Star Wars lands at Sierra with park for little snowboarders

By Kathryn Reed

TWIN BRIDGES – Sierra-at-Tahoe has put the force of Burton and Lucas Films behind its kids' learn to snowboard program.

Four-year-old Elliana zips away from Jar Jar Binks headed toward Chewbacca. It doesn't take her long before she is riding without any assistance.

"Dropping in," she says as she whizzes down the subtle decline.



Yoda's Riglet Park at Sierra is designed to teach 3- to 6-year-olds how to snowboard. Photos/Kathryn Reed

There isn't anything about the sport and Yoda's Riglet Park that she doesn't like. She even likes jumping. But the 180s come with a little assistance. Instructor Alexis Fleming lifts Elliana up by the strap on the back of her bib to twist her

around. Still, it gives her the feel for what it's like to get a little air and go from regular to goofy foot.

"Here, there are so many more options," Fleming said in comparison to the magic carpet. "It helps kids because they stay more engaged."

She said youngsters learn more in such a fun atmosphere and that they seem not to notice they are in a lesson instead of a theme park. But with a storm trooper standing guard and Yoda welcoming the youngsters, it does feel more like a play area than a ski center.

However, when Fleming tells one of her charges the reason she is on her knees is because she needs more weight on her toes, it becomes obvious this all-day class is focused on teaching youngsters to snowboard.

Yoda's Riglet Park is the combination of Burton wanting to tap into a market that is often ignored (3- to 6-year-olds), using the snowboard company's technology, and Lucas Films' wanting to engage the next generation of Star Wars fans. The film company, whose headquarters are in Marin County, also wanted a local ski area to work with. Burton and Sierra have had a partnership for years.

With "Jedi Knights" coming to theaters Feb. 10, it's timely of Sierra to launch its other-worldly training facility. Folks from Burton and people affiliated with the Star Wars films will be at the resort Feb. 17 for the grand opening of the park. By then the audio features should be installed.

But some people wanted to learn this weekend instead of waiting for the crowds of Presidents Day weekend.

Kristi Verma is standing outside the fenced-in area watching her 4-year-old son, Ahren, slide across the white stuff. While the kid from Sacramento didn't say much during the lesson because he was focused on the job at hand, his mom said all he

could talk about on the way up Saturday was learning to snowboard.

With the X Games just last month, this is also fueling the enthusiasm to learn to board. Who knows, maybe one of these snowboarders will be the next to score a 10 in superpipe.

Pato Bicens is working with 5-year-old Jayden of South Lake Tahoe in the “superpipe” area. He’s able to pull her via the riglet at the top of the board from the bottom of the pipe to the top. The riglet is the device at the top of the board instructors use to pull little ones that helps them with balance as well as making it more realistic instead of pushing them along. The pipe, while it does have visible contours, is miniature like everything for this size and age group.

But what could not be scaled down are the Star Wars figurines. Sculptor Bob King of Washington had to carve the wooden items to the same specs as they are seen in the movies.

Much of the park was built from downed trees at the resort, with a portable mill being brought in to cut the wood.

Before getting on the snow the newbies enter the Padawan Center. In Star Wars lore a Padawan is the first step to being a Jedi Warrior.

One wall has Yoda overseeing the training of a young Luke Skywalker.

Each young Padawan is given a fighter vest. Older warriors wear an R2-D2 vest. All have a light saber – though no one was dueling on the snow Saturday.

In the center they stand on a skateboard-like device that shows instructors which foot they put forward first (left = regular, right = goofy), and to test their balance on a stable surface.

Then it’s off to Yoda’s Riglet Park.

The idea is if the little ones get the hang of it, by the afternoon they could be on the mountain in Burton's Progression Park off Easy Rider. Classes usually don't have more than four kids per instructor, so there is lots of quality time.

Most classes are all day, though half-day afternoon sessions are available. Three-day and 10-day learning packages are also available.

Susan Wood contributed to this story.

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Artist brings life to inanimate objects

MEYERS – A reception with empty glasses. Some on the walls. Some on the table. Some in people's hands.

The gathering Saturday night at Bona Fide HQ was to show off the artwork of Kit Night.

Glassware is a common theme throughout her paintings.



Artist Kit Night, right,

talks to people Feb. 4 about her artwork. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Night's website says, "It's a great vehicle for me to explore the dynamics of space: flattened abstraction, reeling distortion through refraction, a line or a plane rushing backward in space. I like the combination of hard surface and liquid movement. It's like a dance of light."

That dance of light is evident in many of her pieces.

Dozens of people attended the Feb. 4 reception for this South Lake Tahoe painter who works almost exclusively in oils.

The images will remain at Bona Fide (1069 Magua St., No. 4, Meyers) throughout February. Everything on display is for sale.

– Kathryn Reed

Romney easily wins Nevada caucus

By Mark Z. Barabak, Los Angeles Times

LAS VEGAS – Mitt Romney spent years cultivating voters in Nevada, and it paid off with a commanding victory that not only pushed him closer to the GOP nomination but laid a strong marker in a state both parties will fight to carry in

November.

Romney also won the Nevada caucuses in 2008, one of the few impressive performances of his failed bid for the Republican presidential nomination, and he never really stopped campaigning here. The only question was whether Romney on Saturday would top the 51% he received four years ago; he was winning just less than that in early returns.



Mitt Romney

Trailing far behind were former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and Rep. Ron Paul of Texas, who were locked in a fight for second. Former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, who eked out a win in Iowa but has faded since, was a distant fourth.

“Thank you, guys. What a great showing,” an exuberant Romney told supporters Saturday night in Las Vegas, as they waved white-and-blue placards reading, “Nevada believes.”

