Reno Aces to host Triple-A All-Star Game in ’13

By Chris Gabel, Reno Gazette-Journal

They built the stadium. They drew the crowds. They won a division title.

Now the Aces – and the city of Reno – are to be rewarded.

The Aces on Tuesday officially announced the “least best-kept secret” in town: Reno will host the Triple-A All-Star Game in 2013.

Stuart Katzoff, Aces managing partner, sat on a stage inside the Aces Ballpark home clubhouse with other local and Triple-A dignitaries for the announcement, which came as a surprise to no one. The Aces long wanted to host the nationally televised game since they arrived in Reno in 2008. The RGJ in July reported the franchise was a strong candidate to host the 2013 game.

But the team waited until Tuesday to let the cat out of bag, prompting Branch Rickey, Pacific Coast League president, to call it the “least best-kept secret in recent years.”

“We didn’t want to come out and announce it until we had everything in motion and everything planned,” Katzoff said.

The three-day event, July 8-10, that also includes a home run derby and fan fest, as well as league meetings, galas and other events, will bring a significant number of out-of-town visitors to Reno, Katzoff, Rickey and Reno Mayor Bob Cashell said.

Read the whole story

Sierra sending 3 athletes to X Games

Turn on ESPN this weekend and chances are good an athlete from Sierra-at-Tahoe will be on the slopes competing at the Winter X Games in Aspen.



Riders looking to podium at Winter X are:

Jamie Anderson – Widely considered the best female slopestyle snowboarder in the world, she has won slopestyle gold at Winter X Games twice and was the youngest Winter X gold medalist ever in 2007. She earned a bronze in 2011.

Hannah Teter – An Olympic gold and silver medalist and five-time Winter X medalist, including one gold, Teter has her sights set on the podium in the women's snowboarding superpipe event.

Maddie Bowman – Coming off a first place at Dew Tour in Killington, Vt., this month, Bowman is quickly becoming recognized as one of the top female superpipe skiers in the world. An alternate last season, this will mark her second appearance at Winter X Games.

Steinberg: Redevelopment agencies won’t be resurrected

By Torey Van Oot, Sacramento Bee

Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg said today that he believes an effort to extend the life of local redevelopment agencies through April 15 is “not going to happen.”

Legislation to that effect, Senate Bill 659 by Democratic Sen. Alex Padilla, faces a Tuesday deadline for winning passage in the state Assembly, in addition to the planned Feb. 1 date of closure for the agencies

“I’m skeptical,” Steinberg said. “I think the speaker is skeptical, and the governor is dead set against the bill. The focus needs to be on recreating a new set of economic development tools for cities and not on trying to keep alive the current form.”

The Legislature axed the agencies, which subsidize local projects in blighted areas, and created a new redevelopment entity as part of last year’s budget package. But the state Supreme Court ruled in December in response to a legal challenge to the move that while the Legislature had the power to dissolve the agencies, the replacement organizations could not stand.

Read the whole story

Wandering wolf tracked to same area as California's last wild wolf

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

California's new wild wolf resident generally has been on the move since arriving one month ago. But the wolf known as OR7 has spent a lot of time lately in the same region where the state's last known wild wolf was killed in 1924.

That would be an area north of Honey Lake in southeastern Lassen County. A trapper killed what is thought to be the state's last known wild wolf in that area, near the town of Litchfield, in 1924.

That wolf was emaciated. At 56 pounds, it was half a normal wolf's weight. It was also missing part of a hind leg, likely from escaping a prior trapping attempt.

OR7's lingering in the area is likely coincidence, experts said, though it may point to something in a wolf's habitat preferences.

Read the whole story

Arbor Week contests for students, photograhpers

Two statewide contests are being conducted to celebrate California Arbor Week (March 7-14), a statewide celebration of

trees.

These contests are designed to increase awareness of and appreciation for the trees and forests in the communities where Californians live, work and play. Winners will be featured at the State Fair and awarded cash prizes.

Third, fourth, and fifth grade students throughout California are invited to participate in the California Arbor Week Poster Contest. The contest titled Growing Happy Communities is designed to increase the student's knowledge of the important roles of trees and the many benefits they provide to our communities. In addition to contest rules and entry forms, the contest information packet includes curriculum for three lessons.

Entries are due Feb. 1.

All Californians are invited to participate in the inaugural year of the California Arbor Week Photography Contest. The contest is designed to highlight the broad diversity of tree species, settings, and landscapes throughout our state, in locations urban and rural, large and small. Photographs may be entered in two categories: My Favorite California Tree or Trees Where I Live. Entries are due March 31.

