Realtors expanding scholarship opportunity, looking for donations

In 1988 the South Tahoe Association of Realtors established a scholarship fund to be awarded in the memory of Barbara Kelly, a past president of the board and a founding member of the STAR scholarship committee. This tradition continues today with a few changes. More graduating seniors in the South Tahoe community are eligible to apply. This change is to demonstrate STAR's commitment to supporting all youth in the community who wish to pursue higher education.

Below are the minimum qualifications of applicants:

All graduating seniors within the South Shore community, including children of STAR agents and affiliate members, are eligible to apply;

Applicant must be bound for college or trade school;

Applicant is highly encouraged to be active in extracurricular activities and/or community service;

Applicant must submit a letter stating his or her short- or long-term goals;

Applicant must submit an application in writing;

A letter of recommendation must be received from someone other than a relative;

The scholarship committee must interview the applicant.

To donate to the scholarship fund, make checks payable to the South Tahoe Association of Realtors and note "STAR Scholarship Fund" in the memo.

For more information, contact Steve Costanza at (530) 318.0325 or the STAR at (530) 541.7007 or STAOR@STAOR.org.

Chilling tale of Tahoe area killing unfolds on tape

By Scott Smith, Stockton Record

The first murder Loren Herzog admitted to watching his buddy Wesley Shermantine carry out came in the wee hours of Sept. 1, 1984, on a drive back from Lake Tahoe.

Herzog was behind the wheel when Shermantine spotted a man passed out drunk next to his car just off the road. He told Herzog to turn back. They were on Highway 88 in Hope Valley in the High Sierra.

Shermantine beat Henry Howell and then shot him once in the back. He took Howell's wallet and $45, which the two buddies from Linden used to buy gas in Jackson, according to Herzog's statements.

"He'd kill for nothing," Herzog nervously told investigators years later. "He's a cold-blooded killer, man. … I told my wife, he's one person in this world I'm scared of."

This is just one violent episode captured in 17 hours of grainy videos taken 13 years ago. A string of investigators interrogated Herzog over several days at the San Joaquin County Sheriff's Office after his arrest in 1999.

After hours of denials and cajoling from detectives, Herzog eventually admitted that he watched Shermantine kill five people in a 15-year drug-fueled killing spree. In all,

Shermantine told Herzog of killing 24 people, Herzog told them.

Shermantine also appears briefly on video. Detectives confront him with the blood they found in his truck of missing Cyndi Vanderheiden. Shermantine stoically denies everything before folding his arms and asking for an attorney.

Shermantine today blames Herzog for everything.

Read the whole story

Nevada highway deaths increasing

By John Potter, Channel 2 News

Recently, the Nevada Strategic Highway Safety Plan was developed, with the goal of zero traffic deaths on Nevada roads. But the numbers are going the opposite direction, just ahead of a dangerous season for drivers.

Spend a few minutes on Nevada roads and highways, and you'll quickly discover that many drivers really could use a remedial course in drivers education. The way the statewide accident numbers are looking this year, it's becoming a serious, dangerous issue.

Statewide, traffic fatalities are up by nearly a 3rd this year compared to the same time last year. So far in 2012, 77 people have died in Nevada traffic accidents…18 more than last year. Nevada traffic fatalities:

2012 to date: 77.

2011 same period: 59 (246 total for year).

It’s a gruesome head start, and it comes right before the most dangerous time on the roads. Warmer weather brings more pedestrians, bicycles, and motorcycles, mixing in with too many drivers who just hit the gas and throw out the rules of the road. As motorcyclist Scott Alquist told us, “Cars just don’t see bikes. We’re invisible.”

Read the whole story

Opinion: Barton saves author’s life

To the community,

A huge shout-out of thanks to the people of Barton Hospital.

In my line of work I occasionally get to save the life of a fictional character. Always a good thing, but no big deal. Last week I witnessed how it’s done in the real world. I was interested because the life they were trying to save was mine.

Here’s how it went down.



