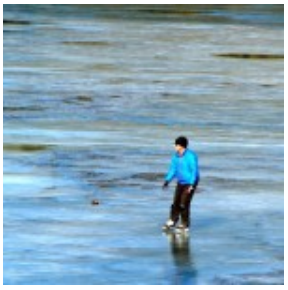
Lack of snow not a total loss for outdoor enthusiasts in Tahoe

By Susan Voyles, Reno Gazette-Journal

Dave Murray, an avid skier and author of the best-selling book "Plan B," jokes that he has put his strategies to work in challenging the mountains at Squaw Valley USA, where only man-made snow exists.

He hits the few open slopes early in the morning at the Tahoe resort to take advantage of the best ski conditions. Then, on Thursday, he put on shorts, boots and a backpack to climb its landmark butte near the tram.



Frozen lakes in the Sierra are giving ice skaters a chance to get out. Photo/LTN

Murray and friend Sarah Lindquist made an odd pair as they stood near Squaw's ski loading stations to size up which side of the butte to climb.

"This is usually what I do in the summer," said Murray, an Olympic Valley resident of his rock-climbing venture.

A few minutes later, Mary McNally of Sacramento arrived at the same plaza with her three children and Tahoe Adventure Co. guide Kevin Hickey – all on bicycles.

“We were supposed to go on a snowshoeing tour,” McNally said, with a laugh.

With not enough natural snow to scrape together a snowman, people are finding new winter pastimes at Lake Tahoe. And that’s helping fill rooms and breakfast nooks.

Golfers can be seen at the Old Brockway Golf Course. Ice skating on small, frozen alpine lakes has become a new craze. And bicyclists and walkers tread along Lake Tahoe and Truckee River trails as they do in the summer. Paddle boaters and kayakers are even out.

But overall, there are deep worries that a continued dry spell could ruin the ski season.

The ski business over the holidays was down 45 percent to 50 percent, said Rob Roberts, California Ski Industry Association president, saying this has been the driest start since the winter of 1995-96.

But unlike the past, Roberts said, California resorts are in the snow-making business. And he said more than 450,000 season ski lift passes were sold this year to California resorts, and the people who bought them won’t let them go to waste.

California ski resorts drew 7.6 million visits to major resorts last season, the association reports. That’s $700 million in direct visitor spending and a total economic impact estimated at $3 billion.

Read the whole story

Daylight saving time

It’s time to turn the clock forward one hour as people return to daylight saving time.

Lake Tahoe real estate market starting to stabilize

Year-end home sales at Lake Tahoe are holding steady compared to 2010 with some indicators on the rise, according to a quarterly report released by Lake Tahoe-based real estate firm Chase International, which notes a 1 percent increase in units sold around the lake.



The National Association of Realtors recently reported that existing home sales rose again in November and remain above a year ago, and the latest Tahoe housing market sales figures concur with this national trend.

While real estate sales and prices took a slight dip around the lake overall, the East Shore market segment saw a 1 percent increase in median home price ($575,000) and a 35-percent jump in average price ($1,286,924). Volume sold on the East Shore was up 26 percent, while the number of units was down 7 percent.

Although the number of units sold is up slightly, the median

price of a home in Lake Tahoe is down 13 percent to $365,000 from 2010’s year-end numbers. The average home price fell 14 percent to $607,683.

“It definitely is still a buyers’ market as average and median prices have continued to fall but with units sold rising we believe the market is strengthening,” Sue Lowe, corporate vice president for Chase International, said in a statement.

Deb Howard of South Lake Tahoe-based Deb Howard & Co. expects a “new normal” market to appear this year.

“I’m cautiously optimistic to report that the industry leaders at (California Association of Realtors) and (National Association of Realtors) are predicting that during the next year we will experience modest increases in median home price with continued increases in home sales as well,” Howard said. “In the forecast for the Lake Tahoe South Shore: Stabilization of median home prices; steady increase in home sales; and improving consumer confidence will be felt in response to the ‘bottom of the market’ data.”

Truckee saw a 2 percent increase in units sold and a 17 percent rise in units sold for less than a million. The median price of a home in Truckee is $438,166 (down 10 percent) and the average price is $562,811 (also down 10 percent).

