California wine grape harvest 9% less than 2010

By Chris Macias, Sacramento Bee

After a second year of unseasonably cool temperatures, the grape tonnage has been tallied and the results are ready. According to the California Department of Food and Agriculture, 3.3 million tons of wine grapes were harvested in the 2011 growing season, a 9 percent drop from the previous year.

That’s not too much of a surprise considering the cold shoulder that Mother Nature gave to Northern California this year, with its wet spring and temperate summer. The grape harvest started about three weeks late in Lodi, with growers hoping for warm weather to help their grapes reach ripeness.

This year’s total pales compared with 2009, when 3.7 million tons of grapes were harvested – the second largest amount in California’s history. But as the saying goes, good things come in small packages.

Read the whole story

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2 wildland fires burning on West Slope of El Dorado

County

Updated Dec. 22 9:35pm: Both fires have been extinguished.

By Kathryn Reed

Two fires are burning this morning in the Eldorado National Forest. The smaller of the two is near Kyburz and is visible as people drive along Highway 50. The other is in the Georgetown Ranger District near Nevada Point Ridge.

Winds knocked down power lines, igniting the fire in the American River Canyon, according to Frank Mosbacher, spokesman for the U.S. Forest Service.

“This is the time of year when wind would have an influence on fire, but fuels are moist and temperatures are low,” Mosbacher told *Lake Tahoe News* at 10:15am Dec. 22. “There are a lot of things working in the favor of firefighters. We don’t anticipate it getting much bigger.”

The fire had burned a little more than a quarter-acre, staying on the ground, and was not expected to get much bigger before firefighters put it out. A delay in dousing all the flames was because crews had to wait for PG&E to cut power to the fallen lines.

The California Highway Patrol evacuated one resident in the area before firefighters arrived. He has since been allowed to return.

Firefighters were also working a 9-acre blaze on the West Slope near Nevada Point Ridge.

Youth loved being on slopes; chairlift fall remains under investigation

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

He was 7 years old and loved to ski, a child described as simply “happy out on the slopes.”

Now members of the Sugar Bowl Ski Team are being comforted by grief counselors and are offering their own condolences and support to the family of John Henderson, who was a second-grader at North Davis Elementary School.

The boy, a member of the ski team, fell Sunday from a chairlift he was riding with two of his teammates. He died two days later, after surgery at Renown Medical Center in Reno, according to officials of the resort and its ski team. What caused the boy to fall from the lift, in what ski industry officials described as an exceptionally rare accident, remained under investigation Wednesday.

His death brought heartbreak to the 400-member Sugar Bowl Ski Team, which offers programs for youths 5 to 18.

“We’re a close community, and we’re devastated for John and his family,” said Bill Hudson, the ski team’s executive director. “We’re really just focusing on what we can do as a community to support them at this time.”

John Henderson was in his second year with the ski team. The boy was an avid mountain enthusiast, whom Hudson described as “an excellent skier” who could “ski any run on the mountain.”

“I’m not sure how many years he had skied, but he was quite proficient,” Hudson said.

The boy was the son of Mark Henderson, associate dean of the medical school at UC Davis, and Helen Chew, leader of the UC Davis Cancer Center clinical breast cancer program.

Read the whole story

History: Amundsons reflect on a time gone by

Publisher’s note: ***This is printed from the Lake Tahoe Historical Society’s 1977 fall quarterly newsletter.***

There was a time, the Amundsons remember, when bears walked down the Tahoe streets.



In 1946, when Patricia Amundson moved to the South Shore’s Al Tahoe area, she recalls, “The mountain lions would still come down to the meadow and in the fall, usually when you would have the first dusting of snow, you could hear them screaming.”

Then, there was that fierce winter of ’51. There were about 400 people snowed in at the south end of the lake then.

“I was snowed in with the kids by myself for ten days,” continues Patricia. “People didn’t get so perturbed about it because you planned on it. You bought groceries once a month. You always had candles and you always had wood. People have very fond memories of that winter because you couldn’t go anywhere, and they would walk over the snow and have a party

at somebody’s home, or a pot luck.”