“This is not the first time you gave me your vote of confidence,” he said, “and this time I’m going to take it all the way to the White House.”

Gingrich, at a late-night news conference, said he would stay in the race until the late-summer national party convention.

Read the whole story

South Lake Tahoe Health Connective looking for members

Licensed natural health care practitioners in the South Shore are being invited to join a free networking/referral group to help promote their practices and the benefits of natural health care to the community.

The group is called South Lake Tahoe Health Connective. It is being spearheaded by Mandy Kendall.

Email mandykendall1@gmail.com for more information or go online to sign up.

El Dorado County public health director quitting

By Brad Branan, Sacramento Bee

El Dorado County's public health officer is expected to take the same job in Sacramento County.

Olivia Kasirye has been El Dorado County's top health official since August 2009. She previously had health positions with Sacramento County.

The Sacramento County Board of Supervisors will vote on her recommended appointment Tuesday. She would fill the spot

vacated by Glennah Trochet, who was public health officer for 12 years before citing frustration over budget cuts as a reason for resigning last year.

Kasirye is board certified in public health and general preventive medicine.

On Tuesday, El Dorado County is expected to appoint an interim public health director.

Snowfest Parade in Kings Beach

The Kings Beach Snowfest Parade is March 10 from 11:30am-12:30pm.

The North Tahoe Business Association hosts this annual fun-filled event featuring entertaining entries from many local community and nonprofit organizations.

After the parade there are Snowfest activities and events.

For more information, call (530) 546.9000.

Lahontan-PG&E sign agreement to clean up toxic SoCal water

By Katie Lucia, Daily Press

HINKLEY — The regional water board signed a $3.6 million agreement with Pacific Gas & Electric on Wednesday night, dedicating half of that money to build a new water filtration system at the Hinkley School.

The settlement was concerning PG&E's violation of their cleanup order requiring them to contain the rapidly growing plume of water that's contaminated by chromium 6, a cancer-causing metal, said Lauri Kemper, assistant executive officer of the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board.

PG&E pushed to have as much of that settlement money given to the community as possible, according to company spokesman Jeff Smith. They decided on a water system for the school after community members voiced concerns about the facility's quality of water. Currently PG&E supplies bottled water to the school to address those concerns.

"It's good to see the school got (that money) so they can put a new water system up there and take care of the kids," said Hinkley resident Jim Dodd, who serves on the community advisory committee. "It's just nice to see something getting done."

Barstow Unified School District Interim Superintendent Jeff Malan said the district was excited about the news and looked forward to working with PG&E and the water board.

Read the whole story

Applicants sought for state internship program

College graduates with an interest in California government can take part in an internship opportunity that will allow them to help develop and implement public policy in California while they prepare for a new career.

The Capital Fellows Program provides graduates the chance to work for 10 to 11 months as a full–time staff member in a state legislative, executive, or judicial office. Fellows are typically given assignments with a significant amount of challenge and responsibility, such as analyzing legislation or regulations, communicating with groups and individuals interested in public policy, or monitoring committee or agency activity.

Anyone 20–years–old or older by Sept. 1, 2012, who has a bachelor's degree and has an interest in state government, is eligible to apply. There are no preferred majors or political affiliations. Graduate, postgraduate, and mid–career applicants are welcome. Non–U.S. citizens must provide proof of appropriate immigration status.

Fellows learn firsthand how the highest levels of state government operate and how public policy affects all Californians as well as businesses and industries that operate in the state.

For those disillusioned with government, the fellowship provides an education in what currently happens and perspectives on what needs changing.

Application materials and specific information about the

Capital Fellows Program can be found by clicking here. The postmark deadline for all 2012–13 fellowship applications is Feb. 22.

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1 killed, 2 injured in explosion at Bridgeport training center

By Tony Perry, Los Angeles Times

One person was killed and two were severely burned in an explosion Friday night at a family housing complex for Marines stationed at the Mountain Warfare Training Center at Bridgeport in the Eastern Sierra.

Thirty-eight families had to be evacuated as the blast and fire ripped through the Lincoln Military Housing Neighborhood about 8:45pm, damaging seven homes.

The explosion was apparently caused by a propane leak, Marine officials said Saturday. Names of the dead and injured were not released.

The 111-unit housing complex is in Coleville, a Mono County community about 30 miles from the Bridgeport training facility.

East Fork Fire & Paramedic District crews were sent to Highway 395 base.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Why are public lands public?

By William H. Meadows

As the Republican presidential nomination process moves on to the states of Nevada and Colorado, a new topic has arisen in a race that has already seen many twists and turns. That issue is the purpose and importance of public lands. In a recent interview with the *Reno Gazette-Journal*, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, the leading contender for the GOP nomination, was quoted as saying, in reference to the large acreage of public land in the state, “I don’t know why the government owns so much of this land.” As an organization whose mission is to protect wilderness and inspire Americans to care for our wild places, I think it is important to answer the governor’s query for all people who enjoy and benefit from our public lands.

Our public lands, which include national parks, national forests, national wildlife refuges and national wilderness areas, among others, are vital to America’s economy. Through recreation, such as hunting, fishing and hiking, and tourism, our public lands contribute over $1 trillion to the nation, not to mention millions of jobs.

Public lands provide much of our clean drinking water and without protection, much of it might be contaminated. Our public lands have also played an extremely important role in energy development, and the economic importance that comes with it. Oil and gas exploration could not have exploded the way it did during the early 20th century without our public lands, and now as we move forward in the 21st century, public

lands can help us advance renewable energy development. Public lands provide some of the best places in the world for solar and wind energy and the energy self-dependence that the United States needs.

William H. Meadows is the president of The Wilderness Society.

Read the whole story