The condominium market around Lake Tahoe experienced a 6 percent decline over 2010 in units sold. However, for units sold for more than $500,000, a notable 29 percent jump occurred. Tahoe City experienced the most pronounced increase in sales over 2010 sales figures, with a 3 percent rise in units sold and up 50 percent in units sold for over $500,000. South Lake Tahoe saw a 21 percent increase in overall volume sold, with median and average prices rising 14 and 69 percent, respectively. The median price of a condo in Lake Tahoe is $262,000 (down 8 percent) and the average price is $348,868 (down 12 percent).

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Opinion: Preschool prepares kids for the classroom

By Vicki Barber

Debates continue about whether or not preschool is important for children. For some of us, it’s not a debate; we know it works for children. Two states in the nation, Georgia and Oklahoma, have mandated preschool programs and have consistently shown that preschool gives children a jump start in their learning. California has not yet decided preschool is a major player in education, but El Dorado County knows it is important.

So what’s so special about preschool that can’t be accomplished at home? Most activities of preschool can be accomplished at home with a dedicated mom or dad who is willing to spend time talking, playing, showing, teaching, and demonstrating how the world works. Preparing to read requires a great deal of language development, including such activities as stories, nature walks, and playtime. Some families are geared toward providing just this kind of support for their little ones. However, there are many more families who may not be in a position to provide the structured support that creates a strong learning environment for their voracious learners.



Vicki Barber

High quality preschool does provide the support and opportunities a child needs to develop the language skills necessary for reading and counting. It provides for nature walks and interactive play with others. Here's what I mean: A child comes to preschool knowing the word "fish." A family might use the word "fishy" for anything in the water. It's easy and logical and fun, so fishy it is. Guppies are fish, tadpoles are fish, crawdads are fish, sharks are fish, and so on. Inadvertently, in our desire to keep things simple for a child's understanding, we often do not use the language that truly describes the thing that is in the water.

A child doesn't know all those other names for fish unless we use the words. Preschool uses the words. "Here's the guppy. See the crawdad. There's a picture of a shark. It's much larger than the guppy."

Now the child is getting more words and a much broader picture of "fish." The wonderful news about this oral language development is that it directly translates into reading. When the child who has these experiences learns to read the word guppy, he or she now has a picture in mind of what a guppy looks like. The same thing happens with a crawdad or a shark. Without these language connections, the child only knows "fish."

Reading becomes a problem when he sounds out the word gu-pp-y only to be left with a blank space in his mind because there is nothing, no picture with which he can connect the word.

Language development in these early years is a major key to reading. Families and preschools can support this development every day simply by asking the question, “What’s in my world that my children and I can talk about today?”

Vicki Barber is superintendent of El Dorado County Office of Education.

RAOK: An honest clerk sets the tone for the day

Just being honest can make a person’s day. It made Jenny Anderson’s.



She is *Lake Tahoe News’* latest Random Acts of Kindness winner. But she is giving her prize to the clerk, Jared, who helped her. Weidinger Public Relations is arranging for him to play a round of golf at Edgewood Tahoe.

Random Acts of Kindness are selfless acts performed randomly. They occur every day. *Lake Tahoe News* wants to tell the world about them. That’s what this promotion through the month of January is all about – promoting kindness.

Tell us about the Random Act of Kindness you did, witnessed or received at the bottom of this story to be considered for tomorrow’s prize.

For more details about Random Acts of Kindness and the few rules associated with it, check out this story.

Author to tell stories about Lake Tahoe

Scott Lankford, author of “Tahoe Beneath the Surface: The Hidden Stories of America’s Largest Mountain Lake”, speaks about his book on Feb. 15 from 6-7pm.

The event is at Explore Tahoe: An Urban Trailhead, 4114 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

A $5 donation is requested. A $5 flat rate is offered in the Heavenly Village Parking Garage after 4pm.

For more information, call (530) 542.4637.

S. Tahoe library bridging the digital divide

The South Lake Tahoe Branch library is hosting free individual training sessions for many popular digital devices including laptops, tablets, iPads, Kindles and Nooks.

Each sessions is 30 minutes and are available from 10am to 4pm on Jan. 21, Jan. 28 and Feb. 4.

