Tahoe-Reno athletes on podium in slopestyle

By USSA

OSLO, Norway – Chas Guldemond of Reno won men's slopestyle finals and the overall Ticket To Ride World Champion title on Sunday. Guldemond's run was smooth and had a huge backside 1080 to an even bugger cab 1260.

Jamie Anderson of South Lake Tahoe took second place for the women, while Canadian Spencer O'Brien took the top spot.

Guldemond's final run gave him the win with an 87.9 and it was a nail biter that put Quebec's Sebastien Toutant in second place with a final score of 86.8.

Eric Beauchemin of Lake Winola, Pa., came in fourth place and Tyler Flanagan of Mammoth Lakes ended up in seventh.

In women's competition, Jordie Karlinski of Snowmass Village, Colo., came in seventh and Ty Walker of Stowe, Vt., was ninth.

The weather improved from Saturday's pipe finals, but temperatures dropped making the course slick.

What do you have to say about the Tahoe Rim Trail?

Stories about the Tahoe Rim Trail are being sought by Bona Fide Books for a future book.



Hikers, backpackers, cyclists, equestrians, trail builders and anyone else with an experience from the 165-mile trail that wraps around Lake Tahoe is invited to submit a story. It may be humorous, about natural history, epiphanies, trials and tribulations, wildlife, weather or anything else.

The deadline is Dec. 1. Stories should not exceed 5,000 words. Send them to submissions@bonafidebooks.com.

A portion of the proceeds will go to the Tahoe Rim Trail Association.

For more information, go online.

Paying to make transition for seniors less stressful

By Jan Ferris Heenan, Sacramento Bee

It could easily have been a two-Tylenol day when Jill Brackmann's 83-year-old mother had to pack up her Carmichael home of 55 years last spring. The house sold within a week, mom was in a wheelchair and a lifetime of memories was stashed in rafters and closets.

Instead, Joan MacTaggart's big move turned out to be a party of sorts, said Brackmann, an only child who lives in south Sacramento.

"We had a bottle of wine and ordered pizza. People stopped by

all day," she recalled. "My mother, who's very coherent, said, 'I kept waiting to be sad and I wasn't,' and it was because Lee took care of the business so we could process the emotions. If I had had to be responsible for everything in her house, it would not have been that way."

The Brackmanns contracted with Lee Mahla, a professional organizer whose Sacramento company, Get OrderLee, specializes in helping seniors downsize their households and move – usually into independent or assisted-living facilities. As baby boomers age, and live ever longer, the number of companies like Mahla's is on the upswing, both nationally and across the Sacramento region.

The National Association of Senior Move Managers started with 22 members in 2002, tripled by 2006 and now counts nearly 700 companies in the United States, as well as start-ups in Canada, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, according to Mary Kay Buysse, executive director.

"The demographics are just so compelling; 10,000 (American) baby boomers turn 65 every day," said Buysse, from her suburban Chicago headquarters. "It's not an easy time for the older adults or for the family when mom or dad is told by the physician that they can't live alone anymore. It used to be such a crisis point for the family. Not as much anymore."

Read the whole story

Opinion: Proposition 13 is

outmoded

By Russell Hancock and Emmett D. Carson

Ever since its passage, Proposition 13 has been the “third rail” of California politics: Political leaders touch it at their peril.

We think it’s time to take a fresh look.

Our two organizations released last week the 2012 Silicon Valley Index, a comprehensive analysis of our region’s health. The report is filled with encouraging news about our regional economy, including a rebound in the tech sector and the revving up of our innovation engine.

But the same report shows local governments in a state of crisis, with decreasing revenues and rising expenses, no longer able to provide the essential social services and capital investments we need to sustain vibrant communities.

Even a stunning economic recovery won’t address our fiscal woes. That’s because our state’s tax system, geared toward an early 20th century economy, no longer tracks with the 21st century economy that is being invented in Silicon Valley.

Our current system is based on taxing sales in brick-and-mortar establishments, on the most volatile sources of personal income (stock options and capital gains), and — increasingly — on property taxes.

