House engulfed in flames – all to train firefighters

By Kathryn Reed

Smoke fills the air. It's hard to see. Flames all around. It doesn't matter. No time to think; just time to instinctively react. Someone up the narrow stairs is injured. It's going to take careful maneuvering to get them out of the engulfed house on a gurney.

Situations like this happen all the time throughout the world. In South Lake Tahoe it happened twice last week and is expected to again later this week.

It's all about training.

A house on Third Street near the corner of South Avenue is being used by South Lake Tahoe and Lake Valley firefighters as live fire training. Barton Health recently acquired the tiny structure with the intention of demolishing it. (It's a short walk to Barton Hospital from the property.) The South Lake Tahoe Fire Department negotiated a deal to use it for training, with the end result being less debris for Barton to be responsible for hauling away and area firefighters more ready for a real structure fire.



South Tahoe firefighters use a house on

Third Street for training. Photos/Sallie Ross-Filgo

“There are some dangers associated with this sort of training, but it’s important to do it in a controlled way so they can gain some experience, feel some heat, so to speak, and overcome whatever challenges are associated with it so when they encounter the real deal they will be able to think more clearly and operate at maximum capacity,” Fire Chief Brian Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Firefighters are required to always be training, but the high-risk, low frequency emergency situations like fires, and water and rope rescues are more difficult for a small department to train for. This is because with only three shifts it’s not possible to take one off duty for training and have the others cover. That scenario works in metropolitan locations.

And until recently the command structure within the city’s department did not put an emphasis and priority on real-world training.

When Uhler took over in August he met one-on-one with firefighters as well as in group settings.



Firefighters discuss how best to approach the live fire.

“One question I asked was, ‘When was the last time you deployed from the station and went to and actually put a fire out during a training session?’ I got some blank looks and answers like ‘never’. I asked how long they’d been here and some said five years,” Uhler said.

Thus began a new era within the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department.

But part of the sparse real fire training had to do with logistics as much as higher ups. Plus, lack of a training facility and no overtime are other hindrances to getting ample time in.

While Lake Valley has an extremely old burn tower at its station on Highway 89 in Meyers, it’s not the same as a house. Carson City has a training site that uses propone, so the flames can be turned on and off. But that does not give firefighters the same feel as being in a room to watch and feel how fire behaves, builds and refuels.



A firefighter drags a hose to the second floor balcony.

Jim Drennan, who was is one of three South Tahoe fire captains to be promoted to shift commander, is now in charge of training for the city’s troops.

“The formula in my perfect world is to have the resources and funding to have a true training facility nearby and take one

engine company out at a time and send them to the training tower," Drennan said.

While he recognizes that perfect world is not going to exist anytime soon, he plans to actively seek more structures to burn for training purposes. Plus, it's cheaper for owners to have firefighters burn it to the ground compared to having a demolition team haul away the debris.

Of course there are a ton of hoops to jump through to do something like this – permits from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, Air Resources Board and others. The Barton house had to be certified not to contain asbestos before it was ignited.

In the past, South Tahoe has coordinated with Tahoe Douglas firefighters to train to extinguish a high-rise fire. Wildland training has been done in conjunction with Tahoe Douglas, Lake Valley, U.S. Forest Service, CalFire and CalStar.

With the house on Third Street, firefighters are cutting holes and doing ventilation work before the fire is set. Then, as flames roar, the men and women sling hoses over their shoulders, dragging them to the second floor – all to get used to what that's like fully suited up, oxygen masks on and heat intensifying.

"There have been some learning opportunities, some corrections were made in how things were done," Uhler said.

To that end he says the training has been a success.

Next up is for the third shift to get its turn at training – that will be Dec. 7 or Dec. 8.

Vonn, Mancuso share podium in super G

By USSA

LAKE LOUISE, Alberta – Lindsey Vonn of Vail completed a historic clean sweep in Lake Louise, topping the Audi FIS Alpine World Cup super G podium with Julia Mancuso of Squaw Valley third.

It was Vonn's 45th career World Cup win and 11th in Lake Louise. Following a season opening giant slalom victory in Soelden, Austria, a pair of downhill victories and Sunday's super G win in Lake Louise, Vonn now has four victories in the five races she's started this season.

It was the second podium finish for Mancuso, who was also third in the Nature Valley Aspen Winternational giant slalom last weekend.

The women's alpine tour now moves to Beaver Creek, site of the 2015 FIS Alpine World Championships, for a Dec. 7 super G. It will be the first women's World Cup race to be held in Beaver Creek.

Holiday party at South Tahoe library

The South Lake Tahoe branch library (1000 Rufus Allen Blvd.) is having a Children's Holiday Party on Dec. 10 at 2pm.

Join us for an afternoon of family fun:

– Listen to a holiday story

– Sing Christmas carols

– Free picture of children with Santa

– Holiday frames for children to make and decorate

– Refreshments will be provided.

This program is free, however, a non-perishable food item donation to Christmas Cheer is requested.