Todd Borg

April 6 – Shortly after breakfast I felt a sudden sore throat coming on. By mid-afternoon, my throat was in lockdown. No food and no water would move past the gates except under extreme duress. I wasn't happy about it, but I'd had severe sore throats several times over the decades. I knew it just took time.

April 7 – Tried the usual, hot tea, lots of sleep time, all without effect.

April 8 – Woke up to discover that the right side of my neck was swollen like the Pillsbury Doughboy. Left side still looked normal. I realized this wasn't just another severe sore throat. What were my options? Go to the ER, or try to make some poor doctor abandon holiday plans, neither very attractive. I'm loathe to make a fuss if it can possibly wait until normal hours. I decided I'd go in first thing in the morning.

April 9th – Visited Tahoe Urgent Care where Dr. Henning Mehrens took one look at me and said I had to immediately visit an ear, nose, and throat specialist. He got on the phone and found that Dr. Ronald Roth would see me an hour later.

I went down the street to Dr. Roth's office. He took one look at me and said that he was going to admit me to the hospital and put me on antibiotic IV, and after several hours on the IV, they would do a CAT scan and additional chest X-rays, and when he found what he knew he'd find – a deep-neck abscess – he'd do surgery in the morning.

"I, uh …," I fumbled in shock. "Let me talk this over with my wife and …."

"No," he said. "You don't have time to talk this over. You have to go now."

Dr. Roth gave me one of those looks that, while pleasant, are designed to communicate that some parts of life allow for chat

and discussion, maybe over a glass of wine. But in other parts of life, there are black-and-white decisions based on hard science, no room for emotion. A deadly enemy had taken up a commanding position in my neck and my survival required application of a number of measures, time-sensitive, focused, and coordinated.

The rest of that day is a blur of pain and misery. Add to the pain a dehydration level I'd never experienced, and I was ready to be done with this life. They wheeled me around the hospital getting the various scans, which revealed what Dr. Roth expected. I had a large abscess just outside of the windpipe.

By the time they brought me into the OR, my mental perceptions were gone. I was a blob of protoplasm with a rapid, shallow heartbeat, nothing more.

An hour later, I was awake in recovery, my major pain hugely reduced, a result almost too astonishing to believe.

Over the following hours, I learned that Dr. Roth had gone in through my mouth, tunneled down and sucked the guts out of the abscess, an impressive feat by any measure. (Later research has taught me about the odds of surviving deep-neck abscesses. Not very good unless you get the exact right treatment. Even with the correct treatment, one's chances remain unsure.)

As I've thought back on my time at Barton, I've revisited all of the different components necessary to make a hospital work so smoothly. Nurses and nurses' assistants and countless other support staff, all putting together a seamless whole. It is a hugely complicated network, all of these interrelated health professionals.

My only previous surgery was at a big-name, big-city hospital in a city with a world-famous medical university. How does Barton compare? More professional in every way. Much more focused on basic quality care. Less self-important. At every

step I felt that Barton's doctors and nurses simply wanted to give me the best care they could. Dealing with the big-city hospital was like trying to communicate with a giant robot. But real medicine takes place between two individuals, a sick patient and a caregiver who is genuinely focused on the patient. Barton beats the big-city hospital hands down.

I come away with many snapshots: Dr. Roth and his frank assessment of what was needed to survive a life-threatening disease, followed by his laser-accurate ability to orchestrate a search-and-destroy mission in the mysterious caverns of a person's neck. Dr. Mehrens coming in morning and night to check on me and answer questions. Kinder, warmer docs they don't make. The large nursing staff that doted on me. Yes, my health threat had an "impeded airway" issue to it, which made them pay extra attention. But that wasn't what made them all feel like friends after a first visit. The CAT scan and X-ray staff, the OR specialists. These are the people behind the scenes. Yet each one of them treated me as warmly as the front-line nurses.

So, Barton Hospital staff, here is a love letter to all of you. I am deeply grateful and indebted to you. I will never forget your help, your attentions, your caring.

