and Rebecca Wesson – are part of Generation Green Club,

Tahoe National Forest sites ready for visitors

Most campgrounds and recreation sites within the Tahoe National Forest will be open for Memorial Day; however snow is expected to keep some of the more popular trails closed until early or mid-June.

There are still some snow banks in the high country, especially on north facing slopes or in shaded areas.

Even so, fire season is arriving earlier than usual, especially on the east side of the forest. Campfire permits are required outside of developed campgrounds and are free at all Forest Service, BLM, and CalFire offices.

The following status report of campgrounds, roads and trails is listed by major transportation corridor or area.

The campgrounds are open around Boca, Prosser and Stampede reservoirs. Water has not been tested for Prosser Reservoir. Contact the Truckee District Office for more information on water availability for Prosser sites (530.587.3558). The Sawtooth and 5 Lakes Trails are open. The Commemorative Overland Emigrant Trail is also open for mountain bikes or hiking.

Rivers are running fast, cold and high. Caution should be taken near the water – especially with children and pets.

For more information, go online.

Storm may dampen start of Memorial Day weekend

Enjoy the sunshine in Lake Tahoe because it’s about to go away.

It wouldn’t be a normal Memorial Day weekend if nasty weather weren’t in the forecast. The brunt of the bad weather is expected to land Friday. The National Weather Service in Reno is calling for 70 percent chance for rain-snow showers.



Wind is an issue at Kings Beach on May 23, but rain could be the word of the day Friday. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Those odds drop to 30 percent on Saturday.

Sun will dominate Sunday and Monday.

Officers on heightened alert for drunken drivers in S. Tahoe

The Avoid the 6 DUI Campaign will be deploying officers this holiday weekend at DUI/driver's license checkpoints and DUI saturation patrols throughout El Dorado County to arrest impaired drivers.

The Memorial Day weekend is the first holiday travel period of the summer season and this, coupled with many college and high school graduations, will see friends and families gathering to celebrate, often with alcohol. Law enforcement is reminding everyone to make plans now for those weekend trips and celebrations to use a designated driver to avert arrest or worse, a deadly drunken driving tragedy.

The enforcement blitz begins Friday night with DUI saturation patrols in South Lake Tahoe and Placerville. Saturday night officers from the AVOID Coalition will be conducting a DUI/driver's license checkpoint in South Lake Tahoe.

More local DUI saturation patrols will be out on Sunday nights in South Lake Tahoe. The California Highway Patrol is deploying all available officers Memorial Day weekend onto freeways and county roads in their jurisdiction.

Law enforcement regionwide are asking for everyone's support this holiday weekend and all summer:

• Arrange rides home for your friends, family, co-workers and yourself before the drinking begins

• Those hosting celebrations and servers must limit drinks to your guests or patrons. Don’t serve more than one or two over several hours.

• Identify and provide free non-alcoholic drinks to the designated driver

• Cut back on the amount of drinks you plan to bring to the party – and provide plenty of food.

• If you see dangerous driving, report drunken drivers – call 911.

Funding for the Avoid DUI Campaign is through a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Solstice celebration

Meyers is hosting a Summer Solstice Celebration on June 23 from 2-6pm.

This family-centered event is designed to bring together the healing, artistic and recreational cultures of the Lake Tahoe Basin in a community street fair. Activities will include a parade, live music, art cars, food, children’s recreation and booths featuring local artists and healers.

The celebration is free and open to the public.

The theme of the solstice celebration is “fire,” to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the Angora Fire and the community’s ability to unite.

Costumes, bicycles, strollers and all non-motorized vehicles

will be encouraged around this theme. Attendees are encouraged to come in costume and join the 4pm parade at 3170 Highway 50.

For more information, call (530) 577.5433 or go online.

Victim from S. Tahoe bar fight remains hospitalized

Update: May 23, 2012, 9:50am:

South Lake Tahoe police this morning let *Lake Tahoe News* know the patron in the weekend bar fight is still alive.

Officers are not releasing exact medical conditions per federal law pertaining to medical confidentiality.

The name of the person has also not been released, nor have more details about the fight been disclosed, nor whether arrests are pending.

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Two people were severely injured in a bar fight early Sunday morning.

