Simple solutions for trouble sleeping

By Hanna Brooks Olsen, Huffington Post

You don’t have to be one of the 70 million Americans who suffer from a sleep disorder to wish for ways to sleep better. Between heavy work loads that keep many of us up late, the lure of late-night TV and our social lives, we may skimp on shut-eye – and then wonder why we’re tossing and turning when we finally do hit the sack. This week is National Sleep Awareness Week, so let’s take this opportunity to be aware of why exactly a good night’s rest is so important – and learn some non-drug-related ways to sleep better.

Insomnia and sleep disorders don’t just mean you can’t fall asleep – they can also impact your quality of sleep. Even if you sleep a full seven or eight hours, if your sleep quality is low (i.e., not enough deep, restful sleep), your body does all kinds of wonky things that basically make it hard to exist. Aside from a lack of concentration, too little REM time may actually make you more prone to cancer, heart disease and diabetes. It also leads to poor job performance, mood disorders and can trigger depression. Plus, there’s research that shows crappy or insufficient sleep may also lead to weight gain, as tired folks try to eat more to wake up.

Read the whole story

Teens told to pay restitution fine in Ray May Fire

Two 15-year-old boys have been ordered to pay $10,000 in restitution fines for starting the Ray May Fire.

The August fire burned 3,628 acres south of Gardnerville and caused more than $2.8 million in damage.

Earlier the judge had sentenced the teens to probation and ordered them to do 500 hours of fire-related community service.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Digital evolution not touching all corners of California

By Mike Anton, Los Angeles Times

DARWIN – Here on the shoulder of the information superhighway, smartphones turn stupid, streaming videos shrink to a trickle and a simple download drags like a flat tire.

Darwin is a former mining town cloistered in the high desert mountains between Death Valley National Park and the China Lake naval weapons testing center. Finding it isn’t easy – a sign that marked the turnoff from California Highway 190 was stolen recently.

In Darwin, there is no food, gas or lodging – or any businesses, for that matter. There is one stop sign. People emerge from their mobile homes and reclaimed miner's shacks shortly after 11:30 each morning and walk to the post office to greet the mail's arrival.

A sign at the edge of town announces Darwin's population as "50 or so." It's actually about three dozen, and they are outnumbered 3 to 1 by abandoned cars. There are retirees, artists, loners, eccentrics – independent souls who've accepted that the price of living in California's tranquil outback is a 90-mile drive to the nearest shopping center.

"We're a little more than rural," said John Rothgeb, 67, who has lived in the desert since the late 1970s, first in his van before settling down in Darwin. "Frontier is more like it."

But the 21st century frontiersman needs more than food, water, shelter and elbow room. He needs connectivity. He needs high-speed Internet. And the federal government is spending billions to bring it to him.

Darwin is emblematic of the nation's digital divide – the disparity between those with broadband access and those suspended in the technological amber of the 1990s, with dial-up connections to the Web.

In 2000, just 3 percent of American adults used broadband at home, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project. Today, about 60 percent do. Only 3 percent use dial-up.

The difference in performance is like that between a bullet train and a steam locomotive.

Want to stream movies on Netflix or video-chat on Skype in Darwin? Forget it. Check out Wal-Mart's weekly sales flier? Schedule an hour. Peruse the latest funny-cat videos on YouTube? The incessant buffering might induce a seizure.

Read the whole story

Consolidated Reno-area fire departments going their separate ways

By Brian Duggan, Reno Gazette-Journal

Reno officials continued to push on Wednesday for a "regionalized" fire service plan that fell apart when it was presented to Washoe County Commissioners last month.

That $45 million plan would have consolidated fire services in Reno, the Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District and the Sierra Fire Protection District under an independent fire board and reopened all labor contracts with firefighters if the county and city agreed to it.

Commissioners ultimately nixed it, saying they couldn't live with the plan's $2.1 million deficit closed by reducing payments to the county's fire services reserve funds.

Reno Fire Chief Michael Hernandez said while the plan wasn't perfect the fact that labor contracts would be renegotiated would result in cost savings.

"Every single article is on the line and that's where management and the financial analysts sit with the bargaining groups and say this is the pot of money that we have," Hernandez said. "We have to live within our means."

Dennis Jacobsen, the president of the International Association of Fire Fighters Local 731, agreed every article

would be open to negotiation because the fire fighters would be creating a new agreement with a new fire department.