Sheriff's office honors West Slope man as SAR volunteer of the year

Each fall El Dorado County Sheriff's Office recognizes the achievements of search and rescue volunteers.

There are approximately 200 registered SAR volunteers throughout El Dorado County who are organized into teams and

respond to searches countywide and to mutual aid requests. In any given year, volunteers in El Dorado County respond to more than incidents involving more than 80 missing-lost or injured persons.

Search and rescue is made up of several teams which are necessary to bring a search or rescue to a successful conclusion.

David McCracken is this year’s volunteer of the year. The Cameron Park area resident joined the SAR in 1993.

He has increased his training. Some accomplishments include:

Emergency Medical Technician

Basic Wildland Firefighting

Incident Command Systems

Numerous FEMA courses

Emergency Response to Terrorism

Confined Space Rescue

River and Flood Rescue

First responder Hazardous Materials

Low Angle rescue

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Trainer.

In 2004, McCracken traveled to Alabama in response to Hurricane Ivan with FEMA as a team leader assisting the citizens of Covington County.

Squaw-Alpine assessing possibility of putting in backcountry gates

Backcountry gates linking Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows are getting closer to being a reality.

This season the two resorts, operated by the same company since earlier this fall, are working with the U.S. Forest Service to study the practically of opening the area.

A press release says, “If successful, the pilot study would result in a policy which could permit skiers and riders with specialized backcountry training and equipment to access the wilderness land connecting Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows.”

It goes on to say, “The goal of the pilot study will be to determine whether or not feasible locations for backcountry access gates exist – and if so, where the best locations would be in terms of topography and exposure. The pilot study will be launched when adequate snow conditions have been reached.”

Opinion: How to keep the fire department away at the holidays

By Tia Rancort

The winter holidays are a time for celebration with family and friends, and that means more cooking, entertaining, home decorating and an increased risk of home fires due to increased usage of cooking and heating equipment. Most home fires and injuries occur in the kitchen as reported by the U.S. Fire Administration.

Some simple and easy life-saving tips to remember during the holiday season:

Cooking fire safety:

o The leading cause of fires in the kitchen is unattended cooking. Please stay in the kitchen when you are frying, grilling, or broiling food.

o It’s not a good idea to wear loose clothing (especially hanging sleeves) while cooking.

o Please do not leave flammable materials, such as pot holders or paper towels near the stove.

o If your clothes catch on fire, stop, drop and roll. Stop immediately, drop to the ground, and cover face with hands. Roll over and over or back and forth to put out the fire. Immediately cool the burn with cool water for 3 to 5 minutes and then seek emergency medical care.

o Please create a “kid-free zone” by keeping young children at least 3 feet away from stove and cooking area.

o Use back burner when possible to reduce the risk of spills and turn pot handles away from stoves edge and always use a pot holder or mitt when moving hot food or liquid.

o If using a turkey fryer (remember these devices are not certified by Underwriters Laboratory because of the numerous safety hazards they present to consumers), please use outdoors away from buildings and items that can catch fire and never use in a garage or on a wooden deck.

Preventing Christmas tree fires:

o Selecting a tree for the holiday – When buying a live tree, look for one that is not shedding needles. If needles fall off or branches snap when bent, the tree is already too dry.

o Keep trees watered. A mixture of lemon-lime soda and water will keep a tree moist longer.

o Keep trees away from all heat sources including fire places, stoves and room/space heaters.

o When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label “Fire Resistant”.

o Secure the tree firmly in tree stand to keep it from toppling over.

o When tree becomes dry, promptly discard it. Please consider using the IVGID Waste Not Free Holiday Tree Recycling Program. This service will be available Dec. 24-Jan. 25. For more information on this program, please call Waste-Not Hotline at (775) 832.1284.

Lights and candles:

o Please do not use candles on a Christmas tree.

o Place candles where they will not be knocked down.

o Keep candles away from curious pets and children’s reach.

o Be extremely careful with candles that have leaves, flowers, pine cones or other decorative items cast into them. These items can become wicks and ignite the candle in a way that the candle is not designed.

o Keep lights or candles away from anything that could easily catch fire (NFPA reports that half of home candles fires occurred when some form of combustible material was left or came too close to the candle).

o Please do not leave holiday lights or candles unattended.

o Inspect all lights and cords before using them. Discard all lights with cracked or broken wiring and never overload circuits.

Holiday decorations:

o Keep wrapping paper and ribbons away from heat sources. This includes candles, lights, fireplaces, stoves and heaters.

o Wrapping paper and ribbon should be thrown away in trash containers, not fireplaces. Burning paper and ribbon could cause a chimney fire.

o Put decorations high enough on the tree so your child or pet can’t reach them. Children can choke or cut themselves on ornaments or ornament hangers.

o Holly and mistletoe are poisonous. Keep them away from children.

o Use only nonflammable or flame-retardant decorations and place away from heat vents.

o If you are using a metallic or artificial tree, make sure it is flame-retardant.