The Amundsons are long-time residents of Tahoe. Glenn Amundson was born in Montana but in 1932, when he was 16 years old, he, his dad, and his brothers lived at Tahoe one summer to work in the tree surgery business.

“We had a contract,” he says, “for clearing four acres at Fallen Leaf Lake. They were going to burn all the timber, so we asked them if we could have it to build a log cabin. We had the selection of any of the logs we wanted.”

About 80 of the biggest and best logs were chosen to build the house in which the Amundsons still live. “Everything you see cut here,” says Glenn, pointing to the 24 rafters, “was cut by hand. They never even heard of a chain saw in those days.”

In the ’30s, says Glenn, “We had our choice of any lot in this two block area. At that time you would have to ski down to get your groceries. They wouldn’t even plow the road out in the winter.”

Even years later, says Patricia, “When you heard a car turn off the road, you knew it was for you because you were the only person who lived on the street. And when the snowplow came – it didn’t make any difference what time of day or night it was – you would always have a pot of coffee on and some cookies, and you would holler to the fellows on the snowplow, ‘Want a cup of coffee?’ and they would come in and think nothing of it.”

Glenn now runs a pier construction company where his son also works. The Amundsons feel it was good for their two children to be raised in Tahoe. “They were outside all the time,” says Patricia. “They learned to entertain themselves. The kids learned to swim, loved the mountains, loved just to wander, just to see. I think both of the youngsters are very observant people.”

“You learn,” she adds, “not to total out your home, and that’s what these mountains are. In other words, you don’t destroy what you live in. Our kids, if they went hiking, and if there was trash, they hauled it back. All these mountains are their backyard. This is the thing that bothers youngsters who have been raised up here – to see what other people, who have not learned to love it and cherish it, do to it.”

About today’s tourist-bustling Tahoe, Patricia says, “You don’t like to see it grow, but it cant’ stand still.”

There was a time when the Amundsons never locked their front door. Now they have to. “We’ve had things taken right out of our front yard,” says Patricia. “We had a goofy looking ceramic frog,” adds Glenn, “and somebody stole it. Imagine stealing something as worthless as that.”

But, they stress, they are still very happy at Tahoe. Says Glenn, “I wouldn’t live any place else.”

Observes Patricia, “Many years ago somebody said very facetiously that the people who lived at Tahoe were the people who were misfits and couldn’t live anywhere else. Maybe so. I’m speaking primarily of people who have lived here a long time. They are maybe more individualists. They were more capable of doing and thinking for themselves.”

– Gail Bernice Sullivan, reprinted from the San Francisco Examiner.

Opinion: Donation keeps doors open at Austin’s House

To the community,

Austin’s House recently received a fantastic donation of $65,000 from Patty Clark, founder of the Austin Kirby Foundation. Patty and her colleagues at Century 21 Clark Properties work vigorously the entire year to raise donations for Austin’s House with fundraisers and direct requests.

The Austin Kirby Foundation is the largest single donor for Austin’s House. The nonprofit emergency shelter home is named in honor of Patty’s grandson, Austin Kirby.

The generosity of our community built Austin’s House and continues to sustain it through donations of cash, food, clothing and other basic necessities. Austin’s House is the only emergency children’s shelter in rural Northern Nevada. The children are placed at Austin’s House after being removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect. These children have no place else to go. Austin’s House provides the basic living necessities including proper nutrition, hygiene, rest, nurturing, recreation, companionship, education, and life skills training. Austin’s House has cared for more than 200 children since opening in September 2007.

Thanks to the community and individuals like Patty Clark, the staff at Austin’s House will continue to provide compassionate care for the children in crisis who need it the most. If you would like to know more about the Austin Kirby Foundation, please contact Patty Clark at (775) 782.7111.

