Destination management company opens office in Tahoe

RMC, a longstanding destination management and special events company with six operations in Colorado, Utah and Wyoming, is moving west this month with the addition of its Lake Tahoe California/Nevada operation.

RMC was also recently hired to be the exclusive destination service provider partner for the Ritz-Carlton at Northstar.

The RMC Lake Tahoe division will serve high-end incentive and corporate event clients.

Christopher Oliphant will serve as director of national accounts and sales, and Andrea Emerson is operations manager of the Tahoe office.

Opinion: How banks can help end financial crises

By Robert Leeson

The cause of financial crises – and thus the central malfunction of capitalism – is the discretion allocated to banks to stop lending. If such destabilizing discretion were exercised by a foreign dictator, and if the economic flow were related to oil or shipping lanes, it would be regarded as a national security issue to be followed by an ultimatum and war.

To eliminate financial crises we need an injunction of

biblical proportions: Banks who do not lend, neither shall they take deposits.

Banking should be a simple flow: channeling the current savings of one person into current borrowing by some else. This spending flow can be blocked at three points: Individuals can hoard savings under the mattress, and banks can hoard deposits or use them to buy secondhand assets (i.e., existing government bonds).

The first blockage was largely removed by Federal Deposit Insurance.

The other two can be engineered away by a simple change in bank charters: Deposits should be accepted only if they will be transformed into loans for capital expenditures (to build offices, factories, equipment and machinery). Deposits should be swept into a bank's account at the Federal Reserve and held until the bank has a capital expenditure loan to make (or depositor withdrawals to meet).

If banks do not wish to reacquire their traditional – but now neglected – role of assessing and bearing the risks associated with making loans, the excess deposits should fund newly issued government bonds and infrastructure projects.

All parties would benefit.

First, governments: There wouldn't be credit-crunch recessions to jeopardize re-election chances.

Robert Leeson is a visiting professor of economics at Stanford University and the University of Trento and adjunct professor at the University of Notre Dame, Australia.

Read the whole story

North Tahoe to host prestigious travel symposium

North Lake Tahoe will host the 2012 Mountain Travel Symposium, one of the world's premier ski industry wholesale conferences.

The April 15-21 conference will be at Resort at Squaw Creek.

North Lake Tahoe hosted the symposium in 2006, with 1,200 attendees.

"Mountain Travel Symposium is the biggest and longest running annual contracting and networking gathering in the mountain travel industry worldwide," Andy Chapman, with North Lake Tahoe Resort Association, said. "To have our colleagues here in North Lake Tahoe to experience our product firsthand, especially with all its stellar spring snowpack, is absolutely advantageous. These ski wholesalers are going to have North Tahoe and our variety of lodging options on the brain when talking with clients from all over the world."

In attendance will be ski wholesale companies from North America, South America, the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, as well as decision-makers for all United States' ski councils and clubs, in addition to ski-related vendors and other attending mountain destinations.

The event will primarily be based in Olympic Valley, but tourism officials expect the entire region to benefit. Those confirmed to attend include representatives with Orbitz, Expedia, Travelocity, Mark Travel, HotelBeds, Crystal, Virgin Holidays, Ski.com and Mountain Reservations.

In addition to business-to-business appointments, Mountain

Travel Symposium offers professional development with national speakers, hands-on workshops, as well as multiple opportunities and social events for networking.

For details about Mountain Travel Symposium, registration and photos, go online.

Placer County working on a blueprint for Lake Tahoe

By Katherine E. Hill

KINGS BEACH – Wanted: Local residents and business owners to serve for at least two years on one of four committees to help direct future planning and growth on Tahoe's North and West shores.

That's the message from Placer County officials at a recent meeting on the Community Plan Update, a multi-year planning project that will determine the future of commercial and residential growth in the Lake Tahoe Basin from the state line in Kings Beach to the El Dorado County line on the West Shore.

The plan will address zoning and design guidelines for land use, housing, safety issues, transportation and conservation across four plans areas: North Tahoe East from east of Highway 267 to the state line, including Kings Beach; North Tahoe West from west of Highway 267 through Cedar Flat; Great Tahoe City from Cedar Flat through Tahoe City and down the West Shore to the Granlibakken area; and West Shore from Granlibakken to the county line in Tahoma.



Placer County is working on its community plans in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The community plans are joint planning documents that were adopted by Placer County and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency nearly 20 years ago. Now, the TRPA is in the process of updating its Regional Plan and the community plans for counties and city around the Tahoe basin must be inline with that plan.

Placer County is taking on the process of updating its 20-year-old plans for the North and West shores to fall in line with TRPA guidelines. Placer County is consolidating the nine plan areas that now exist into the four plan areas being reviewed.

