NASA scientists looking for meteor remnants in El Dorado County

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

It’s not every day that NASA descends on your backyard, hunting for clues to extraterrestrial life.

But that is the drama unfolding this week in and around the community of Lotus, along the south fork of the American River in El Dorado County. Scientists from NASA and the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence Institute are hunting for pieces of a meteorite that plunged to Earth on April 22.

The SETI Institute, based in Mountain View, is the same nonprofit that has spent decades searching for radio signals from outer space in hopes of locating other advanced life forms.

On Thursday, the scientists flew over the Sierra Nevada foothill region in a chartered zeppelin, hoping to spot craters, burn marks or other signs of falling space particles.

The meteorite did not arrive quietly early on that Sunday morning. Residents throughout the Sierra Nevada, from Lassen to Kernville, reported hearing explosive sounds as it burned in the atmosphere. Many saw a bright white streak in the sky.

The track of that streak ended around Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park in Coloma, where pieces of the meteorite were found in the parking lot. It was here, in 1848, that gold was discovered in the American River’s south fork, touching off the legendary Gold Rush that transformed California and the West.

Read the whole story

Cyclists return to Tahoe to train for Tour of California

Even though the Amgen Tour of California is not returning to Lake Tahoe this year, some of the cyclists are.

Liquigas-Cannondale, a professional Italian racing team in the UCI ProTour, will train in North Lake Tahoe May 5-11 for the Tour of California, which is May 13-20.

“Many cyclists got a taste of Lake Tahoe last May while training for the 2011 Amgen Tour of California,” Andy Chapman of the North Lake Tahoe Chamber/CVB/Resort Association said in a statement. “These professionals had the opportunity to experience the beauty of the area firsthand and its challenging, high-altitude terrain. Although last year’s Tahoe stages of the Amgen Tour of California were canceled due to an untimely snowstorm, riders have been eager to get back and hit our scenic steeps.”

Liquigas-Cannondale will be difficult to miss because they’ll be outfitted in their team jerseys and accompanied by support vehicles as they make their way around Lake Tahoe.

LTN tidbit 4: Engage Lake Tahoe News through social

media



May is 31 tidbits about Lake Tahoe News month.

LTN tidbit No. 4:

Lake Tahoe News is on Facebook and Twitter. Make sure it's LakeTahoeNews.net you are following because other entities out in the world of social media are saying they are *Lake Tahoe News*. Look for our logo and you will have found us.

Why bother following *LTN* on these outlets? Sometimes we re-Tweet things from those we follow – like last weekend we re-Tweeted about Heavenly closing and what Marco Sullivan said about Squaw's last day.

With Facebook we are a bit more social at times. Sometimes we tease stories about what will be coming up on LakeTahoeNews.net the next day.

Facebook and Twitter have all the locally generated stories from *LTN*, but not the stories produced elsewhere. This means FB and Twitter followers aren't getting the full flavor of *LTN*.

Social media allows a different type of interaction with readers as well.

We'd like you to be part of all components of *LTN*, but understand if you have your preference – that's why we try to

be where you are.

Here is information about becoming a paid subscriber.

Revamped Basecamp Hotel going after outdoor traveler

By Kathryn Reed

Basecamp Hotel wants to be just what its name says – a base camp. Only instead of tents to sleep in, completely refurbished rooms are provided. Instead of scaling massive peaks, it will be a day or week of playing outside at Lake Tahoe.

“We are trying to create a communal type of atmosphere like a ski house, but with the amenities of a hotel,” explained Robbie Graves, who will manage the hotel.

Basecamp replaces the old Block hotel on Cedar Avenue in South Lake Tahoe behind the would-be convention center. If all the permitting issues can be cleared up, the hotel expects to open to the public June 20.



Basecamp Hotel in South Lake Tahoe expects to open in six weeks. Photo/Provided

It took more than $1.5 million to gut the place. The foundation and framing are about all that are left from the original building.

“Every door had been kicked in, every toilet had been used without water, gangs were living here, graffiti was everywhere,” owner Christian Strobel told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We had to physically evict people who were smoking some sort of drugs.”

Dry wall, siding, windows, doors – all new.

Recycled wood has been installed as well as environmentally friendly fixtures.

In addition to a continental breakfast that will be served to overnight guests, a communal dinner will be offered three nights a week.

Deals are being worked out with tour operators in the area. Discounted lift tickets, bike rentals and snowboard rentals are likely to be part of lodging packages.