However, today’s knowledge economy increasingly provides goods and services through the Internet without providing needed tax revenue for state and local governments.

Russell Hancock is president and CEO of Joint Venture Silicon Valley. Emmett D. Carson is CEO and president of Silicon Valley Community Foundation.

Read the whole story

Legislative studies languish because of lack of funding

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Nevada's tough financial situation is holding up two interim studies approved by the Legislature because of the requirement for alternative funding sources to assist in conducting the reviews.

One is a study of the state Public Employees' Retirement System and the other is a study of the funding formula now used for public education. Both studies require non-state funding, but proponents are having a hard time coming up with the money.

Typically there is state funding appropriated for interim studies by the Legislature. But the state's difficult fiscal situation led to the imposition of the financial requirements for the two studies.

Gov. Brian Sandoval and lawmakers approved a study of the state public pension system with an eye toward evaluating the need for a change for future state and local government hires to a "defined contribution" or some modified type of plan.

But the study outlined in Assembly Bill 405 requires a $250,000 contribution from the private sector to be secured before another $250,000 appropriation from the state could be used for such an assessment.

The private funding has been hard to come by.

Heidi Gansert, chief of staff to Sandoval, said other options are being explored by representatives of Nevada's business community interested in such a review.

"They had to meet the $250,000 threshold before state funds would be released and so I think the issue was the level of funding required, private funding, versus getting some funding for it," she said. "There may be some private sector folks that are still going to work on some form of study.

"My understanding is the $250,000 is too high of a threshold, but they are looking at coming up with partial funding and maybe doing something on their own versus trying to meet that threshold to get the state funding," Gansert said.

Sandoval favors a change to the retirement plan because of a concern about the potential taxpayer liability for the defined benefit plan that covers almost all state and local government employees. The long-term unfunded liability is estimated at about $10 billion, although some assessments using different measures put it at a much higher amount.

There has been a growing call nationally to move public pension plans to a state to a defined contribution plan, similar to a 401(k)-type plan, from the current defined benefit plan, where retirees are paid a set amount per month based on salary and years of service.

Sandoval has advocated such a position, although the concept did not see any serious discussion in the 2011 legislative session.

Nevada PERS officials say the plan is actuarially sound, and that the unfunded liability will be covered over time. They also note that the contribution rates required to keep the plan healthy are set by an independent actuary and are fully funded by the Legislature. The Legislature also made several

changes to the existing PERS plan in 2009.

The legislative study looking at potentially new ways of funding public education was sought by the Clark County School District. But no state funding was provided for the review.

At the first meeting of the New Method for Funding Public Schools interim study in January, Clark County School District official Joyce Haldeman said $125,000 in anticipated funding from a private foundation to pay for a study would not be available.

The district is looking for other funding for the study.

Assemblyman Marcus Conklin, D-Las Vegas, the chairman of the interim study, gave the district until Feb. 21 to identify at least $125,000 for a study. The panel is scheduled to meet Feb. 28, but the meeting will be canceled if no funding is secured.

The Clark County School District would like to see new factors included in the 45-year-old funding formula, such as additional financial weight given to educate special education students, English-language learners and children in poverty.

Questions have been raised as to whether either study is actually needed.

Geoffrey Lawrence, deputy director of policy for the Nevada Policy Research Institute, said in an interview in June 2011, regarding the PERS liability that legislative studies do not typically generate change in subsequent legislative sessions.

And Assemblyman Ira Hansen, R-Sparks, a member of the public education interim study panel, asked for justification for the proposed review at the January meeting, noting a 2007 study by lawmakers identified no inequities in the Nevada Plan.

After spending nearly $250,000, the conclusion was that the Nevada Plan was highly equitable, he said.

Grooming goes high-tech with a beastly fleet at Heavenly

By Susan Wood

She may be cold sometimes, but she'll warm up fast – then take you for a real ride.

If you push her buttons just right, she'll raise her big blade – then cover her tracks behind her.