Contest information packets can be downloaded.

Attorney who made tribes rich

comes under fire

By Dale Kasler and Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

He started out in a tent at the reservation at Wounded Knee, S.D., an idealistic young lawyer defending Indians' rights. He evolved into a champion for Indian casinos – a towering political figure who cut deals with California governors and helped give birth to a $7 billion-a-year industry.

Sacramento attorney Howard Dickstein has made his tribal clients rich. He's largely responsible for creating three of the region's top casinos: Jackson Rancheria, Cache Creek and the stunningly successful Thunder Valley resort near Lincoln.

After nearly 40 years representing tribes, however, Dickstein is a polarizing figure. His negotiating tactics have angered some tribes, and he is often depicted as a controlling presence who meddles in tribal affairs.

For the second time in four years, he is facing bitter accusations of gaining vast personal wealth at the expense of unsophisticated clients.

Two banned members of the United Auburn Indian Community, which owns Thunder Valley, have accused Dickstein of duping the tribe into paying his firm $26 million in fees over six years.

Most of the money – about $23 million – came through a fee arrangement that, until 2009, gave Dickstein's firm 2 percent of the tribe's share of Thunder Valley's profits. Legal experts and rival tribal lawyers say they have never heard of such an arrangement.

Dickstein said there was nothing wrong with it – and that he's worth every penny.

"A tribe's financial relationship with me is a phenomenal net

benefit to the tribe," he said.

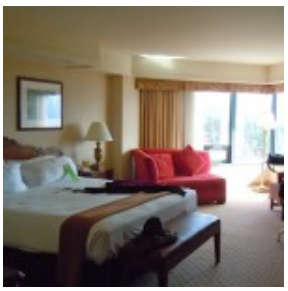
Read the whole story

Maids at 2 Stateline casinos let go; offered jobs with Fla. firm

By Kathryn Reed

Caesars Entertainment will be outsourcing its housekeeping departments at its Lake Tahoe and Reno properties starting Feb. 1.

The Service Companies will take over the operation, having already done so at other properties owned by the world's largest gaming company and having plans to do so at others later this year.



The same people will be cleaning rooms at Harveys; they just won't be Harveys'

employees.
Photo/LTN file

A handful of housekeeping employees contacted by *Lake Tahoe News* on Jan. 25 were not aware of the changes, even though it was announced to staff last week.

The nearly 200 housekeeping employees at Harrah's Lake Tahoe and Harveys and 84 in Reno all have been offered jobs with The Services Company, a Florida-based firm that specializes in all things cleaning.

John Packer, spokesman for the Northern Nevada properties, said 40 employees would be getting a raise because TSC has a higher minimum wage than the casino company.

He said the head of housekeeping has signed on with TSC, as have many of the team leaders, so the rank and file will likely have the same boss.

TSC did not return a phone call. It's not known if benefits are better or worse, or if employees will get the same number of hours they are used to.

Caesars Entertainment and TSC have a long relationship. About 10 years ago they began doing the cleaning at the Stateline properties. TSC also has contracts with MGM, Ritz Carlton and Hyatt properties.

Packer said hotel guests should not notice any changes.

"It's extremely important to us that guests still have a great experience," Packer said. He said of the 40-plus properties Caesars Entertainment owns, Harveys, Harrah's Lake Tahoe and Laughlin consistently receive the top marks for guest services. He expects to keep that ranking when the new housekeeping company takes over.

Gary Thompson, spokesman for the Las Vegas-based company,

would not say if more employment changes are in the works within other departments. Nor would he say exactly how many have been laid off in the last few years.

“Over the course of the past 3½ years we have reduced our overall employment across the company,” Thompson told *Lake Tahoe News*.

In 2008, private equity firms Apollo Management Group and Texas Pacific Group bought Caesars Entertainment for $30.7 billion. An IPO was planned for December 2010, but company executives stopped that from going forward because of market conditions.

An IPO is expected sometime this year.

Opinion: Accomplishments and challenges of sheriff’s department

To the citizens of El Dorado County,

The year 2011 is wrapped up, and so is my first year as your sheriff. This year end report is to provide you, the community we serve, with information outlining some of the achievements by the men and women who make up your sheriff’s office. I believe it is my obligation to keep you, as the taxpayers of

El Dorado County, informed as to the direction and accomplishments of this office.

To recap all the achievements of the last year would take up more space than I have, so I will simply highlight some of the more significant successes. Please know that the accomplishments were a result of teamwork, leadership, and action taken by all levels and divisions of the sheriff's office.