One room is called the Explorer Room. While it has a hostel-like quality in that it has a series of bunk beds to be shared by people who probably don’t know each other, single room nights won’t be available. It will have more of a shared ski house feel in that people must pay for 10 room nights up front. Various payment plans are still being developed. The philosophy is along the lines of season passes at a ski resort with possible discounts during midweek and blackout periods. It’s a co-ed room.

People will be able to use Instagram technology in the lobby area to print photos taken that day. A large TV will allow a

GoPro video shot earlier in the day to be shared with other guests.

“We want to build a strong community,” Graves said.

A small bar for hotel guests and locals is being worked on. Strobel spent Thursday in Sacramento talking to Alcohol and Beverage Control officials about permits.

Strobel has a background in the hospitality industry, having worked for the Joie de Vivre hotel chain. Basecamp, though, is the first hotel he has owned.

“What we want to do is have a hotel for people who love the outdoors; for people who don’t want to stay in the casinos and inhale secondhand smoke,” Strobel said.

Fire pits in the patio area and hot tubs on the roof are designed to keep the outdoor fun going on the property long after guests are done exerting themselves playing at Lake Tahoe.

Eating organic foods is good for the body and planet

By Mandy Kendall

I don’t know about you, but I can’t wait for the farmers’ markets to start up again. I love this time of year with all the fresh local fruits and veggies coming back into season.

Buying food that I know has been grown locally satisfies a bit of my “I want to be as green as possible” side.

I know the carbon footprint of the produce is pretty small and it’s about as fresh as you can get. I can also ask how the food has been grown and what pesticides, etc. have been used on them.



Mandy
Kendall

Why worry about pesticides? Well, there is growing agreement in the scientific community that prolonged exposure to even small amounts of pesticides can have adverse effects on health, especially during fetal, and childhood development. Pesticides also contaminate groundwater and are believed to be a factor in the “colony collapse disorder”, the mysterious, and serious, decline in the pollinating honeybee population that threatens our food supply. The miraculous work of the honeybee is essential to the complex ecosystem of our natural world and responsible for 40 percent of our food production. The honeybee is vital to our survival, but pesticides are slowly eradicating them.

So, we might want to support our local farmers, protect our family’s health and the health of our planet, which leads us to organic produce. The issue is that organic produce prices can be substantially higher than regular produce and it can get mighty expensive to go “totally green”. So I looked into what I should be spending my organic budget on for maximum benefit.

There is an organization called the Environmental Working

Group who do a study each year that is a Shoppers Guide to Pesticides in Produce. The 2011 version is based on federal research into pesticides tests on produce between 2000 and 2009.

It turns out that there is a group of foods they have dubbed the Dirty Dozen – foods that have the highest pesticide load, making them the most important to consider first when buying organic.

The Dirty Dozen:

• Apples

• Celery

• Strawberries

• Peaches

• Spinach

• Nectarines (imported)

• Grapes (imported)

• Sweet bell peppers

• Potatoes

• Blueberries (domestic)

• Lettuce

• Kale/collard greens

Fortunately there is also a list of foods called the Clean 15, which had the lowest pesticide load when tested and are therefore considered the safest, conventionally grown, crops to eat from a pesticide point of view.

The Clean 15:

- Onions
- Sweet corn
- Pineapples
- Avocado
- Asparagus
- Sweet peas
- Mangoes
- Eggplant
- Cantaloupe (domestic)
- Kiwi
- Cabbage
- Watermelon
- Sweet potatoes
- Grapefruit
- Mushrooms

So, if you find the cost of purchasing all your fruits and vegetables from the organic section prohibitive, maybe just concentrate on the Clean 15.

There is, however, one caveat I would like to add: Although the peeled foods listed above may limit how much pesticide is ingested by the consumer, it does not mean that the farm they were grown on used any less pesticides in the growing process than other farms. Therefore, to help promote the health of you and yours, as well as that of the planet, it is still best to buy organic whenever possible.

Until next time.

Mandy Kendall operates Health Connective in South Lake Tahoe. If you have any questions, would like some advice, or would like to request some Qwik-e tips on any health and wellbeing topic, please feel free to drop me an email at healthconnective@gmail.com, visit us on Facebook, or keep an eye out on Lake Tahoe News for regular Qwik-e tips on how to make healthy changes one Quick and Easy step at a time.

Opinion: Plan now in case wildfire strikes

By Teri Mizuhara

A new and improved “Ready-Set-Go” fire and life safety program has been developed by CalFire.

Everyone living in the Sierra has a responsibility that many urban/suburban dwellers do not face. Fire is a natural part of our ecosystem which helps clear out the weeds and brush (understory) and create a healthier forest dynamic.