Conrad Buedel, Austin’s House

Post offices to be closed Monday of holiday weekends

All post offices will be open Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve. The normal Saturday hours at each location will apply.

In observance of the holidays, post offices will be closed Dec. 26 and Jan. 2. With the exception of Express Mail, there will be no delivery on those days.

South Dakota buffalo ranchers serving up what people want

By Charles Michael Ray, NPR

2011 wasn’t a banner year for the stock market, and anyone heavily invested in the Euro zone might be biting their nails right now. But if your business is buffalo, you may be looking at some very happy holidays.

The buffalo market is booming. Look no further than the buffalo ambling across the wide open South Dakota prairie munching on grass as they go. Bison raised on grass don’t

require corn or grains to fatten up. That's part of why they're seen by many as better for the environment.

Dan O'Brien is the founder of the Wild Idea Buffalo Company. He raises free range, grass-fed bison near the South Dakota Badlands. O'Brien says the market for buffalo is exploding. "We've put 10 people to work during this recession – this horrible recession we're going through – and that makes me feel like we're moving the ball a little bit up the field here," says O'Brien.

This year O'Brien opened a new processing plant to package and ship buffalo meat. His company hopes to hit the $1 million mark, double last year's revenue.

One of the buyers of O'Brien's buffalo meat is Tally's restaurant in downtown Rapid City – where Kevin Weiland chowed down on a buffalo burger. Besides being a lover of buffalo meat, Weiland is a medical doctor who wrote the book Dakota Diet. It touts the health benefits of buffalo.

Read the whole story

State parks workers want governor to remove their boss

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

The managers who operate California's state parks say they have lost faith in their leader, and are urging Gov. Jerry Brown to appoint a replacement.

Ruth Coleman, director of the Department of Parks and Recreation, was appointed by former Gov. Gray Davis in 2002.

It has been rumored for weeks that Brown is considering a new appointment for the post. Evan Westrup, a spokesman for the governor, declined to say Monday whether a new appointment is in the works.



Ruth Coleman was in Tahoe in October for the Washoe Meadow State Park hearing. Photo/LTN

In a Dec. 14 letter to the governor, the State Parks Peace Officer Management Association shared a recent poll of its approximately 125 members. The poll found that 93 percent want a new director. About 56 percent of the members participated in the poll.

“Director Coleman is an honorable person, but she has been largely absent in making sense of the new economic realities,” the letter said. “We understand that there is some discussion within the administration regarding the director’s appointment process. Consequently, we wanted you to know our position.”

Read the whole story

Zephyr Lodge – bring an appetite, wallet, camera

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – No snow at a ski resort can be a good thing – at least when your business is construction.

With winter delayed in the Sierra, it meant the team of builders from SMC Contractors could complete the Zephyr Lodge at Northstar in five months. No days off also allowed the 17,000-square-foot facility to open this week.



Zephyr Lodge increases seating at Northstar by 50 percent. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Joe Stewart of SMC was at the resort Tuesday to see firsthand what it looks like with people using the multimillion-dollar lodge.

While building at nearly 7,000 feet presents an array of challenges, Stewart and his team had a head start on this project with having completed the Tamarack Lodge at Heavenly Mountain Resort a year ago. Zephyr's design is based on her sister resort's lodge.

“This has a lot of character,” Stewart told *Lake Tahoe News* as he looked at the reclaimed wood on the exterior.

While the interior of the two lodges feels similar, the exterior does not even though the design is much the same. Much of the difference is the initial look of the lodge from Zephyr chairlift and then skiing to it.

The gray of the wood seems to blend in to the backdrop of the Sierra Crest.

With the entrance on what could be called the side wall, the building does not appear as large as it is.

This addition to Northstar could mean the era of long food lines and little room to sit is over. The 500 indoor chairs and more than 200 outdoor seats increased the overall mountain seating by 50 percent.

On a sunny day like Dec. 20, sitting outside with views of the snowcapped mountains was inviting. But the ambiance and energy of the warm indoors kept most people inside. Plus, the massive windows provide stunning views.