Call (530) 573.3185 for more information or to register for an appointment.

The library is located at 1000 Rufus Allen Blvd. in South Lake Tahoe.

Conditioning is first step to preventing knee injuries

By Kathryn Reed

Most people don't give tips for how not to visit their business. But that's exactly what doctors Terry Orr and Jonathan Finnoff did.

In a 90-minute presentation last week, the two did a tag-team lecture about Ski and Snowboard Injury Awareness before more than 30 people at Lake Tahoe Community College. Working in the field of orthopedics through Barton Health and both being affiliated with the U.S. Ski Team, these two know how to help people stay out of the operating room as well as what to do if someone needs that level of care.

For every 1,000 skiers on the slopes, one person will hurt her knee. Half of those injuries will be to the MCL or medial collateral ligament, while a third are to the ACL or anterior cruciate ligament.



Jonathan Finnoff with

Tahoe Center for Orthopedics talks about knee injuries. Photo/LTN

Of the quarter million ACL injuries each year, most are non-contact.

“Most of the time it’s someone running or landing in a jump,” Finnoff said. “One out of 10 collegiate female athletes will tear their ACL.”

Women are more apt to have an ACL injury than a man. Part of it has to do with women having smaller ACLs, but Finnoff also said research also shows there are “tons of hormone receptors in the ACL.”

Pre-puberty boys and girls tend to jump from a box and land with their knees going in. This is hard on the joint. Post-puberty, guys tend to land with their knees in alignment with the rest of their body. Not so for gals; they are still turning their knees in.

This is another contributing factor to why women have more ACL injuries. However, if they go through proper training, they can learn how to land a jump in a way that will be less impactful to their knees.

Prevention comes via core stability, endurance and strength training. A dynamic warm up is suggested, but static stretches should be avoided before athletic activity.

While everyone laughed when the doctors pointed out the irony of someone saying they got hurt on the last run of the day, the truth is fatigue plays a role.

This is why preseason conditioning is so important. Knees take

a beating on the slopes. If the muscles surrounding them aren't strong, they will be more susceptible to being hurt.

Ligaments, they said, are like ropes. If they exceed their tension limit, they snap. People can hear and feel when a ligament tears.

"One of the busiest times for us with knee injures is April with the variable conditions," Orr said. "Be aware of what you are skiing on and use caution when we have conditions like we have now."

It's days where ice, slush and ideal conditions are all on one run that can pose risks. Skis can jerk or slide, causing knees to twist.

A quick anatomy lesson was given – bone, cartilage, ligaments, muscles and tendons. Pictures of what an intact knee looks like compared to one with torn ligaments were shown.

But it's not just knees theses docs worry about.

"You need to armor-up," Orr said. "I'm surprised by how many people don't wear a helmet. It doesn't make sense."

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The Jan. 5 lecture is one in a series Barton Health is putting on. Details about the free upcoming lectures are online.

June trial date set for

former Placerville mayor

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

Placerville's former Mayor David Machado is scheduled to go on trial June 5 on charges relating to his property dealings in the city.

The date was set Friday by El Dorado Superior Court Judge James Wagoner after the defense suggested a date after May and the prosecutor requested something on or before June 4.

"Stop, everybody," Wagoner told prosecutor Michael Pizzuti and Machado's defense attorney, James S. Clark. "We have to be realistic in our estimations."

The attorneys agreed to June 5.

Machado has been accused of performing unpermitted work on several properties and covering up ownership of one property.

Read the whole story

County education council needs one more member

El Dorado County Early Care and Education Planning Council is accepting applications for board membership to fill a vacancy. The vacancy is for a provider representative, which is defined as someone who provides care and education services for children.

The 15-member council is a legislatively mandated body

advising the county Board of Supervisors and county superintendent of schools on early care and education program and policy issues. The council provides input on research and analysis, makes recommendations to the California Department of Education on funding priorities for subsidized child care and development programs, and coordinates countywide early care and education projects.

Applicants must submit cover sheet, application, and supplemental application to Elizabeth Blakemore, 6767 Green Valley Road, Placerville, CA 95667. Prospective candidates can call (530) 295.2312 or email eblakemore@edcoe.org for an application packet and additional information.

The deadline for applications is Feb. 10 at 5pm.