If you were to create the salary schedule for public entities – be it city-county-state level – what would you pay people in salary and benefits and why?

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2 performances of ‘The Vagina Monologues’ in South Lake Tahoe

V-Day South Lake Tahoe joins the global effort to stop violence against women and girls with a benefit production of “The Vagina Monologues”.

The Feb. 24 and Feb. 25 7pm performances of Eve Ensler’s award winning play will be in the Loft at the Blue Angel Café.

This is the ninth year that V-Day will be celebrated in South Lake Tahoe. Last year more than 5,800 V-Day benefits were conducted throughout the world raising funds and awareness toward ending violence against women. These events raised more than $5 million.



"The Vagina Monologues" returns to South Lake Tahoe on Feb. 24 And Feb. 25. Photo/LTN file

“The Vagina Monologues”, which was first performed off-Broadway by Ensler, dives into the mystery, humor, pain, power, wisdom, outrage and excitement buried in women’s experiences.

V-Day is a global activist movement to stop violence against women and girls. The V-Day movement is growing at a rapid pace throughout the world, in 140 countries from Europe to Asia, Africa and the Caribbean and all of North America. V-Day, a nonprofit corporation, distributes funds to grassroots, national and international organizations and programs that work to stop violence against women and girls.

The V in V-Day stands for Victory, Valentine and Vagina.

To learn more about V-Day Tahoe, call Natalie Yanish at (775) 843.7142 or email natalie@realtordeb.com.

Admission is $15. Tickets are available at South Lake Tahoe Family Resource Center at 3501 B Spruce Ave. and at the door.

Local beneficiaries are South Lake Tahoe Family Resource Center, Tahoe Youth & Family Services, Live Violence Free, and Court Appointed Special Advocates.

Other V-Day events include:

"The Sex Show" – a Jeopardy based sex education game show on Feb. 22 at 7pm at the Divided Sky in Meyers. Tickets are $5 at the door.

"HONK" – a rally to raise awareness on Feb. 20 from 5-6pm at the Y in South Lake Tahoe.

Survey: Residents less than enamoured with South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

While the number of people who believe South Lake Tahoe is going in the correct direction increased by 50 percent in the most recent survey compared to the prior year, the majority of survey takers said the city is off track.

Partial results from the December citizen survey were just released. Twenty-two percent believe the city is on the right path. While that is a dismal percentage, the 2010 survey had 15 percent believing in what the city was doing.

This was the largest percentage increase in all the questions asked.

The goal of the annual survey that was started in 2010 is to ask residents and business owners a series of questions to find out how the city is doing in a number of areas. From there it is up to staff and the City Council to figure out how to improve on those numbers.

“We have to do a better job in the services we are delivering,” City Manager Tony O’Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We need to focus less on ourselves and more on the public.”

This was in response to 29 percent of respondents believing they get value for their tax dollars. That dropped two percentage points from 2010.

Forty-one percent of the people who were sent a survey filled it out – or 444 people. The 2010 survey had a 35 percent response rate. On things like this response rates usually range between 25 percent and 40 percent.

Twenty-two questions were about the city, though many were multi-part. For example, under the question about the quality of services in South Lake Tahoe, 38 areas needed to be graded either excellent, good, fair, poor or don’t know.

The highest rated city department was fire at 88 percent believing these men and women do a good job. However, garbage collection was at 92 percent – the top ranked entity. But garbage isn’t even a city business; South Tahoe Refuse is a private company that contracts with the city.

“I’m going to make it a point to have these garbage guys visit our staff,” O’Rourke said. “That is the type of customer service we want to obtain.”

The worst area in the city is streets – with an approval rating of 14 percent. That is the same number from 2010.

Besides comparing the results from year-to-year, the city also puts itself up against other cities in the United States.

Out of 339 cities, garbage service in South Lake Tahoe is ranked eighth best. This compares to street repair that is No. 391 out of 400. That means people in nine other cities have a bumpier, more unpleasant experience than people here.

Snow removal, which is considered a core service, received a

63 percent good-excellent rating. Compared to other cities, South Tahoe is 108 out of 255.

O’Rourke wants to do what he can to make the number go higher. It’s impossible to know if all the news about cutbacks to the department as well as last year’s heavy snowfall that was not always plowed to residents’ satisfaction contributed to the rating.

But it was up 3 percentage points from the previous year.

O’Rourke said he was alarmed with only 30 percent saying business service is good or excellent.

“We are ranked 156 out of 170 and we are a tourist destination where service should be our hallmark. That is a horrible story,” O’Rourke said. “I think the pubic is critical, but not in an overly negative way. They call it like they see it.”