Since naturally occurring fire has not been allowed to do what it should because fire agencies must suppress fires that threaten lives and property, it is vital that people do their part and create a space around their homes.

Defensible space works.

Creating a buffer zone between your home and the wildland greatly reduces the risk of your home catching on fire from radiant heat or flying embers. These embers can destroy homes and even entire neighborhoods that are far from the actual flame front of a wildfire.

Keys to creating defensible space are:

Zone One extends up to 30 feet (or your property line whichever is closer) from every structure on your property.

– Remove all dead and dying vegetation

– Remove leaf litter from your roof and rain gutters

– Relocate woodpiles well away from your home

– Trim trees so that they are a minimum of ten feet away from your chimney and roof line

– Remove ladder fuels (low-level vegetation that could allow fire to spread from the ground to shrubs and bushes to the tree canopies).

Zone Two extends from 30 feet to 100 feet (or to your property line whichever is closer).

– The key is to keep plant material separated from each other both horizontally and vertically, this prevents the vegetation from acting like a ladder and allowing the fire to move from the ground to the tree canopies

– Cut annual grasses down to a maximum of 4 inches in height.

Preparing and practicing your family’s disaster plan is also key to being ready for fire season. This plan can make evacuating ahead of a wildfire or other disaster far less stressful.

It is important that every member of your family understands what to do in the event of a wildfire in your area. Practice

this plan on a regular basis so each member of your family knows their role and what they need to do; keep a copy of this written plan in an accessible place so that you can refer to it quickly and easily.

Things to include in the plan are: meeting locations away from your home, communication plans and evacuation plans for your family and your pets. Identify where your gas, water and electrical shut-offs are and how to use them. Plan several evacuation routes in your neighborhood and drive them so you are familiar with them day or night. Assemble emergency supply kits and have them ready for yourself, family and animals. Don’t forget to include a portable radio and/or scanner so you can stay updated on critical fire information.

Finally, take steps to make your home more fire resistant; if you are building a new home or renovating your home, consider these fire resistive measures (hardening your home):

Roofs are the most vulnerable surface on your house. Make sure your roof is made out of “class A” materials, such as composition, metal or tiles.

Rain gutters should be screened or enclosed to prevent accumulation of plant debris which can catch on fire from a flying ember during a wildfire.

Exterior walls of your home should be made of ignition resistant materials such as cement siding, stucco or fire retardant treated wood.

Windows should be double paned with one of the panes made of tempered glass which will reduce the potential of the heat from a wildfire breaking the window and catching the interior of the house on fire.

If your home is dependent on a well for water, install a backup generator so that you have water in case the electricity goes out.

The following areas of your home should be checked annually and maintained as needed:

Check that your chimney has an approved spark arrestor (screen) in good condition covering the opening. The screen should have openings no smaller than three-eighths inch and no larger than half inch.

Keep the area under your deck or balcony free of combustible material. Never store your firewood under your deck.

Consider having multiple garden hoses that are long enough to reach any area of your home and any structure on your property.

Wind driven embers can fly up to one mile during a wildland fire so “hardening” your home with fire resistive material, creating a solid buffer zone of defensible space and preparing and practicing your family disaster Plan are critical.

Being ready for wildfire season is your best defense. Preplanning for a disaster can save your life and the lives of the ones you love.

For more detailed information on what you have read, go online or call (530) 644.2345 to receive a free brochure.

Teri Mizuhara works for CalFire.

STHS teacher earns award for master’s project

South Tahoe High School teacher Wes Berkshire, a recent graduate of Sierra Nevada College, is being recognized for his

master’s project “Slam: A Teaching Guide for Using Performance Poetry in High School English Classrooms”.

Berkshire will receive the award May 11 at the Incline Village campus.

TRPA air mitigation fees delay opening of businesses

By Kathryn Reed

Christian Strobel closed escrow on the former Block hotel near Stateline in May 2011. He paid $450,000 for the 51-room rundown lodging property.

In the past year he has spent about $1.5 million to turn it into a functioning facility, which included removing asbestos, replacing all the doors and windows, kicking out the gangs living there who were smoking various illegal drugs, putting in new furniture, adding green elements like recycled wood and low-flow toilets, all with the desire to market the hotel to an outdoor clientele.

On Tuesday, he found out he owes the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency $163,021.01. It’s called an air mitigation fee. It was the city of South Lake Tahoe that told him the news – not the TRPA. This fee is about one-third the price he paid for the structure.