She'll light up your night man. And to the one who knows her best, she is an animal that often lives up to her name – The Beast.



The Beast is able cover more terrain than smaller snowcats and do high-angle grooming. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Heavenly Mountain Resort's latest fleet of four grooming snowcats is aptly named for being the best at moving snow,

carving corduroy and covering ground.

With a 500 horsepower engine, she can put her mark on 9.5 acres per hour. Her predecessor the Bison is a smaller version in the 13-machine fleet that grooms 6.5 acres an hour with 350hp under the hood.

“The whole reason we bought The Beast is it can do more acres per hour. It has its place. It can push (snow) uphill. It’s aggressive. We need to cover as much ground as we can in the time we have,” Casey Blann, chief of Heavenly’s mountain operations, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “In their second year, we think it’s the way to go.”

This year, covering enough ground and spreading the snow can be more of a challenge with the lack of it – especially compared to what Lake Tahoe Basin experienced last season.

“Usually we have Mother Nature covering holes and rocks. Now it’s all us,” said swing shift groomer Daniel Huizar, who waited patiently for clearance to drive his rig up the mountain from the Tamarack Lodge at the end of the day. It’s Huizar’s fourth season as a groomer – a big step up in his eyes from sitting inside auditing tills at Mount Hood Meadows. Now he usually works at Heavenly from 4pm to midnight.

Heavenly employs 35 groomers who collectively have logged at least 230 years of experience.

Huizar’s first glance at a grooming machine was love at first sight.

“I want to be in one of those,” he recalled with the glee of a teenage boy. The 28-year-old is spending his fourth season at Heavenly. He sought change, and change is what he got with the opportunity to drive The Beast.

This beauty’s tiller in back and blade up front measure 23 feet across at full wing span. That’s a good 4 feet more than

the Bison. Both are made by Prinoth, an Italian corporation that took over the former Bombardier company.

Parent company Vail Resorts spared no expense with purchasing the first Beast at Northstar then adding four more at Heavenly at about $500,000 each – substantially more than what the Bison models cost. With the buttons, joystick, levers and stereo with an iPod hookup, she's a little bit of a cross between an airplane and video game inside. There's even a knob for defrosting a very large windshield that runs coolant through the blades. (Tahoe residents would likely line up for that feature on their trucks and cars in the winter.)

Outside, she resembles a bulldozer on snow. She can push snow up the mountain like no other machine – even at a 16-degree angle most cats would have to use a winch for what's called "high-angle grooming." It can be nerve-wracking to drive it at first because unlike smaller cats she can easily clip a fence with her size. If you were to equate different models with paintbrushes, The Beast would cover the wall. The Bison would touch the corners.

Although Huizar appreciates the workhorse nature of The Beast, he waxes poetic when talking about her ability and where she takes him on the hill.

There's a certain rhythm to watching The Beast's giant blade push snow. It reminds Huizar of an ocean wave forming over the shoreline.

It was hard to imagine the run off the Tamarack chairlift was so tracked up when The Beast went for a spin last weekend. She placed perfect corduroy behind her. This is why some riders and skiers hang behind the machines – to "poach" the tracks, as Huizar put it.

Apparently, they're not the only ones. Huizar often sees coyotes. One ran off with a whole bottle of Gatorade near the Beach Hut at Patsy's chairlift. Most sniff the tracks to see

if food has been churned up.

“Some places are thin, so you don’t want to do too much,” he said of this year’s slim natural snow. The groomer pointed to the top of the ridge that takes skiers and riders to the Nevada side of the resort and indicated how the area can be more challenging to groom with rocks just underneath the surface. Though conditions have improved substantially in the week *Lake Tahoe News* took a ride in The Beast.

“You tend to feel rocks more on these machines than skis,” Huziar said a week ago.

(Note to my skiself: These guys have saved the ski season.) But a modest Huizar turned the credit over to the snowmakers who manage the gun operations.

Suddenly, a beautiful rosy sunset lay over Mount Tallac to the west.