While the lack of snow was good for SMC, with the snowmaking guns going full tilt, the white stuff eventually presented a few challenges.

“They’ve been delivering furniture by snowcat the past couple weeks,” Northstar COO Bill Rock said.

Noting California’s dismal economy, state Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Roseville, spoke of how the $30 million infusion of cash into Northstar for this season by owner Vail Resorts is good for the local and state economies. He also presented Rock with a proclamation from the state Senate.

Food and drink

Building on the success of their Colorado resorts, the more

upscale food court is what Zephyr and Tamarack lodges offer. Often eating at a ski resort is a less than desirable experience for a vegetarian. Not at Zephyr.

The veggie burger ($10.25) is made on site. It's tasty and a bit messy. But what a nice change from the usual cardboard restaurants often pass off as a veggie burger.

The tomato bisque ($7.75) comes in a decent size bowl. Definitely worth having. Christine, who manages the lodge, says sharing recipes is something that's being talked about. This would be a soup worth making at home.

The veggie pizza is good, but at $8.50 a slice, not worth it.

For some reason, the fries at Northstar, Heavenly, Vail and Beaver Creek are all lacking and can be skipped.

The Asian bowls are said to be one of the "must haves" – and based on flavor we agree. You get to choose a variety of items. Brown rice, tofu, veggies, water chestnuts and Kung Pao sauce filled my bowl. Sue's had snow peas, squash, sticky rice, shrimp and a green curry coconut sauce. Each bowl is $14.75.

Of the seven drinks we tried (samplers, not full glasses), we placed the same in the top four, just a different order. My favorite was the African Winter – dark rum, hot African tea, peach liqueur, lemon, orange bitters. Hot and refreshing – though not often two words that go together – they do with this drink.

Sue's favorite was the Zinger – Hangar One Kaffir lime vodka, ginger beer, lime juice, orange liqueur. It was a perfect complement for her Asian bowl.

Rounding out our top four were the Pimm's Royale (sparkling wine, Pimm's No. 1, cucumber spear) and S'more Snow (Firelit coffee liqueur, Absolute vanilla, hot cocoa, whipped cream).

The Z Bar inside Zephyr Lodge has 13 specialty drinks not served anywhere else on the mountain. All are $12.

All the juices in the drinks are fresh squeezed at the lodge.

The easiest way to get to Zephyr Lodge is via the Zephyr lift from mid-mountain. It's to the right at the top. But the lodge will be a convenient gathering spot for people skiing the Back Side, including The Promised Land lift that opened this week, too. And even if you aren't eating or drinking, the setting is gorgeous and worth stopping to have a look.

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Opinion: Reno tired of being the punchline

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Dec. 18., 2011, Reno Gazette-Journal.***

Once, it's been said (by Auric Goldfinger, in Ian Fleming's "Goldfinger"), is happenstance.

Twice is coincidence.

And three times is enemy action.

Having been the target of jokes in "Glee," "The Muppets" and "Saturday Night Live" (let's not even waste time on "Reno

911”), Reno residents should admit that there’s some enemy action going on.

At the very least, someone is trying to tell us something … and we should be listening.

The essence of comedy writing is stereotype and exaggeration.

Stereotype saves the writer a lot of time and effort. “The Muppets” didn’t have to go to a lot of trouble to explain that Fozzie Bear was down and out as the movie began. All the writers needed to do was put him in a tribute band in a dive casino in Reno. The viewers got the message.

That’s the stereotype.

Those of us who live here also know that it’s exaggeration. No one took Seth Meyers literally, after all, when he announced on “SNL” last week: “According to a new list, the least happiest city in America is St. Petersburg, Florida. But that’s only because Reno, Ne-vah-da, finally killed itself.” Everyone understands that it’s an exaggeration based on a commonly held stereotype.

Fair enough. Let no one say that we in rundown Reno don’t have a sense of humor.

Read the whole story