Fireplace safety:

o Check and clean the fireplace and chimney every year.

o Always put logs and newspapers on a grate inside fireplace and use a fireplace screen.

o Please do not use gasoline, lighter fluid or kerosene to start a fire and make sure the fire you build “fits” your fireplace (use an appropriate amount of newspaper and logs).

o Place completely cooled ashes in a metal container. Keep metal container outside away from the house in a safe place.

Give holiday gifts that promote fire safety:

o Smoke alarms. If a fire occurs, having a smoke alarm cuts the chance of dying by half.

o Carbon monoxide detectors – helps detect carbon monoxide (CO), a colorless, odorless, poisonous gas.

o Flashlights for emergency lighting instead of candles, to avoid the risk of fire from an open flame.

o Sturdy candleholders to prevent tip-over when candles are lit.

o Sturdy fireplace screen, to keep embers out of the room.

o Gift certificates for chimney cleaning can reduce oily creosote build-up in chimneys that can be easily ignited.

o Portable fire extinguishers, with clear instructions on how to use them.

o Oven mitts for handling cooking equipment.

o House address numbers – our local ordinance requires 6 inch for residential and 12 inch for commercial structures.

o Stocking stuffers. Download fire safety information –

including home escape plans from NFPA’s website.

Tia Rancort works for the North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District.

Obama quietly organizing in Nevada while GOP contenders ignore Silver State

By Anjeanette Damon, Las Vegas Sun

As most of the political world’s attention is captured by the circus of the Republican presidential primary, Barack Obama’s campaign has been assiduously reactivating the formidable infrastructure that helped drive him to victory four years ago.

Obama and the Democratic Party have been pouring organizing resources into battleground states such as Nevada, recruiting volunteers, building social networks, holding outreach events and registering voters.

That same machine will be used to identify and turn out supporters next November.

And the bad news for Republicans, who have largely skipped Nevada in their primary contest, is Obama doesn’t have much work to do to rejuvenate an organization he has been maintaining since he won the state by 12 points four years ago.

“The organizing efforts actually have been pretty good and pretty consistent for a couple of years in Nevada,” said Chip Evans, former chairman of the Washoe County Democratic Party, a key swing county in Nevada. “To some extent, they’ve expanded the Democratic base of activists beyond the typical folks we’ve usually seen.”

Ronni Council, a Democratic strategist in Las Vegas, said the same has been occurring in Southern Nevada.

Read the whole story

Gingerbread building at Zephyr Cove library

Sweets will be featured at the Douglas County Public Library in Zephyr Cove on Dec. 17 at 1pm.

Miss Carol will be on hand to help children build gingerbread houses using graham crackers and other sweets. Come to the library to create a fun, edible craft to take home. Children and parents are welcome.

This program is limited to 30 children.

You will be asked to choose a donation from a list of supplies for the program. Supplies must be delivered to the library before 5pm Dec. 15.

This event is sponsored by the Friends of the Douglas County Public Library. The library is located at 233 Warrior Way in Zephyr Cove.

Call (775) 588.6411 to participate.

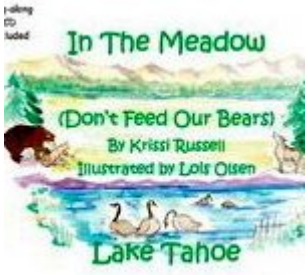
Budget gift: Children's books about Lake Tahoe



Publisher's note: ***Lake Tahoe News is looking for gift ideas that are less than $20. Find out how to make a suggestion.***

Sing-along stories make a great gift for young children on your gift list. "In The Meadow (Don't Feed Our Bears)" and "On the Trail" are two Tahoe stories that use rhythm, rhyme, and repetition to teach nature appreciation and environmental awareness. Each book, illustrated in full color, comes with a sing-along CD.

Book/CD sets are $15 each.



Contact local author, Krissi Russell at (530) 307.1357 or go online. Both books are also available at Toy Maniacs, Barton Gift Shop, Explore Tahoe, Driftwood Cafe, Made in Tahoe and Bona Fide Books.

– Krissi Russell

Athletes returning to wool to stay warm, dry

By Blair Anthony Robertson, Sacramento Bee

In the past 15 or 20 years, there have been countless technical advances in clothing for athletes and active folks.

Clothes got smarter and so did we.

New high-tech, petroleum-based synthetic garments wicked, warmed and breathed, and they made those who skied, hiked, hunted, ran and bicycled all the more comfortable.

They seemed to do everything but run your 10k for you or make you resemble the second coming of Jean Claude Killy on the double black diamond.

But the latest advance in active wear involves looking to the past. Think of it as the ultimate high-tech fabric – in sheep's clothing.

Outdated and all but overlooked for decades, wool, insist its many proponents, wicks better, warms better, looks better and is kinder to the planet. It also passes the sniff test – it's anti-microbial, meaning it resists absorbing odors.

With the early days of winter weather upon us in Sacramento and in the Sierra, it's worth assessing the recent history of good, old-fashioned wool – how it nearly got muscled out of the way by those new-fangled fabrics that attempted to do some of the things – but not everything – wool has always done.

Read the whole story