The Block for years sat empty, boarded up and painted with graffiti. TRPA says it is working with the new owners to overcome the air mitigation fees. Photo/LTN file

“I fell off my chair. We have a loan that is secured by my house. If I have to pay the fee, I won’t go into business,” Strobel told *Lake Tahoe News* on Thursday. “If that happens, we go into bankruptcy and I lose my home.”

Before buying the hotel on Cedar Avenue he checked with the TRPA about the validity of the tourist accommodation units. Those were in check. So, TRPA knew his intent to reopen the facility as another hotel but never mentioned the air mitigation fee.

No one at anytime disclosed the air mitigation fee, Strobel said.

TRPA calculates the fee based on an international engineering survey that says a hotel of this type will generate 9.81vehicle trips per day, per room. For Lake Tahoe Basecamp Hotel that fee is $163,021.01.

The problem Strobel and even South Tahoe officials have is why people must pay the fee on a building – especially when the use hasn’t changed – when the previous owner already did so.

TRPA rules state that if a building is not used for two years, the air mitigation fee must be paid again.

When asked by *Lake Tahoe News* if this is actually a double fee, TRPA spokesman Jeff Cowen said, “We’ve all been talking about that. The only information I have is it’s in our code.”

In the Regional Plan update, alternative 4 (not the preferred alternative) would increase the vacancy to five years.

Asked why TRPA doesn’t issue an air mitigation refund when a business stops existing – the premise being then it wouldn’t be having customers polluting the air with emissions – Cowen said the funds can’t be refunded because they have been spent.

That’s the point property owners and others are trying to make – the fees have been spent to mitigate air quality issues. Why pay for the same thing twice is what TRPA can’t answer.

Hilary Roverud, director of development services for South Lake Tahoe, said the city would not comment on whether this is a double fee.

“The fee applies to any change. The previous use is not recognized,” Roverud said of how TRPA looks at things.

Roverud and Cowen said they are trying to come up with a solution for Strobel so he can open as planned on June 20. But neither would say what the possibilities are to mitigate the mitigation fee.

“It’s a legal issue,” Cowen said.

Not an isolated case

Strobel is not the only business caught in this quagmire. Down the street from his property is the Cedar Lodge that has new owners.

Judy Finn, planner with the city, said the owners have

received a permit to do interior changes and have been told about the TRPA's air mitigation fee.

According to City Attorney Patrick Enright, the air mitigation fee at the Cedar Lodge will also be more than $100,000.

Part of the issue with the Garfinkle building – aka Miller's Outpost-TJ Maxx – is the $35,000 air mitigation fee. A lease between the property owners and clothing store has not been signed.

"I can't speculate on what people choose to do based on these fees. But it would be logical if someone is trying to do a project and they figure out the finances, this would be a factor," Roverud said of the air mitigation fee. "It does seem to be more of an issues because we are in a period of a lot of vacant commercial property."

The old Dixon's restaurant on Emerald Bay Road has suitors. It, too, will face the air mitigation fee issue.

Why have a fee?

The fee is used to combat air pollution that presumably a business' customers is creating.

But the TRPA also doesn't provide incentives for businesses that might attract hybrids or electric vehicles or even more than two people per vehicle.

The business may pay the fee, which most do, or pay directly for bus shelters, bike trails or other projects that would be considered a use that ultimately decreases vehicle miles traveled.

The mitigation fee is then put in a pot for the jurisdiction where the business is located.

According to TRPA, the city has used $1.3 million in air mitigation funds in the last 10 years on bus shelters, street

sweepers, transit buses and intersection improvements.

“The south Y intersection pedestrian and level-of-service improvement project cost $2.5 million in 2007, $500,000 came from air mitigation fees collected in the city,” Cowen said.

As of April, the city had $180,000 in its air mitigation account at TRPA.

Plein air event in Markleeville

Markleeville Plein Air is June 19-23.

A group of artists will be painting Alpine County. Areas to artists at work will include Hope Valley, Grover Hot Springs area and the base of mountains, at lakes and river vistas.

That Saturday morning all the artists will be in Markleeville painting the town.

At noon June 23 all the artwork will be at the Markleeville Art Gallery ready for viewing and purchase. The show will be up until July 31.

Barton Foundation Golf Tournament

The 18th annual Barton Foundation Golf Tournament is June 29 at Genoa Lakes Golf Course.

The 9am start is a shotgun scramble.

Cost is $150 per person. The Community Health Endowment Fund of the Barton Foundation is the beneficiary.

For more information, call (530) 543.5909.