Staff, as was done a year ago as well, was also surveyed. All those results will not be made public until employees hear the news first. However, O’Rourke said overall feelings “went from neutral to slightly negative.”

“It seems like employees feel picked upon. But we have to be fiscally solvent before we are mother hens,” O’Rourke said. “There is a nexus to what we do today and how it affects us down the road.”

In coalescing all of this information the city also sought data from neighboring counties with the main goals to find out the percentage of employees who were let go in the last year, change to the pension and health care plans, and what the significant impacts were. South Lake Tahoe officials in this chart provide that information.

The citizen survey will most likely be discussed in full at the March 6 City Council meeting. It is slated to be released at that time as well. The council could make changes to the

strategic and business plans that were adopted last year to incorporate any information from the survey.

Whittemore, Seeno lawsuits' impact may ripple through Nevada

By Martha Bellisle, Reno Gazette-Journal

Some might say it's just a legal battle between rich, powerful men.

But the court fight ensuing between one of Nevada's most high-profile lobbyists, Harvey Whittemore, and the owners of the Bay Area's largest home-building company, Tom Seeno and Albert Seeno Jr., could threaten the network of business, philanthropy and influence that both have worked their entire lives to create.

Competing lawsuits between Whittemore and the Seenos make accusations that could ultimately land someone in prison. They include claims of embezzlement, racketeering and threats of murder and physical violence. If any of the claims prove true, they also could result in the loss of several valuable and coveted licenses – including the gaming license for the

casinos run by the Peppermill. The Seenos are minority partners in the gaming empire and are listed on the gaming license.

The Seenos claim Whittemore stole funds from their shared business, the Wingfield Nevada Group. If that claim is true, it could cost Whittemore his license to practice law and curtail his ability to raise funds for philanthropy and political candidates – something he is known for throughout the state, giving big contributions to some of the state's most politically connected candidates.

Sam McMullen, a Las Vegas lawyer and lobbyist who has known Whittemore for decades, said Whittemore has always been willing to step up and organize political fundraisers. And he has done it across party lines, he said.

"As long as I've known him, Harvey has been a force in Nevada politics," McMullen said. "It will be a loss if he was no longer active. He has done a great deal for Nevada."

Read the whole story

Competing casinos coordinate advertising efforts

By Bill O'Driscoll, Reno Gazette-Journal

The Peppermill and Atlantis resorts, competing anchors on south Reno's gaming front, have united in the battle for Northern California's drive-up market.

Their billboards across Sacramento-region highways brag about Reno's "Loosest Slots in the USA" designation, awarded last

year by Casino Player magazine.

The mission is two-pronged, say the resorts: Tell motorists there’s value in making the trek over the Sierra and, in the same glance, show the Peppermill and Atlantis names and their hotel profiles against a mountain backdrop.

Whether it has worked since the billboards went up last summer, officials say, is hard to quantify. They insist the $310,000 investment by Reno’s top two hotel-casinos as measured in taxable value is more an image booster for the region’s struggling gaming sector.

“There’s no specific call to action, so it’s difficult to measure results,” said Kimberlee Tolkien, executive director of administration at the Atlantis Casino Resort Spa. “It’s designed to send the message that your best gaming experience is Reno with the loosest slots.”

But it’s also clear the properties, which together have spent more than $500 million on expansion in recent years and focus much of their attention on the local market, see a way to tap out-of-area gamblers to south Reno.

“It’s nothing different than what downtown does,” Tolkien said. “It’s getting a message that there’s more to Reno than downtown. Visitors don’t necessarily have a clear picture of what’s available. There’s a lot more in Reno than just downtown.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Schoolchildren showing importance of state parks

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Feb. 12, 2012, Sacramento Bee.***

Slowly but surely, nonprofits and local communities are exploring what they can do to keep open the 70 state parks slated to close on July 1.

So far, 10 parks have been removed from the closure list. The latest is a gem in our region, the South Yuba River State Park, with a lovely canyon and covered bridge, near Grass Valley.

Elementary school students at the public Grass Valley Charter School were among those who lobbied local leaders and helped the South Yuba River Citizens League collect 10,000 petition signatures. The Nevada County Board of Supervisors, the Nevada City and Grass Valley city councils and Truckee Town Council signed a letter to the governor.

State Parks officials announced Wednesday that the park will remain open, with new parking fees at entry kiosks and self-serve devices at park entry sites. Nevada County agreed to "no parking" signs along the public road adjacent to the park, so visitors will use the park's lot and pay the fee.