During a quick-paced presentation by Placer County Supervising Planner Crystal Jacobsen, the audience of more than 100 residents and business owners heard the county's plan to address each area as an individual community for growth, housing, commercial and transportation issues. The call now is for residents, business owners and those with environmental interests in the plan area to serve on a committee that will help to develop the plans for these area. A task that Jacobsen says will likely take at least two years.

"The key factors are to have a good balance of commercial and residential uses," Jacobsen told the audience.

Committee members are being recruited now, with applications accepted through Nov. 30. The committees will be appointed in early January, with the county hosting open houses about every two months to gather public input on the plan.

Committees will be made up of seven to nine people, and members are required to either be a resident of or a business owner in the plan area of the committee that they wish to serve on, or, to have an environmental interest in the plan area. Membership on the committees is not open to second homeowners, however, but they may voice concerns at the public open houses, Jacobsen said.

While Placer County is recruiting committee members, county officials are already at work on proposed zoning maps for the plan areas as part of the Technical Committee, made up of representatives from utility districts, fire districts and other government agencies.

“The idea is that the framework will be set (by the first workshop),” Jacobsen said. “We’ll then break out those subareas and decide the overall look and design.”

The Community Plan Update is based on the Pathway 2007 document that Placer County completed four years ago to serve as a guide for development until 2027. Pathways 2007 calls for reinvesting in the basin’s communities, including workforce housing, commercial and lodging for tourists; improving the gateway areas to the county; improving transportation, including non-motorized uses for residents and visitors; and to address water quality and environmental improvements.

Details on the Community Plan Update and the maps of the four plan areas are available online under Planning Services Division. Applications to serve on the committees also are available on the site.

Unlimited first tracks costs $25,000 at Aspen

By USA Today

Want first crack at the runs in Aspen? The Aspen Skiing Co. is offering an “Ultimate Ski Pass” that will let you have unlimited first tracks before chairlifts open to the public — for $25,000.

If you’re itching to beat other skiers to the slopes and ready to pay for the privilege, the Ultimate Ski Pass may be just the ticket for you.

The exclusive passes also allow holders to meet members of the U.S. Women’s Ski Team when they race in Aspen on Thanksgiving weekend. The pass also buys them breakfast with Aspen native Bill Marolt, president of the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association.

When Ultimate Ski Pass holders are ready to ski, they can bring up to three friends. They can take a private tour of the four ski areas of Aspen-Snowmass with a member of Skico’s management team and ride on a snowcat on a grooming mission. They also can take a “behind-the-scenes tour” with the ski patrol.

The pass is transferable and valid at Aspen Mountain, Aspen Highlands, Snowmass and Buttermilk.

Read the whole story

Proving Congress is getting rich off Wall Street

By Peter J. Boyer, Newsweek

In the spring of 2010, a bespectacled, middle-aged policy wonk named Peter Schweizer fired up his laptop and began a months-long odyssey into a forbidding maze of public databases, hunting for the financial secrets of Washington's most powerful politicians. Schweizer had been struck by the fact that members of Congress are free to buy and sell stocks in companies whose fate can be profoundly influenced, or even determined, by Washington policy, and he wondered, do these ultimate insiders act on what they know? Yes, Schweizer found, they certainly seem to. Schweizer's research revealed that some of Congress's most prominent members are in a position to routinely engage in what amounts to a legal form of insider trading, profiting from investment activity that, he says, "would send the rest of us to prison."

Schweizer, who is 47, lives in Tallahassee with his wife and children ("New York or D.C. would be too distracting—I'd never get any writing done") and commutes regularly to Stanford, where he is the William J. Casey research fellow at the Hoover Institution. His circle of friends includes some bare-knuckle combatants in the partisan frays (such as conservative media impresario Andrew Breitbart), but Schweizer himself comes across more as a bookish researcher than the right-wing hit man liberal critics see. Indeed, he sounds somewhat surprised, if gratified, to have attracted attention with his findings. "To me, it's troubling that a fellow at Stanford who lives in Florida had to dig this up."

It was in his Tallahassee office that Schweizer began what he thought was a promising research project: combing through congressional financial-disclosure records dating back to 2000 to see what kinds of investments legislators were making. He quickly learned that Capitol Hill has quite a few market players. He narrowed his search to a dozen or so members—the leaders of both houses, as well as members of key committees—and focused on trades that coincided with big policy initiatives of the sort that could move markets.

While examining trades made around the time of the 2003 Medicare overhaul, Schweizer experienced what he calls his "Holy crap!" moment. The legislation, which created a new prescription-drug entitlement, promised to be a huge boon to the pharmaceutical industry—and to savvy investors in the Capitol. Among those with special insight on the issue was Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry, chairman of the health subcommittee of the Senate's powerful Finance Committee. Kerry is one of the wealthiest members of the Senate and heavily invested in the stock market. As the final version of the drug program neared approval—one that didn't include limits on the price of drugs—brokers for Kerry and his wife were busy trading in Big Pharma. Schweizer found that they completed 111 stock transactions of pharmaceutical companies in 2003, 103 of which were buys.