Oh, yeah, you also saved my life. No small thing, that.

Todd Borg, Meyers

P.S. If you, dear reader, know people who work at Barton, please consider forwarding this to them. I have no way to contact all of the Barton staff, and I wish to thank them all.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• The Beach Boys reconfirmed for the original date of July 15 to play at Harveys in Stateline.

• Docents are needed for education centers in Incline Village and Tahoe City. The flyer has more information.

• America's Most Beautiful Bike Ride is June 3 starting on the South Shore and continuing for 72 miles around Lake Tahoe. For more information, go online. Just know that is it already sold-out.

• Former World Cup champion Tamara McKinney was honored with her own run off KT-22 at Squaw Valley.

• Placer County Job & Resource Fair is May 4 from 9am-noon at the University of Phoenix, 516 Gibson Drive, Roseville.

Dry conditions could be problematic for bears, other wildlife

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

From bears breaking into Lake Tahoe homes to possible disease

outbreaks and other problems, Nevada wildlife officials are waiting to see how this year's dry conditions impact animals.

Significant snowfall in March has eased concerns – at least to some degree – that a lack of berries and other backcountry forage will send black bears marauding through neighborhoods at Tahoe and other bear-prone areas.

"I'm a lot more optimistic than I was two months ago," said Carl Lackey, bear biologist for the Nevada Department of Wildlife. "It's kind of wait and see. Up until the beginning of March I was really worried."

March snowfall will hopefully nourish berry bushes sufficiently that a lack of natural food won't drive bears into communities to raid trash containers and search for other human food sources, Lackey said.

That's what happened during the summer of 2007, "by far" the worst on record for bear problems at Tahoe and along the Carson Range, Lackey said.

That year the Department of Wildlife recorded more than 1,500 bear complaints, with drought-related bear problems also experienced in California, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Idaho.

Read the whole story

Some El Dorado County officials want to change the

name of South Lake Tahoe's Lakeview Commons? What name do you like?

South Tahoe continues to tweak sign ordinance

By Kathryn Reed

Small town politics reared its head at Tuesday's South Lake Tahoe City Council meetings as verbal sparks flew regarding the city's sign ordinance.



The underlying issues were posturing for political gain and protecting business clients.

The overt issue was whether the council would hear appeals of decisions made by the Planning Commission regarding historic signs.

It was agreed on a 5-0 vote that if three members of the council want to hear an appeal, it would be heard. This only pertains to the old signs, of which less than an dozen are estimated to fall into this category.

Planning Commissioner Judy Brown, who is also a former mayor of the city, asked for the item to be pulled from the

council’s April 17 consent agenda.

She and fellow Commissioner Austin Sass questioned the council’s timing of revising its sign ordinance that was originally passed in October. This week’s agenda item was the second reading of the revision that would have allowed an appeal of historic signs no matter what.

It was Councilman Hal Cole who suggested the majority of the council would need to agree on the hearing.

Sass, who intends to run for the City Council again, questioned why the owners of Stardust Lodge asked for the hearing before the Planning Commission be delayed until after this specific council meeting.

He said there is an appearance of impropriety.

Councilmen Bruce Grego and Tom Davis have been extremely vocal in their desire to have the electeds hear the appeals. Grego is the attorney for the McCarthys, who own the Stardust. However, if an appeal did come before the council, he would have to recuse himself. Davis is in the lodging industry.

Jan McCarthy, who had to have her personal attacks on Sass curtailed by City Attorney Patrick Enright, said she doesn’t believe the Stardust’s sign would receive a fair hearing with Sass making this a personal issue, and having allegedly voiced his intent to vote for the sign to not be allowed to remain standing.

Penny slot play turns into $1 mil. win at Jackson Rancheria

By Huffington Post

Alberto Lopez had some spare time on Thursday when rain prevented him from fixing windows at a local school in Livermore.

So the 51-year-old construction worker decided to head over to Jackson Rancheria, a casino two hours away in the Sierra foothills. The drive was worth it: Lopez ended up winning more than $1 million that day playing penny slots, according to a press release issued by the casino.