Employees and statistics



John
D'Agostini

Your sheriff's office is budgeted for 357.5 staff members, of which 159.5 are peace officers, 88 correctional staff, and 110 professional staff. Our current approved budget is $54 million. Your tax dollars support many programs, including the operation of two correctional facilities, patrol of over 1,700 square miles, the Office of Emergency Services, coroner services, civil services, court, bailiff, and transportation services, dispatch and radio communications, criminal records, boat patrol, public administration, investigations, and property and evidence.

We are very proud of the many volunteers that donate their time to make our county a better place. Our volunteer programs consist of over 600 citizens who support programs including search and rescue, S.T.A.R.S., C.E.R.T., Explorers, the air squadron, and our reserve deputies.

Concealed weapons

One of the first policies I directed be modified was the concealed weapon policy. I am a strong believer in the Constitution and the Second Amendment guaranteeing our right to keep and bear arms. The primary changes were removing the requirement for reference letters and accepting personal protection as justification of good cause for the permit. Our staff has been working hard to keep up with the applications, as we issued 844 concealed weapon permits in 2011, a 275 percent increase over the prior year.

Community outreach

In order to be better informed on the issues facing our county, as well as keep our citizens informed of the hard work accomplished by our staff, I attended and/or took part in over 600 individual meetings with citizens, service clubs, schools, and other community events in 2011.

The welfare of our children is a top priority for the sheriff’s office, and in addition to our on-going school resource officer program, our staff reinstituted the Safety Pup program. The program includes presentations at local elementary schools which reinforce safety awareness for our children.

In 2011 we published the first Sheriff’s Annual Report, which includes statistics and information concerning operations, services, and accomplishments. The statistics are eye-opening, but they also display the hard work being done every day by sheriff’s office employees, and frankly, it highlights the services you—the taxpayers—are receiving for your tax dollars. The annual report can be viewed online.

In order to improve our interaction and transparency with the public, we also have revamped the patrol Citizen Ride-Along Program. In the past, the program was restrictive as to who was allowed to ride. We made changes specifically to increase

the number of citizens allowed to take part in the program. The result has been a significant increase in participation.

This last year we had 106 citizens ride-along, a 54 percent increase over the prior year.

We have also continued the Citizen’s Academy, which is a 10-week program, designed to educate the public on the functions and responsibilities of the sheriff’s office. In order to improve access and accessibility in the El Dorado Hills area, we began staffing the El Dorado Hills Substation with our S.T.A.R.S. volunteers during normal business hours.

Crime

I strongly believe that we have a moral responsibility to provide high quality patrol and investigative services to all of our communities. Last year, at the request of our patrol staff, we changed patrol shifts to a 12-hour schedule. This schedule has reduced overtime and increased the number of deputies on patrol in your neighborhood. In order to quickly address specific crime issues we more than doubled the size of the Special Enforcement Detail, which is a team of deputies and one supervisor who ad dress specific neighborhood, community, and county-wide crime problems.

Early last year we experienced a surge in residential burglaries in the west end of the county. Our investigators proposed an action plan that included extra patrol, increased surveillance, and concentrated investigation and patrol resources. This successful process resulted in numerous suspects arrested and thousands of dollars in stolen property recovered and returned to the victims.

We have reinstituted the long dormant volunteer reserve deputy program. At this time we are in the process of hiring unpaid reserve deputies which will increase our patrol staffing as well as our presence at community events, at minimal cost to taxpayers.

It is my belief that if a citizen calls for service, they should have a deputy sheriff respond to address their problem. In the past, many citizens were referred to an online computer system to file a report. We have changed our policy so that if you want a deputy you get a deputy. The computer system is still available but only as an alternative option, as decided by the victim. It is my hope that this change will improve our knowledge of neighborhood issues and increase the number of contacts between patrol deputies and those we serve.

Internal processes

As with most organizations, I strongly believe we should listen to those who do the work by asking for their input on improving efficiency and effectiveness. Last year we conducted a confidential employee survey asking for input regarding job satisfaction, employee relations and work environment, management and supervision, ethics, fairness, standards and training and equipment. Through this survey we were able to determine things the Office does well and areas where we can improve. The response was excellent and we have made many internal policy changes based on employee recommendations. I can assure you that your sheriff’s office employees strive to provide high quality services to our communities.

Last year we implemented officewide performance expectations for every employee in the organization. The performance expectations include professional ethics, human relations, and management and supervision expectations.