The kids and the community still are trying get neighboring Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park off the closure list. That's the site of the largest hydraulic mining operation in California in the 1870s and early 1880s.

Other parks have gotten off the closure list with timely donations and active nonprofits.

Read the whole story

Agriculture inspections going to the dogs

By Cynthia Hubert, Sacramento Bee

Under the light of a nearly full moon early Friday morning, Sacramento County's newest agricultural inspector reported for duty.

Dozer, an 86-pound Labrador retriever mix, bolted out of a white van and into OnTrac's bustling shipping warehouse on the end of a leash held by his human partner, inspector Jennifer Berger.

"Let's go!" Berger said. "Check!"

Dozer went to work at the facility near the former McClellan Air Force Base. Within seconds, he pounced upon a box labeled "California Flowers" that likely held someone's Valentine's Day bouquet. Racing through the facility, he sniffed pallets of copy paper, stacks of tires, even a package that held live lobsters, with nary a reaction.

Then he encountered a box with the words "Living Herbs" and pounced again, scratching at it frantically.

"Good boy!" Berger said, and passed him a treat from a pouch attached to her waist.

Dozer is one of 13 highly trained former shelter and rescued dogs that work to sniff out fruit and other plants that may be carrying agricultural pests such as fruit flies that pose a

threat to California crops.

Read the whole story

Hunt for human bones continues in San Joaquin Valley

Publisher's note: ***Families are hoping the uncovering of remains in the San Joaquin Valley will lead to the solving of other murders. The killing of Henry Howell, 45, in Hope Valley in 1984 is still not completely resolved. Loren Herzog was convicted of being an accessory to Howell's murder, but his conviction was overturned after an appellate court ruled his confession had been coerced.***

By Kim Minugh and Melody Gutierrez, Sacramento Bee

Should the rains hold off, investigators are expected to return to rural San Joaquin County today to pull aside their tarps, descend 45 feet into the earth and resume their painstaking search for human remains.

Already, their tedious archaeological digs have unearthed more than 300 bones or bone fragments at three sites in Calaveras and San Joaquin counties, the most fruitful of which was an abandoned well east of Linden.

The discoveries could confirm what many have long suspected: The carnage left in the wake of notorious "Speed Freak Killers" Loren Herzog and Wesley Shermantine far exceeds those victims known to date.

It could be weeks or even months before authorities know how many more deaths can be attributed to the boyhood friends whose methamphetamine-fueled crime spree over two decades landed both in prison.

In the meantime, authorities have vowed that the digging will not stop until the bones stop appearing.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• The Divided Sky in Meyers celebrates its 10th anniversary Feb. 14 with a party starting at 9:30pm.

• Lake Tahoe Winterfest Gay and Lesbian Ski Week is March 4-11 on the South Shore. More information is online.

• Truckee High School Principal David Putney is retiring at the end of the school year.

• Sign-up for Little League on March 7 from 6-7:30pm at the South Lake Tahoe Ice Arena.

• Squaw Valley this month became home of the world’s first ski-in/ski-out Starbucks.

Valentine’s Day can be big business

Expressing one’s love to another is a celebrated custom on Valentine’s Day; whereby sweethearts and family members present gifts to one another, such as cards, candy, flowers and other symbols of affection. Opinions differ as to who was the original Valentine, but the most popular theory is that he was a clergyman who was executed for secretly marrying couples in ancient Rome.

In A.D. 496, Pope Gelasius I declared Feb. 14 as Valentine Day. Esther Howland, a native of Massachusetts, is given credit for selling the first mass-produced valentine cards in the 1840s. The spirit continues today with even young children exchanging valentine’s cards with their classmates.

California in 2009 led the nation in the number of chocolate and cocoa manufacturing establishments, with 135, followed by Pennsylvania, with 111, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Total value of shipments in 2009 for firms producing chocolate and cocoa products was $12.6 billion. Non-chocolate confectionery product manufacturing was a $7.4 billion industry

In 2010, Americans ate 24.7 pound of candy per capita.

The combined wholesale value of domestically produced cut roses in 2010 for all operations with $100,000 or more in sales was $17 million.

In February 2011, U.S. jewelry stores sold $2.27 billion in merchandise.

The number of marriages performed in Nevada during 2009 was 108,150. So many couples tie the knot in the Silver State that it ranked fifth nationally in marriages, even though its total population that year among states was 35th. California ranked first in marriages.

The number of dating service establishments nationwide as of 2007 was 393. These establishments, which include Internet dating services, employed 3,125 people and pulled in $928 million in revenue.