“Alberto says he put $100 in the penny machine, played for a little while – getting as high as $350 and as low as $45 – when his luck came through and he hit the jackpot for $1,129,009.20,” the press release said

Lopez told the casino he was in shock from the win and planned to use some of the money to pay off his loans and “do something for [his] mom.”

But first, he would finish his construction work at the school.

“Gotta go to work Saturday. Can’t leave those kids without windows,” Lopez told the casino.

Read the whole story

S. Lake Tahoe operating in the black despite TOT shortfall

By Kathryn Reed

Even though hotel taxes are down considerably because people stayed away from the barren ski slopes, South Lake Tahoe's midyear budget report was positive.

"We are living within our means," City Manager Tony O'Rourke told the council April 17. "We no longer have financial icebergs looming."

A year ago the council created a five-year budget, plus business and strategic plans designed to put the city on stable ground, improve infrastructure and move the city into the 21st century. Those measures appear to have righted the listing mother ship to put its 23,000 residents on a voyage filled with fewer rough seas.

While the city is not financially out of the woods because it is dependent on tourism and many properties are bank owned, O'Rourke believes the bottom has been reached and things are on the upswing.

"We need to continue to make an investment in the community," O'Rourke said.

That is why $ 3 million is being put into a capital improvement program reserve. This is coming from the city's undesignated reserve fund. That pot of money per city ordinance is to be at 25 percent of the general fund and has

grown to about 36 percent – thus the reason money can be reallocated.

South Tahoe's three main sources of income are property tax (22 percent of the budget), TOT (16 percent), and sales tax (11 percent).

MaryAnne Brand, interim director of finance, said projections in property taxes are for growth to be 1.5 to 2 percent each of the next five years.

But she told *Lake Tahoe News* after the Tuesday meeting, "It's a moving target, it's so volatile, but no major changes are expected."

A chunk, though, of property taxes that could go away in two years is what's being collected from the would-be convention center site. Through the Teeter law the city for five years is entitled to its $350,000 worth of property taxes from the county even though the owners are not paying their bill. Technically, now the successor agency to the Redevelopment Agency receives that cash. It goes to pay debts associated with redevelopment.

The drop-in visitors to the area during the winter have reduced the projected hotel tax by $298,000. The dissolution of the Redevelopment Agency compounds the lack of projected TOT to date to $573,000.

Councilman Tom Davis, who is part owner of Tahoe Keys Resort, said bookings for the three summer months are higher than a year ago. This could swing the TOT pendulum in the other direction.

With the dissolution of the Redevelopment Agency per state order, the city received a little more than $1 million from the housing segment to be used in the general fund. This money is offsetting the losses in the 2011-12 budget so there is a temporary surplus of $145,029.

This “extra” cash also compensates for the loss of $278,000 in projected income from beach parking. That plan was derailed earlier this year.

Changes in expenses that were approved Tuesday include taking the savings from eliminating the fire marshal position and unfreezing two firefighter positions; reclassifying the community outreach-volunteer coordinator to marketing and outreach coordinator; making the PIO the assistant to the city manager; and bumping the deputy city attorney up a rung.

O’Rourke said the reclassifications are to reflect what the people in those positions are actually doing.

Another unforeseen expense was the $30,000 to repair the compressors at the ice rink. While a private company operates the arena, the current lease has the city being responsible for certain maintenance issues. The contract with TSE is slated to be back before the council on May 1.

In other city news:

• City Manager Tony O’Rourke, while having interviewed for a job in southern Oregon, told *Lake Tahoe News* it is probably not the best fit. He plans to do the job in South Tahoe for the foreseeable future.

• The old 56-acre steering committee will be reconvened in May, with topics to include El Dorado County’s desire to rename Lakeview Commons and what to do with the campground side of the project.

• The city Planning Commission approved a design change for the driveway for the Raley’s gas station because the landlord of the larger center wanted $10,000 a month for use of their property.