When South Lake Tahoe police officers arrived at Mo's Place at 12:36am May 20 they said they were told owner Mo Patel had been knocked unconscious by a customer who had been asked to leave. Patrons took things into their own hands, according to officers, and pummeled the unruly patron so badly that he was not breathing nor did he have a pulse when paramedics arrived.

Paramedics revived him. However, officers would not release that person's name. They did say he is still hospitalized as

of Monday afternoon.

A woman answering the phone at Mo’s on May 21 said Patel is not expected in for at least a week.

A lieutenant with the police department said details of the episode, how many people were involved and conditions of the victims are not being released. All that is known is both men were taken to Barton Memorial Hospital with “serious” injuries. The video from the brawl has also not been released.

At this time there have been no arrests.

– Kathryn Reed

Travel agents rebound as they adjust to tech-savvy consumer

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

The Internet has become a game-changer for the travel industry. But it was also a job-killer.

As the public became more familiar with researching travel options and booking plane tickets and hotel rooms online, people became their own travel agents.

Thousands of travel agency professionals lost their jobs, and small mom-and-pop agencies either were absorbed by giant travel companies or disappeared.

But today, small, home-based travel agencies have rebounded. Last week, more than 1,500 of the estimated 8,000 agents

nationwide were in Las Vegas for the Home-Based Travel Agent Forum, attending seminars and panel discussions to better themselves as travel professionals.

“It’s a $100 billion industry today,” said Mark Murphy, president and CEO of Travalliance and a travel industry writer. “I don’t think people realize that 75 percent of cruises and tours and 60 percent of international travel are booked by travel agents who work from their homes.”

Melody Fee, vice president of the Outside Sales Support Network, which presents the travel agent forum – it debuted at the Venetian last year and is booked at the resort annually through 2016 – said that although some agents have struggled in the Internet era, many of those who have adapted are making six-figure salaries.

Murphy said the biggest challenge facing today’s home-based travel agents is marketing themselves. Most have thin advertising budgets and have a hard time telling potential customers about the services they offer.

Read the whole story

LTN tidbit 23: Tahoe’s only 7-day week news source focuses on accuracy



May is 31 tidbits about Lake Tahoe News month.

LTN tidbit No. 23:

Lake Tahoe News was born from the frustration of the publisher knowing what she knew wasn't getting published and unable to imagine what she didn't know that wasn't getting published. Simply, we saw a need for a better, timelier news venue that came out more often. We decided to fill that need.

Tahoe – the entire basin – is a region rich with news. People are doing interesting things, have interesting stories to tell. Elected officials are doing what they believe is right. The environment, outdoors, education, entertainment – they and all the other topics need to be covered.

We are here to tell those stories.

Until *Lake Tahoe News* came around, there had never been a daily source for news anywhere in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Being online we can update stories quickly, fix errors and fix typos.

We aren't perfect. No news source ever can or will be. But we do strive for accuracy. Please excuse our typos – one day we'll have a fulltime editor who will help eliminate those.

Our philosophy is to deliver news in a timely fashion that has been researched and is well written. Our egos want us to be first and to scoop the other media. Our professionalism

mandates we be accurate and as thorough as possible before pushing the publish button.

We like to say we write for the readers – not ourselves, not the politicians, and never for the advertiser.

We know, as long as *LTN* has the current ownership, it can never be bought by any advertiser. This means an advertiser cannot influence editorial copy. Our news hole is not for sale.

Here is information about becoming a paid subscriber.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• The Virginia & Truckee Railroad launches its summer season with round-trip trains between Carson City and Virginia City on Memorial Day Weekend.

• Tahoe Figure Skating Club is having a chili fundraiser at Coyote Grill in Round Hill on May 24 from 5-9pm. For more info, email michaelamorgan@avalex.info.

• Alex Leff is now conservation director for Friends of the West Shore.

• The Bicycle Advisory Committee of the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority will meet June 8

at 9am in the Downstairs Conference Room at Lake Tahoe Airport.

• Squaw Valley’s head men’s FIS coach, Konrad Rickenbach, has been named Alpine Domestic Coach of the year by the United States Ski & Snowboard Association.