“We would certainly want to maintain our benefits and rights to our members that we’ve worked so hard on, but we would also look at it with an eye of sustainability,” Jacobsen said. “We understand that.”

Meanwhile, the news conference on Wednesday marked latest salvo in the ongoing divorce between Reno and Washoe County.

Since 2000, the county has paid the city about $11 million a year to provide fire services in the Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District made up of county neighborhoods that surround the city.

That agreement will come to an end on July 1 when the county is expected to stand up its own fire department.

Read the whole story

Trends in Tourism is focus of forum

This year’s annual spring South Shore tourism forum is titled Trends in Tourism. On April 26 from 3-5pm Ralf Garrison and Emilyn Sheffield will present current statistics and trends to inform tourism and hospitality operations for the future.

Among the topics to be presented are differences in how the younger “wired” and ethnic visitors will connect with recreation in addition to a discussion on what types of accommodation units and amenities are most important to these growing market segments. Additionally, a “Millennial Team” of

20 college students from CSU Chico’s Recreation and Hospitality Program will be participating. They will present a report card to the community of their pre-arrival research, expectations and experiences.

There will be numerous opportunities for: hosting the students, secret shoppers and future intern potential. If you are interested in learning more about the student opportunities, contact Carol Chaplin at carol@ltva.org or B Gorman at bgorman@tahoechamber.org.

The event is at Harveys in Stateline.

Cost is $15 for Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce members and $25 for non-members. Price includes entrance to the mixer immediately following the forum.

Educational snowshoe trek on North Shore

Alpenglow Sports is partnering with Tahoe Institute for Natural Science to bring a unique type of guided snowshoe to the North Shore. The tour will last approximately three hours and will focus on winter survival strategies of the flora and fauna found throughout Page Meadows.

Meet at Alpenglow in Tahoe City on March 31 at 10am. Bring warm clothes. Participants will carpool to Page, leaving about 10:30am. The hike is free, but space is limited to 25 slots. Preregister by emailing will@tinsweb.org.

For more information, call (530) 583.6917 or email brendan@alpenglowsports.com.

Spring training – where the score is secondary to the fun

By Kathryn Reed

SCOTTSDALE – Eighty-degree days in March and beer vendors meandering through the outfield grass. Clearly this is not AT&T Park in San Francisco.

It's Scottsdale Stadium – where the Giants call home during spring training. They will be playing there for another week to get ready for the real season.

It's appropriately named the Cactus League based on the flora throughout the Phoenix area where 15 teams play in 10 stadiums.



Fans are closer to the field at spring training. Photos/Kathryn Reed

There is something special about spring training. Parks are more intimate, fans of the sport – not just of the teams playing – fill the stands, beer is brought to you, a slew of players fill the lineup, and the sun is beating down. It's less intense – maybe because the score doesn't have the same meaning as during the regular season.

It's hard not to run into someone from Tahoe. The Merkleys were sitting a few rows in front of us on the grass, with one of the boys wearing a South Tahoe High shirt. John Rice's trip overlapped with ours. For many in Tahoe, it's an annual ritual – where that crack of the bat sounds rhythmic and the thought of snow melts.

Players make a habit of signing autographs for throngs of fans. It's almost like you could be on a first name basis with them. If only Buster would want to play a game of catch.

Load up your wallet

Spring training is big business for Arizona. And it's not cheap.

Bring cash. Many vendors at this particular park wouldn't take plastic. Food prices are creeping up to what AT&T charges, what with $6 garlic fries and $8.50 for Gordon Biersch beer.

Tickets, too, are pricey – $25 to sit on the grass on a Sunday. This is more than any of my season ticket games at AT&T ballpark. The price dropped to $12.50 for a Tuesday afternoon game.

In addition to the ballpark prices, extra taxes are levied on visitors to provide all the fun. The Arizona Sports and Tourism Authority collects a 1 percent hotel tax, which will expire in 2031. Maricopa County adds a 3.25 percent tax on car rentals.

But tax revenue for the tourism agency is short $165 million,

in large part because of the recession. That money was supposed to go for stadium improvements. Individual towns may need to pony up the cash for the upgrades to satisfy agreements with various baseball teams.

The state brings in about $350 million a year off people coming to the region for spring training, according to the *Arizona Republic*. A record 1.59 millions fans filled the 10 stadiums for about 230 games in 2011, the newspaper said.