“Oh, I love this,” he said, stopping the machine on the Tamarack ridge and pulling out his camera. This is where Huizar takes lucky, ride-along buddies at the end of the ski day. They’re picked by ski patrol from the lodge. Many are so appreciative, they try to tip him, but to no avail.

To the east, overlooking the Carson Valley, the groomers have even coined a name for the view from where the Big Dipper meets Orion – “Operation Elevation.”

A fleet may follow each other’s fall line from the ridge like a pack of dogs. The camaraderie is enhanced by the chatter on the radio. For that reason alone, Huizar doesn’t get lonely – even on occasions when he works the graveyard shift. He recalled how interesting the nights were at Mount Hood when groomers at Meadows would flash their lights at the Timberline resort drivers and vice versa.

Night operations is a world all its own.

“I don’t think people realize how a lot goes on at a ski resort at night,” Huizar said.

Sometimes he sees the groomers at Homewood across Lake Tahoe.

“The views up here are awesome,” he said as the sun was setting in the real High Sierra.

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Testing for pot potency done in a legal vacuum

By Joe Mozingo, Los Angeles Times

The tech broke the bud of marijuana into small flakes, measuring 200 milligrams into a vial. He had picked up the strain, Ghost, earlier that day from a dispensary in the Valley and guessed by its pungency and visible resin glands that it was potent.

He could have determined this the old-fashioned way, with a bong and a match. Instead, he began the meticulous process of preparing the sample for the high-pressure liquid chromatograph.

His lab, called The Werc Shop, tests medical cannabis for levels of the psychoactive ingredient known as THC and a few dozen other compounds, as well as for contaminants like molds, bacteria and pesticides that marijuana advocates don't much like to talk about. The strains that pass muster are labeled Certified Cannabaceuticals, a trademarked term.

The commercial lab is one of dozens opening in the last two years, as a rush to build an industry around medical marijuana has produced a desire – by some – to know what exactly is in the medicine.

The idea is that patients don't pop a Vicodin not knowing if the pill has 5 milligrams of hydrocodone or 15. Nor do people make drinks wondering if they are pouring beer or bourbon or Bacardi 151.

Read the whole story

Hight takes 6th in halfpipe event in Norway

By USSA

OSLO, Norway – Kelly Clark of West Dover, Vt., earned her 15th straight win taking the Ticket To Ride title at the World Snowboarding Championships halfpipe finals on Saturday.

Matt Ladley of Chicago had a huge frontside 1260 and a great

run that scored him second place in the men’s competition, while Iouri Podlatchikov of Switzerland took the win.

Louie Vito of Sandy, Utah, took third for the men with a big frontside double 1080, while Gretchen Bleiler of Aspen was third for the women.

Elena Hight of South Lake Tahoe came in sixth place.

Foggy weather and humidity made for tricky conditions in the halfpipe and it took great skill for the athletes to gauge their speed.

Next up check out the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix at Mammoth Mountain Feb. 29–March 3.

Squaw Valley embracing SkiDUCK participants

Fireside Pizza Company in the Squaw Valley Village has partnered with Skiing and Snowboarding for Disabled and Underprivileged Children and older Kids (SkiDUCK) by providing a meal for each program member during their day of alpine adventure.

SkiDUCK is a grassroots nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of disabled and underprivileged children by making available the experience of skiing and snowboarding. The program is possible due in large part to the resort’s donation of unlimited lift tickets, including more than 700 package deals combining ticket, rental equipment and lesson.

After a long day of outdoor activity this youthful bunch works up an appetite and Fireside Pizza generously feeds the group a

hearty afternoon meal.

Movie about Aldo Leopold

“Green Fire: Aldo Leopold and a Land Ethic for Our Time” will be shown at the Duke Theatre at Lake Tahoe Community College in South Lake Tahoe on March 28 at 7pm.

Admission is free.

Doors open at 6:30pm.

A question and answer session will follow the documentary about this legendary conservationist.