Public access

We have modified office hours at our lobby reception, records, and civil sections to improve public access. In the past those services were not open during lunch or until 5pm when most business is handled.

Budget

Regarding the budget, my goals from day one have been to avoid employee layoffs and avoid any reduction in public safety services in El Dorado County. We made many changes in order to reduce costs and I am happy to report that we continue to operate within the budget established by the county. At this time we are operating at lower staff levels than we had in 2001, and continuously review each and every function we provide and prioritize it as something vital, important, or just nice to have. We are focusing on our core functions and services.

We have been able to make significant reductions in overtime organization-wide by changing schedules in our Custody and Patrol Divisions, weekly overtime reporting and justification, and reducing non-mandated training.

During the past year we reduced our overtime budget by approximately $900,000. In addition, we recently conducted an audit of cellular telephones, desk telephone lines and pagers. We identified and disconnected 96 unused cellular telephones, 70 unused pagers, 43 unused desk telephone lines, and 28 unused data lines. This will save approximately $60,000/year.

You should be aware that sheriff office employees made personal sacrifices by voluntarily reducing their benefits and increasing their county retirement costs, resulting in an approximate $1 million reduction in county costs.

We also made changes in our contract with the Superior Court, eliminating peace officers at security screening locations. We will provide highly trained “sheriff’s security officers” to do the same job at reduced costs. As a result, the sheriff’s office is able to increase the number of staff and services provided to the Superior Court without increasing costs.

Future challenges

As you may be aware the state passed AB109, which will forever change the criminal justice system in this state. The state

has passed their responsibility for housing certain inmates and supervising those released from custody to the county. This is not a good thing for El Dorado County.

Of most concern is that the state is not covering the actual costs of housing and supervising the inmates, resulting in an unfunded or under-funded state mandate. It is very possible that at some point in the near future we will reach capacity at both of our custody facilities and be forced to release inmates before their sentences are completed, impacting public safety in our county.

The sheriff’s office needs a new home. We are currently spread out in six locations and spend over $330,000 a year on leased space for our staff. We are in the process of evaluating space needs with the goals of reducing or discontinuing the use of leased space, and housing most or all sheriff’s office employees within a new facility in the future.

The sheriff’s office has outgrown the current facility, which was built over forty years ago. This situation not only increases costs for leased property, but it reduces our span of control, fragments our operation, has a negative impact on morale, reduces crime solving communication between divisions, and requires that our staff work in less than ideal conditions. A new facility will reduce county costs, increase our level of customer service, and create one location where all public services will be available to our citizens.

As we move into a new year, your sheriff’s office is committed to providing you with high quality public safety service and will be responsive to your concerns and safety needs.

As sheriff I pledge to work with you and faithfully honor the oath of office I took on Jan. 3, 2011. We must continue to work together to make El Dorado County a better and safer place to live. If you have community or public safety issues, or suggestions on how we can improve service please do not

hesitate to schedule a meeting or call me at (530) 621.6566.

In closing, I want you to know that I am privileged to serve as your sheriff and would like to thank you for your continued support of our sheriff's office.

John D'Agostini, sheriff-coroner of El Dorado County

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• TAMBA has a mountain bike photo contest going on through March 31. Contest details are online.

According to the National Chicken Council, 1.25 billion chicken wings will be consumed during Super Bowl weekend.

• *The Weekly* is having a 30th birthday bash on Feb. 11 from 5-8pm at GarWoods in Carnelian Bay.

• Squaw Valley is second most expensive ski resort in the United States, according to a survey compiled by Cheaphotels.org. Deer Valley is No. 1 and Aspen is No. 3.

• Saint Mary's Regional Medical Center in Reno now has the name Dignity Health. Most of the nuns will be replaced with lay people.

RAOK: A clear driveway creates neighborhood bond

A theme seems to be developing with Random Acts of Kindness – snow.

Rebecca Wass is *Lake Tahoe News'* latest Random Acts of Kindness winner for recognizing the efforts a neighbor puts forth in helping keep her driveway clear of snow. She will be receiving two books that Bona Fide Books in Meyers has published.



Random Acts of Kindness is January's promotion on *Lake Tahoe News* that is all about spreading kindness. We want people to do kind things and recognize. Right about those RAOKs at the bottom of each story that will be posted for the rest of the month.

Winners are picked randomly. Everyone receives a gift from one of the kind businesses that have donated to RAOK.

There are a few rules associated with Random Acts of Kindness. If you want to read them, check out this story.