How to save

But not everything is expensive. We parked in the free, unlimited parking lot owned by the city of Scottsdale. Parking on city streets was available for free for three hours.

And the trolley is free, too. And the sign for it makes sense – visitors know it's public transit and the schedule is posted. How refreshing.

Meandering up and down the streets of Old Town Scottsdale can fill hours. It's just a couple blocks from the stadium. Stores are varied, sidewalks wide and most are covered – which on a hot day would be incredibly welcome. It's touristy without having the feeling it was created just for tourists.

The Old Town Tavern is perfect to sip a local brew after the game. Baseball chatter echoes from most of the tables.

Lodging is all over the board. We stayed at a friend's condo in Scottsdale at the Troon North Golf Club. Perfect accommodations for the four us – me, Sue, mom and my sister, Pam.

For golfers, this is an ideal location. For those more interested in listening to songbirds announcing the arrival of a new day, bunnies hopping at twilight, and cacti flowers sprouting, then Troon North is still the place to stay.

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)

Opinion: Heavenly gives back to Bread & Broth

To the community,

Bread & Broth would like to express its heartfelt gratitude to Heavenly staff for once again adopting a Day of Nourishment.

Volunteers from the Heavenly team spent their time on Monday helping Bread & Broth volunteers serve people a hot meal on a cold night. They served a well balanced, healthy meal to all who came in hungry. All of our co-coordinators that Monday were delighted that Heavenly continues to help out our Adopt-A-Day of Nourishment through the Bread & Broth program.

Bread & Broth is able to continue its mission of feeding the hungry of South Lake Tahoe in large part because of the generosity of the local community. A $250 sponsorship covers the cost of food and beverages for the approximately 100 people who visit each Monday evening.

To find out how your family or business can Adopt A Day of Nourishment, contact Connie Blue at midwest2tahoe@yahoo.com or (530) 544.4945.

Bread & Broth

Biathlon combines two opposing sports

By Holly Heyser, Sacramento Bee

It’s something about the insanity of biathlon that lures people in: First, ski fast and hard. Then, stop, drop and try to shoot five targets while your thumping heart makes the sight on your .22 rifle bounce like hail on a tin roof.

Now, do it all again – but this time, shoot from an even more challenging position: standing.

Crazy, right?

Exactly the point.

“It intrigues people because it’s a combination of two completely opposed sports: The cross-country ski racer is going really hard, and the shooter has to be really focused, calm and deliberate,” said Auburn Ski Club biathlon coach Glenn Jobe. “Combining the two sports is one of the most challenging endeavors you can make in athletics.”

Biathlon is a sport most Americans glimpse just once every four years, when the Winter Olympics put it front and center. If you watched biathlon during the 1980 Winter Olympics at Lake Placid, New York, chances are you saw Jobe race in the 20-kilometer event.

Now 61, Jobe still competes in masters races on occasion, but his main focus is introducing people to the sport, which he does through clinics at the Auburn Ski Club’s facility next to the Boreal Ridge ski area.

If you want to learn biathlon in California, this is where you go. The next-closest ranges are at the Soldier Hollow Cross-Country Ski Resort in Utah and at West Yellowstone in Montana.

Read the whole story

Safeway eliminating ‘pink slime’ from ground beef

By Eve Mitchell, Contra Costa Times

Bowing to public pressure, Safeway said Wednesday it will no longer use a controversial filler called “pink slime” in its hamburger meat.

Safeway, the nation’s second-largest supermarket chain, joins several other stores, including Whole Foods, Costco and Nob Hill Foods, in rejecting hamburger with the filler, called lean finely textured beef by retailers, the meat industry and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Whole Foods and Costco say their hamburger has never contained the filler.

“Safeway is committed to providing our customers with the highest-quality products. While the USDA and food industry experts agree that lean finely textured beef is safe and wholesome, recent news stories have caused considerable consumer concern about this product. Safeway will no longer purchase ground beef containing lean finely textured beef,” the Pleasanton-based grocery chain said in a statement.

The filler is a meat product made from fat trimmings that are heated so that small traces of lean meat can be separated and added back to the ground beef.

Walmart and Sam’s Club also announced Wednesday they will begin offering fresh ground beef products that don’t contain the filler.

Read the whole story