"They were all great picks," Schweizer notes. The Kerrys' capital gains on the transactions were at least $500,000, and as high as $2 million (such information is necessarily imprecise, as the disclosure rules allow members to report their gains in wide ranges). It was instructive to Schweizer that Kerry didn't try to shape legislation to benefit his portfolio; the apparent key to success was the shaping of trades that anticipated the effect of government policy.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

• Two vacancies (chamber and at-large) will occur on the Citizens' Bond Oversight Committee in Lake Tahoe Unified School District on Jan. 31. For more info, call (530) 541.2850, ext. 225.

• Sierra Nevada Alliance has promoted Kay Ogden to associate director. Ogden has served for the last six years as the development director.

• Nixon's Heating and Air Conditioning has expanded its Lake Tahoe operation into the Carson Valley.

• Heavenly Mountain Resort is partnering with Snow Park Technologies. This means the return of a halfpipe after a four-year hiatus.

• This is the El Dorado-Tahoe roadwork schedule for Caltrans for next week, along with the Sierra schedule.

Bay Area residents scooping

up houses in Tahoe basin

By Pete Carey, San Jose Mercury News

Lake Tahoe area real estate agents, hungry for sales in the aftermath of the housing bubble, are counting on the Bay Area's booming tech industry to help generate the next crop of million-dollar vacation home buyers.

Sales of million dollar-plus Tahoe homes are down about 30 percent from the third quarter of 2010, according to Coldwell Banker. While sales of luxury homes have improved recently, a flock of freshly minted IPO millionaires can't come soon enough for Tahoe real estate agents.

"People are starting to feel a little bit better about things. Silicon Valley is kind of spearheading that revival. We're seeing those folks make their way into the Tahoe market," said Jim Telling of East-West Partners, the developer of Home Run at Northstar.

Some buyers from the tech industry have snapped up vacation homes recently that run from $1 million to $4 million or more.

For example, more than 20 parcels at Martis Camp – a 2,100-acre custom lot development between Truckee and Northstar – have been scooped up by employees of tech companies such as Google, Facebook, VMware and Apple,according to the development's spokesman.

One Apple employee bought at Home Run, a small mountainside ski-in, ski-out village of townhomes, where luxury real estate sells for $1.75 million to $2.2 million.

Another Apple employee sold some stock and purchased a place at Incline Village recently, reportedly for $3 million.

Read the whole story

Opinion: New education act better option than waiver

By Tom Torlakson

Parents, teachers, administrators and members of Congress all seem to agree on this much: It's time for No Child Left Behind to go. But what should take its place?

As a teacher and state superintendent of public instruction, I've seen the shortcomings of this federal law firsthand:

– Mislabeling as failures schools that are improving.



Tom Torlakson

– Providing very little funding to pay for a lot of mandates.

– Directing scarce resources toward services parents don't seem to want.

– And leaving the troubling achievement gap – the disparity in learning among different groups of students as measured by standardized tests – nearly as large as it was 10 years ago.

Just this fall, NCLB labeled as a "failure" Westmoor High in Daly City – my alma mater – even though its test scores continue to climb and now stand just two points from the

statewide academic goal.

I've been outspoken about the need for relief from NCLB sanctions, but I'm just as concerned that California not simply trade one flawed policy for another. Unfortunately, that appears to be just the unfair choice federal officials have placed before the state Board of Education.

To obtain a temporary waiver from No Child Left Behind, California would have to meet 11 new federal mandates – and do so quickly – without one dollar of new resources.

The price tag for meeting these requirements is likely to reach $2 billion to $3 billion, depending upon how each is implemented – all within the next year or two, even as our schools continue to cope with a statewide financial emergency and the dire threat of further funding cutbacks.

Tom Torlakson is California's superintendent of public instruction.

Read the whole story

Red Cross presents an idea for gift giving

The holiday season is here and this year the American Red Cross is urging people to give something that means something by donating to the Red Cross and helping those in need.

The Red Cross has launched a holiday fund-raising campaign, asking everyone to go online to make a donation in the name of the people on their gift list this year. The donation can help

provide food and shelter to a victim of disaster, help purchase things like phone cards and supplies for a member of the armed forces, or help supply basic necessities to families in desperate need in countries across the world.

Everyone is invited to browse through the Red Cross Holiday Giving Catalog and view symbolic gifts they can “purchase” for, or in honor of, a loved one – things like infant care kits for babies in emergency shelters, comfort kits for wounded warriors, or water containers used when natural disasters disrupt a community’s water supply overseas.

In the last year, the Capital Region Chapter of the Red Cross – which Lake Tahoe is part of – responded to more than 400 local disasters, educated more than 50,000 residents in lifesaving skills like first aid and CPR, and helped relay 800 emergency messages for local military families.